



Campus Task Force Final Report

LEADING FROM LOVE: SHARING OUR ABUNDANCE

January 27, 2023

PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, 1900 NICOLLET AVE



Dear Plymouth Church members,

At its March meeting the Deacons unanimously passed the following resolution:

We accept with thanks the Final Report of the Campus Task Force and commit to initiating a discernment process leading to congregational conversations about the issues raised by the Report.

Over two years ago, the Deacons recognized the need for Plymouth Church to conduct a comprehensive review of its real estate. Spurred by Brian Siska and Jeff Hall's research into Plymouth Church's property and building on the work of the Growth Task Force, the Deacons commissioned a Campus Task Force (CTF) to begin this work.

The CTF has since then looked deeply at Plymouth, its buildings, its neighborhood, especially in relation to the Purposes of the Church. For more than a year, the members solicited comments from members of the congregation and sought out the views of people and organizations around us. Based on that work and deep spiritual searching, the CTF submitted the attached report to the Deacons.

The report makes bold recommendations, which we may or may not decide to do specifically, but which offer some ideas about what we might do.

We urge your thoughtful reflection on their report, and we express our heartfelt hope that the report will spark a congregation-wide conversation and discernment about our campus, our neighbors, and what our faith commitments call for from us.

This is the resolution passed at the Deacons meeting on March 7, 2023: The Deacons gratefully acknowledge the work, time, soul, and transformational energy that the members of the Campus Task Force put into this report.

We now offer the report for the congregation's consideration.

In loving community,
Jay Matre, Moderator, and Annette Atkins, Clerk

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jay Matre', written in a cursive style.

Jay Matre
Moderator, Chair of Deacons
On Behalf of the Deacons of Plymouth Congregational Church April 11, 2023

LEADING FROM LOVE: SHARING OUR ABUNDANCE

Campus Task Force Recommendations to Deacons
Plymouth Congregational Church
January 27, 2023

TELLING OUR STORY:

This set of recommendations was created and written on traditional territory of the Dakota people. A year ago, the Deacons charged this Task Force with exploring and recommending how to align the use of our building and surrounding properties with Plymouth's Purposes, Mission (Appendix) and 2020 Growth Plan.

This discernment process has taken us beyond the wildest imaginations we held twelve months ago. Our Task Force evolved from a head-based group primarily concerned with operations issues regarding our building and land to one that was increasingly heart-based, reflective, soulful and deeply committed to the spiritual nature of our task in concert with our neighbors. We are on fire to love our neighbors.

As our work progressed, we saw our work as a catalyst to bring Plymouth closer to the bold standards we have set for ourselves in our Purposes. We worked to reflect "the radical love and justice found in the life, teachings and spirit of Jesus". After stimulating and sometimes challenging meetings that expended serious time, energy, and passion, we emerged ever more hopeful and excited about the potential that Plymouth has to become a more engaged and trustworthy member of our community.

We came to believe we must become a catalyst in our community and share our abundance to provide a platform for growth, opportunity, and human dignity for our neighbors. We aspire to become audacious changemakers in intentional, authentic, and mutually beneficial relationship with them.

The Purposes of the Church –

Within, Among, and Beyond - are aspirational and guide us toward the church we wish to be. One of the "Beyond" Purposes became foundational to our work: "God's creation benefits from our love lived out in the world... to "further social, economic, racial and environmental justice." But how? Guided by the teachings, traditions, and practices of our church, we listened, learned, and engaged with neighbors in the community and with our members.

"For all the learning we've been doing to understand our role in building wealth on the backs of the oppressed, here are some concrete actions we can take to show our love for our neighbors."

- Plymouth Member

Embedded in our recommendations is our intention to be guided by, through and with the community around us. Our Christian scripture is clear that passion is required to create and sustain the work that we are called to do. The description of the moment of the birth of the Christian church is not in any way an overstatement of the depth of our convictions: "And tongues of fire reached down and touched everyone there!" (Acts 2:2)

Plymouth's long and deep commitment to justice has increasingly focused on changing systemic injustices. Becoming one with our community will be transformative as we work together to challenge these inequities. This is consistent with the essential meaning of *communion* and the core teachings of our tradition: oneness, unconditional love and compassion leading to action. And Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12b)

Before us is an immense opportunity to recognize the pervasive calls for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice throughout our country and in our own community. We have the chance to actively and meaningfully reconcile the history of our land with the wealth and privilege it has created for us to the detriment of marginalized people, especially African-Americans and Native Americans.

We, the Campus Task Force, believe these actions for 2023 and beyond will help contribute to our neighbors' future lives of opportunity and dignity and will transform us individually and as a community. We invite and encourage the Deacons and congregation to embrace this opportunity to transform and revitalize our church and community by seriously considering and acting on these recommendations.

“This work is the most important challenge Plymouth is facing at this time. This is the work we are called to do.”

- Plymouth Member

May the spark of the divine in each and all of us create a hearty flame that sheds light on opportunities for our neighbors and our relationships with them. May it be so.

OUR PROCESS:

- The Campus Task Force (CTF) was chartered by the Deacons in December, 2021. The group met from January, 2022 – January, 2023.
- The CTF was composed of 17 members with expertise in church finance, real estate development, community outreach, public policy development, and fine arts. Members have current and past service on several Plymouth boards and committees as well as vastly differing areas of expertise, perspectives, and involvement with our local community and beyond.
- The CTF spoke with 150 Plymouth members, receiving over 450 comments related to this work. They also spoke with around 50 neighbors and organizations, receiving over 100 comments.
- The CTF was mindful of community work done by other initiatives at Plymouth and committed to communications that enhanced mutual effectiveness and success.
- The recommendations build on work being done by Riverside Innovation Hub, an initiative of Augsburg's Christensen's Center for Vocation that works alongside local congregations seeking to become Public Churches.

FOUNDATIONS OF OUR WORK:

Inspired by the flame of faith, connection, love, openness we believe this is deeply spiritual work at its core.

- The value of human dignity leads us to denounce and work to dismantle white supremacy.
- “God's creation benefits from our love lived out in the world. . . to ‘further social, economic, racial and environmental justice’.”
- Acknowledge that the Purposes of our church are challenging and that members created them. This work provides a path of rising to that challenge.

- Working from our open hearts, we “seek to embody the radical love and justice found in the life, teachings and spirit of Jesus.”
- Justice in its many forms is fundamental to us as Christians, calling us to act boldly on behalf of the oppressed.
- Conducting an honest, fearless reckoning of our relationship with our abundance, privilege, and ownership of our land is necessary at this time.
- Reconciling the wealth and privilege this land has created for us obliges us to repay this debt.
- Our building and land represent abundance and opportunity, not scarcity and insoluble problems.
- Intentional, authentic relationships with our neighbors is a way we express our love for them.
- Knowing that welcome is a function of culture, not a program on which we embark, we must create a more welcoming culture.
- Collaborating with our neighbors is a relationship based on covenant, binding us to the community in a common vision for hope.
- Partnering with humility and respect, we move beyond our egocentric, unintentional, abuse of our white privilege and comfortable relationship with power.
- Our neighbors are everywhere. We chose to focus our work on challenges close to home in our own neighborhood.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS – THREE BIG IDEAS

Hundreds of creative, exciting ideas emerged from our conversations with members and with neighbors about how Plymouth can do a better job living out our Mission, Purposes and values in the community. Three big ideas, including many of their suggestions, rose to the surface.

All three of these ideas:

- 1) seek systemic change to the challenges of those facing economic, social and racial injustices,
- 2) are both bold and achievable,
- 3) will take time and ongoing commitment from the congregation and
- 4) will require personal and congregational spiritual growth and practice as a precursor and companion to doing the work.

The Task Force assumes that these ideas do not necessarily come at significant financial cost to Plymouth. There is much discernment to be done to determine how these will be implemented with creativity and resourcefulness. The cost of implementing these ideas can be made manageable, particularly if outside partners are involved. The Task Force also believes that there must be significant involvement of the congregation in all of this work, and that there be thorough and ongoing communication with the congregation regarding this report and the ensuing efforts.

I. CREATE A COMMUNITY HUB

Plymouth has been a sacred place of community since its founding. Members have gathered to engage in music, arts, prayer, other spiritual practices, and service within Plymouth's walls and have advanced important work in the surrounding neighborhood and beyond. The question that surfaced was how do we work to build on and expand all that Plymouth has done to share our abundance with our neighbors and the broader community? Members and neighbors alike expressed a wish for Plymouth to become a kind of community hub.

"There is no neighborhood center, no 'downtown.'"
-- Stevens Square Neighbor

"The specifics of the space offered don't matter as much as the opportunity to physically gather neighbors in a safe, welcoming space."
-- Stevens Square Neighbor

Created in existing or newly built or acquired space, it is essential that the hub would be co-designed in relationship with members of the surrounding community, based on their needs and hopes. This could be aided with the establishment of a Neighborhood Council to guide its creation, purpose, values, operation and communications, and incorporate input from the neighborhood. Additional information about the hub is in the Appendix.

- A community hub would provide safe, dignified space for our neighbors who are welcomed no matter their background or circumstances, loved unconditionally, and fully seen for all their potential. Many programs and services would be offered to cater to stated, variable and evolving needs and interests.
- To harness the power of a community hub, many programs and services would ultimately need to be recommended by those involved in the proposed neighborhood council. Some could be community-based programming and church-based programming, using assets of Plymouth's building and services as catalysts for community engagement.
- The hub could be operated by an existing non-profit, known for its knowledge and proven ability to work collaboratively with a low income, multiracial neighborhood and with Plymouth or a newly created non-profit. Examples of potential partners are [Project for Pride in Living](#), Loring Nicollet Community Service, and [Pillsbury United](#).
- It could commence in the current Plymouth facility but might evolve to operate from a separate space.

Possible first steps to moving forward:

- **Create a discernment and implementation group**, reporting to the Deacons with members from the Leadership Council, Boards of Outreach, Deacons, and Finance, clergy and staff, and the Riverside Innovation Hub to do the following:
 - Coordinate with Leadership and Deacons to clarify (1) the process Plymouth follows in making decisions about facility usage among potentially competing interests; (2) who from the congregation/boards should provide advice or set general guidelines about this sort of situation; (3) criteria Plymouth uses in making these decisions; and (4) a plan for how Plymouth can effectively communicate this work to our community.

- Create a Neighborhood Council to elicit active participation from individual neighbors, and neighborhood and community organizations with strong support from the non-profit partner.
- Partner with a non-profit like Project for Pride in Living to develop a serious, actionable plan to get this work off the ground and establish an operating process.
- Inventory spaces available for use at Plymouth and create a multi-year facility use plan which would designate spaces available for the community hub or recommend that new space be obtained if current space is insufficient.
- With guidance from the non-profit partner and the input received from the Neighborhood Council, recommend the form (e.g., non-profit organization with tax-exempt status), governance and operating structure, and relationship with Plymouth of the organization that will carry on the work of the Community Hub.
- Consider implementing and funding the recommendations of the Riverside Innovation Hub once they are completed. This group has already done much work to understand the needs and wants of our surrounding neighborhood.

“The neighborhood doesn’t really have a place where people can gather. Stevens Square Park does not always feel safe.”

– Stevens Square Neighbor

II. CREATE A COMMUNITY STRUCTURE OR COMMUNITY SPACE ON THE GROVELAND PARKING LOT

The Groveland parking owned by Plymouth sits at the intersection of Nicollet and Groveland Ave. While used by Plymouth goers on Sundays and Village Center shoppers at other times, it remains vacant for a substantial portion of the week. Members and neighbors alike expressed enthusiasm for its more impactful use. This valuable asset offers the prospect of building a structure that meets various expressed needs of the neighborhood while aligning with Plymouth’s Mission, Purposes, and values.

“Not as much reason to walk in the neighborhood. No longer as many draws. Nicollet Avenue used to be more inviting.”

– Stevens Square Neighbor

Major forces driving the eventual need for an additional building include:

- The continual growth and expansion of the Groveland Food Shelf, currently undergoing strategic planning for future space needs
- Meeting the demand for deeply affordable housing modeled by Lydia Apartments
- Expanding the Community Hub idea outside of the main Plymouth building with space for various social services
- Creating space for other needed services as determined by our neighbors

“Consider developing the parking lot into a mixed-use building that could offer affordable housing, perhaps working with the Native community, and other needed services.”

-Plymouth member

As with the previous Community Hub recommendation, the Neighborhood Council could identify existing organizations that could help fulfill a vision for this space that meets the expressed needs of neighborhood residents for greater economic justice. Plymouth should also be prepared to receive offers to purchase this land, as development in the neighborhood continues at a robust pace. Plymouth should determine a purpose for this land that will be adhered to regardless of who owns it and how it is ultimately used. There may be alternative uses of this space that don't require building, such as green space, and these should be explored as part of the discernment process.

Possible first steps to moving forward:

- Meet with local community organizations for ideas
 - Include neighbors and business owners
 - May be part of Neighborhood Council
- Plan a series of events that incorporate art, food, and activities that encourage neighbors to gather
 - Could also create a public art installation
 - Could include farmer's market in summer
- Identify how church parking needs will be met when these lots are repurposed

III. CREATE A PROCESS FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Minnesota is home to one of the worst racial disparities in the U.S. on measures such as income, educational levels, life expectancy, health, and home ownership. This is due, in part, to historical oppression such as settler colonialism, genocide and exclusion. The disparities also stem from current policies and attitudes toward non-white people. Plymouth can take steps that begin to address what racial justice looks like. Plymouth can actively work to repair the harm.

We at Plymouth have freely acknowledged that our church resides on the traditional territory of the Dakota People, who lived here for centuries before the beginning of U.S. history. The Dakota were separated from this land through coercion, financial pressure and unkept promises. Over 170 years later, Plymouth is the beneficiary of these unconscionable events, creating for us a debt that continues to go unpaid. The Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area is home to one of the largest urban American Indian populations in the United States. These people are our neighbors, and about 38% of them live in poverty.

“We need to ‘walk the talk’ about the history of our land belonging to Native Americans. Not just a ‘statement’ that is toothless.”

- Plymouth Member

As part of the discernment process for achieving true racial justice, we must also acknowledge that we are members of a church community that was built on white privilege. As citizens of a nation that was built by 250 years of slave labor, we also owe a debt to Black people who are either descendants of slaves or victims of a system of oppression of Black people in the United States.

The Task Force believes that:

- Plymouth Church should be in covenanted relationship with our Indigenous neighbors and their tribes and with Black people and organizations in our community to discern what actions we can take to build long-term relationships and effect meaningful change in their lives;
- We undergo a process of truth-telling whereby native and black voices are heard and incorporated into our understanding of our joint history;
- We build into our spiritual practice a reconciliation of our history and our privilege with the long-term, systematic oppression of Black and Indigenous people;
- We allow for a process of grieving and lament for the suffering created by historic wrongs and allow that to illuminate a path to true justice.
- We reach political solidarity with these neighbors and use our power and our voices to advocate for the change they seek.

Possible first steps to moving forward:

- Create a Racial Justice Awareness Dialogue Series with the Racial Justice Initiative.
- Invite American Indian groups to use our chapel and/or theater for services.
- Make a donation to Makoce Ikikcupi to begin a relationship and to honor Dakota land.
- Make a donation to an African-American non-profit recommended by RJI to start a relationship.
- Invite Angela Two Stars to curate an exhibit in the Plymouth gallery.
- Invite an African-American curator to create an exhibit in the Plymouth gallery.

CALL TO ACTION TO DEACONS AND OUR CONGREGATION

The foundational documents of Plymouth Congregational Church inspire and support the work of each of us to grow spiritually as individuals and as a faith community with each other. They invite us to share our abundance in loving relationship with those beyond our walls. The work of the Campus Task Force was always destined to deal with more important matters than simply how we use our substantial wealth of buildings and property. It was clear during the creation of this group that it would need to deal with the heart and soul of Plymouth as a covenanted Christian congregation. The Task Force understood it would require a lengthy period of open-hearted, dedicated effort to make it real. However long this journey takes Plymouth, we know that the trip will have deep spiritual value to us.

We have used the word “transformation” frequently at Plymouth and within our Task Force. We believe it means doing the hard work of living into the Purposes of the Church. The words of the 2019 Advancing Plymouth Church document (Growth Task Force) also inspire us “...to make changes to become more of what we are called to be as a congregation.” The process of achieving them will be transformative to our relationship with our neighbors, reflect our stand for justice in the wider community, and enhance our vitality and growth as a church.

While all decision making about our work in the community will be done in partnership with the community, we believe this discernment about the Recommendations starts with Plymouth

doing its internal work first. We think it is important enough to mobilize the governing bodies of Plymouth to make this work a priority in 2023 and the coming years.

We recommend that the Deacons take ownership of the process, perhaps forming a Work Group to hold serious conversations with the Ministers and each Board. Each of them should create a high priority plan to explore in 2023 how various Task Force recommendations could be implemented and be infused into the very programs we create for our members and member groups. Task Force members could be resource people if it would be useful to the Deacons or governing boards.

This work fundamentally starts with individual spiritual growth (Within), accomplished through the collective support and efforts of the Plymouth community (Among) in partnership with our neighbors and other organizations selected by the partnership (Beyond). The recommendations are not conclusive in nature. Rather, they describe a process of discernment that will inspire decision making and implementation by members, in collaboration with our neighbors, once Plymouth has begun its internal work. The work is both current and long-term, evolving over time in ways we may not understand now.

Of course, we are not able to predict the exact outcomes of this work. But we believe they will reflect values that stand at the very center of our beloved church. Let us begin this important work in covenant with one another and with our neighbors.

Members of the Campus Task Force

Peter Eichten, Co-Chair
Lila Franklin, Co-chair
Tom Anderson
Peg Birk
Sonia Cairns
Rev. Dr. DeWayne Davis, Lead Minister
Katie Dailey Dillon
Dennis Gimmestad
Jeff Hall
EJ Kelley

Sarah Lehman
Don MacKenzie
Ann Manning
John Schenk
Brian Siska
Carol Truesdell
Theresa Voss
Nicholas Williams

APPENDIX 1 – The Purposes of the Church

We, the people of Plymouth Congregational Church, humbly seek and serve God within, among, and beyond ourselves.

Within

We find sanctuary for our spiritual journey in the Congregational tradition. We:

- Seek the sacred in ourselves and all others.
- Cultivate our deepest and best selves.
- Nurture our capacity to love.
- Live in the hope of renewal and transformation.

Among

We walk together in covenanted Christian community. We:

- Care for one another
- Cultivate a spirit of gratitude, love, joy, compassion and inclusion.
- Honor many pathways to the sacred
- Deepen our understanding of our faith tradition
- Nurture a welcoming culture to all

Beyond

God's creation benefits from our love lived out in the world. We:

- Invest our time, talent, and treasure consistent with our values.
- Serve people in need.
- Advance human rights
- Further social, economic, racial, and environmental justice.
- Share our vision of progressive Christianity, while respecting all faith traditions.

APPENDIX 2 – Plymouth’s Mission (from 2010 Strategic Plan)

Plymouth Congregational Church is a progressive faith community grounded in the Christian tradition. In mutual care and with respect for our diverse understandings of God, we seek to embody the radical love and justice found in the life, teachings, and spirit of Jesus.

Other Ideas Related to All of the Three Recommendations:

- Create and endow a restricted building fund for the sole purpose of building maintenance and enhancements;
- Follow the roadmap being developed by Climate and Environmental Justice to update Plymouth’s heating systems, gradually transitioning away from fossil fuels for heating.
- Perform an analysis of the needs of the church in the coming decades and the facilities that will be required to meet them. Develop a long-term building plan incorporating that learning. This is important work that can have immediate impact.
- Explore the creation of a non-profit at some point to implement the "Big Ideas", to staff and run the Community Hub, and to access grants and additional funds.
- Keep the Marketing Committee involved in all of this work in order to communicate work to the larger community.
- Align with the Racial Justice Initiative whose work is closely related to the Campus Task Force recommendations.

Advancing Plymouth Church, 2019–2022 A Visioning Document from the Growth Task Force is available on the Plymouth website.

APPENDIX 3 – Organizations and Initiatives (Resources)

Throughout the year that the Plymouth Campus Task Force convened, we shared many resources with one another to help guide our conversations and mission. Below is a collection of those resources – from news articles to examples of other churches doing great work, to organizations that Plymouth might consider partnering with to get the three big ideas off the ground. For links to resources, click below or go to www.Plymouth.org.

Case Studies: Churches engaged in exemplary transformative work –

- [St. Olaf Catholic Church affordable housing project](#)
- [Reimagining a church parking lot – Judson Memorial Baptist Church](#)
- [The Beacon Center – Washington D.C.](#)
 - Example of how a church intertwined itself with its surrounding community in a radically hospitable way
- [Engaging community through public art](#)
- [Star Tribune: One home, three churches — and a shared Christmas in Minneapolis](#)
- [Land Back Initiative](#)

Racial Justice –

- [The Tulsa Massacre: Is Racial Justice Possible 100 years later?](#)
- [Equal Justice Initiative 2022 Report](#)

Becoming a more welcoming space -

- [Reaching out to low-income neighbors](#)
- [What to do with aging church buildings](#)
- [Indigenous experimental music](#)
- [Podcast: Father Gregory Boyle's Homeboy Industries](#)

Steven's Square Community Resources –

- [SSCO – Steven's Square Community Organization](#)

Riverside Innovation Hub –

- [Exploring the Public Church: PowerPoint presentation by Riverside Innovation Hub \(Tess will add to this by Mon.\)](#)
- [Plymouth's Meaning Podcast: Episode 4 – Flipping Church Walls Inside Out](#)

Neighborhood Organizations and Businesses –

- [Native American Community Development Institute \(NACDI\)](#)

Stories and Interviews with Neighbors and Plymouth Members –

- [Experience of a Steven's Square Resident](#)
- [Lydia Apartment Residents – Interview](#)

A full and lengthy set of ideas from Plymouth and neighborhood individuals and organizations are available to those who wish to review. Contact Brian Siska, bdsiska@gmail.com, or Sonia Cairns, scairns@mosscairns.com.