

# the flame

Plymouth Congregational Church | Minneapolis

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## In This Issue



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The Unique Gift of Teens Choosing Church

And more!



# Choosing Church in an Age of Loneliness and Isolation

DEWAYNE L. DAVIS, LEAD MINISTER

*“Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humanness.”* —**Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?***

In the last few years, there has been a precipitous decline in trust in the church, attendance, and participation. Since the end of the Covid pandemic closings and the reopening of schools, businesses, and churches, a new pattern of socializing, participating, and working has emerged in surprising and unexpected ways, with the church appearing to bear the most visible brunt of opting out. More recently, even evangelical churches, which until about five years ago seemed to buck the trend in declining church attendance, are not immune to masses of people leaving the church. In the recently published book *The Great Dechurching*, the authors find that for many people leaving the church is less about religious abuse or theological disagreement. For some, careers, hobbies, family schedules, and the routines of daily living push church attendance and participation down on the list of priorities.

But there is nothing new about our current investigation and prognostication about the life and future of the church in the United States. Two articles from *The Christian Century*, written more than 90 years apart, wrestle with the role and purpose of the Christian church in a fractured and polarized social and political environment. Both articles written so far apart indicate the ongoing concern about the church in the world in the last century. The first article, written in 1931 by W. E. B. DuBois, lamented that the church would never be more than a social organization known for demonstrating less unity among the mass of people than any other institution. The other, written by Rev. Martha Tartanic just last month, argues that all of the attempts to revive our churches with a new focus or new programs or the next current trend are futile. She invites us to accept what the church has become and “put our energy, attention, time, and love toward what is already happening.” What is happening in our culture? In our relationships? In our churches?



What is already happening is an epidemic of loneliness and isolation. That was the conclusion of a recent report from the Surgeon General of the United States, finding that “one-in-two adults reported experiencing loneliness,” which has a measurable impact on health outcomes, including an association “with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death.” According to the researchers, the remedy for this epidemic of loneliness and isolation: connected lives and communities. Humans have a fundamental need for belonging. How can we marshal and reimagine social and religious institutional resources to provide sustained social connection? When I have asked people why they attend church or what they like about the churches they attend, in their many stories, examples, and testimonies, the common denominator is relationship: relationships that bring connection and community sustained within a beloved community that sees, hears, and knows the truth about the lives, needs, and concerns of diverse peoples and families.

Years ago, after seminary and before I decided to go into parish ministry, I read many books and attended as many workshops as possible on church growth. I attended all the denominational church-size summits, which presented research models showing how to grow attendance and membership by assessing pastoral roles, staffing and leadership needs, worship, finances, facilities,

planning, programming, and communications within set size categories. I only recall a little information or discussion about the power of relationships in building beloved community. Perhaps church consultants took for granted that all churches understood that building relationships of connection and community was the priority. And while those best practices for church growth and management have been helpful, our current age requires much more than the technical adaptations to church programming and planning can provide. As the Rev. Jeremiah Wright proclaimed, "If we stop majoring in scholarship and minoring in stewardship, and if we start building relationships, first our relationship with God and then our relationship with each other," we can create vibrant churches overflowing with fulfilled and connected people.

In a section of that Surgeon General's report calling for "A National Strategy to Advance Social Connection," noticeably absent from the pillars and recommendations for social connection is

a definitive, articulated role for churches. While the report does include religious organizations in a list of possible institutions as part of a social infrastructure in local communities to connect people, the authors do not demonstrate any knowledge about the promise and possibilities of the beloved community of a church providing a healthy, spiritual home to rebuild human connection. Many of us have chosen church, finding our voice, place, and connection within. We chose Plymouth Church, coming together in a diversity of thought, experience, and expressions to share this space and place through worship, sharing meals, and engaging in conversation. In our stated purpose to "humbly seek and serve God within, among, and beyond ourselves," we offer the gift of covenant, connection, and community as a witness to the power of love and justice in the world. In that gift, our job is not to save the church. Our call is to be the church and welcome our neighbors to join us in building community.

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## Grace Notes

PHILIP BRUNELLE, ORGANIST-CHOIRMASTER

How wonderful it is to welcome everyone back to Plymouth Church—and to sing! Plymouth has had a long and wonderful history of choirs in worship and I look forward to a great year of music-making.

The Plymouth Choir begins rehearsing on Wednesday, September 6, in Guild Hall from 7 to 9 p.m. This wonderful choir sings repertoire from Bach to Bernstein every Sunday at the 11 a.m. service. If you have thought about joining the Choir, please get in touch with me (612-547-1450) for all the details. This fall we have some special music composed by Minneapolis composers David Evan Thomas, Paul Lohman, Dan Kantor, Kyle Pederson, and Carol Barnett, and we will be singing some of the beloved gems of the past. Give it a try; you'll be glad you did!

Another great opportunity for you is the Chapel Singers. This choir focuses on singing music

on themes of peace, love, and justice. They rehearse every Wednesday 6:45-7:45 in the Chapel and sing at the 9 a.m.

Sunday service monthly. A passion for singing is what director Mary Laymon is looking for, and she lives that beautifully! Rehearsals begin on September 13, and you are most welcome to join in!

Of course there are choirs for young voices, and Marie Scholtz talks about them in her column. Plymouth is certainly a church for choirs of all ages. Please add your voice to the wonderful choral sounds of Plymouth Church!



# This Fall at Plymouth, Choose the Arts

MARIE SCHOLTZ, ASSOCIATE MUSIC DIRECTOR

As we head back into the program year, I am anticipating all the beautiful music that will soon be heard in the halls and stairwells of Plymouth Church. Even months after choirs finished up in May, I am still hearing my own children spinning and humming the melodies from Cherub Choir and Young Voices. (I just heard one snippet today!) The text and messages from music that we sing as choir members live in our hearts and minds; here are a few examples from this past year:

“Some words, they can’t be spoken only sung, so hear a thousand voices shouting love.”

“Loving spirits will live forever, we’re all swimming to the other side.”

“When I rise up, let me rise joyful like a bird.”

“Starting now in this moment, it’s time to start over; open your heart, you know there’s nothing to forgive.”

This fall we have more meaningful music to make, and I hope you will be part of it. Intergenerational collaborations are in the works, including a Thanksgiving project with the Plymouth Choir and youth. Youth Choir will join with Cherubs and Choristers for a winter premiere of a new work by Steve Heitzeg, “Peace is Like a Flower.” And I plan to say “yes” to as-yet unplanned projects that get Plymouth singing together.

Our Cherub and Chorister Choirs will combine into one choir until Christmas. This is to accommodate a Wednesday night schedule change since I am directing Youth Choir for the remainder of 2023! I am so excited to sing again with the awesome people I met first as 5- and 6-year-olds. I can’t wait to get to know them again and make music together.

This is the second year of Creative Quarterlies, where children in grades 3 and up can register for mini-courses in the arts, allowing them to dabble in areas they might not have experienced before. This year, we again kickoff the fall with spoken word artist Pierre Fulford. “What Matters to Me,” an original piece created by the quarterly group, was shared last year following their mini course. After the MEA break, a youth bells ensemble will convene to prepare music for Christmas Eve.

Here is a reminder of the meeting times for all our Wednesday night fine arts groups:

**Young Voices:** 5:30–6 p.m., meets in 205

**Cherub and Chorister Choirs:** 6–6:40 p.m., rehearses in 205

**Youth Choir:** 6:45–7:45 p.m., rehearses in 205

**Creative Quarterly:** 6:45–7:45 p.m., meeting rooms vary

**Chapel Singers:** 6:45–7:45 p.m., rehearses in Chapel

**Plymouth Choir:** 7–9 p.m., rehearses in Guild Hall

We have a place for you or your child in a creative ensemble. Our choirs make Sunday worship services even more rich and meaningful. The friendships that develop while singing or while waiting with other parents during choir time are like no other! Many people, young and older, can find a musical home at Plymouth. All voices and musical backgrounds are welcome.

Please contact [maries@plymouth.org](mailto:maries@plymouth.org) with questions about Wednesday night offerings!



# Audio/Video at Plymouth

CODY BOURDOT, PRODUCTION MANAGER

I've never been more confident in Plymouth's technology and AV team as we move into a new program year. We finished installing a two-camera streaming system in the Chapel, like the Sanctuary system on a smaller scale, and a three-camera system in the Conn Theater. These installations were done in-house almost entirely with existing gear from earlier in the pandemic, giving us a total of three livestreaming spaces for worship and art. Whether video recording or streaming hybrid events, this opens the door to wider audiences and forms of outreach, for Plymouth, our partners, and theater users. Look around next time you're in the Conn and Chapel to see if you can find all the cameras.



The Conn has more exciting improvements, with permanent speaker and video monitors in the dressing rooms and the sanctuary's old sound processor added to the PA for better intelligibility and fail-safe protection of our equipment. When possible, we'll augment the Conn sound system with modest sub woofers for dramatic sound effects and the ability to host music concerts between our regular stage plays. Several musicians and promoters toured the Conn during Open Doors Minneapolis this spring and were excited to learn about our facility and talented sound staff.

Elsewhere in the building, microphones and cameras purchased for remote use during lock down have come home to roost, and we're consolidating them into a small studio for easy recording, voice-overs, video messages, and community collaborations. More on that soon.

Behind the scenes, video broadcasting got its own lane on Plymouth's fiber internet, and updated antennas provide robust coverage to the rest of our building and parking lot for events.

Nothing works without our staff, and I'm grateful every day to work with Alex Johnson, Slats Toole, and Felix Svatek-Pine. Each brings areas of expertise to Plymouth. Alex has world-class sound reinforcement experience from First Avenue and has been my collaborator for many of the installs mentioned above. Slats is "bilingual" in theater and worship and has been overhauling the lights in the theater. Felix has a keen understanding of computer programming and a growing list of Photoshop and video credentials, in school and professionally. All adapted quickly to the rigors of mixing and video switching live services, forums, and concerts.

Best of all, we get to work with the warm Plymouth community and actively support and collaborate with the youth, musicians, singers, speakers, poets, ministers, fellowship groups, and partners that make this a home to so many. Looking forward to making your dreams and productions happen this fall.

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## PARISH REGISTER

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### RECENT BAPTISM

**Hannah Pupeza Azad**, child of Raj Azad and Toni Azad

### RECENTLY BEREAVED

**Laurie & Ed Greeno** and **Kent & Judy Hodder**, death of Laurie's and Kent's father, William "Bill" Hodder

**Kathryn Harper**, death of daughter Susan Harper Ritten

**Lynn Moline & Becca Norris**, death of Lynn's mother, Marilyn Borgenheimer Holte

**Jane Riley-Koll**, death of grandson

**Dale Talley**, death of her son Jordan Breakey; **Dan Dressen & Beth Comeaux**, death of nephew

**Jeff & Leah Young**, death of Jeff's father, Richard "Dick" Young; **Dag and Soren Young**, death of grandfather

### RECENTLY DECEASED

#### Recently Deceased

**Gene Blackledge**

**Kari Hellie**

**Bonnie Herr**

**Jean Howell**

**Mary MacLaughlin**

**Mary Mark**, mother of Steve Mark, Debbie Erck, and Scott Mark

**Karen Reed**, mother of Rob Reed, Will Reed, and Andrew Reed

**Wellington "Duke" Tully, Jr.**

# How Do We Live a Faithful Life?

MADELINE SEVERTSON, DIRECTOR OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION



I've spent most of my life in school, and even though I'm finished (for now), September still feels more like the beginning of the year than January does. September is a time for new classes, new ideas, and new opportunities.

This is true at Plymouth too, where September and Rally Sunday kick off the program year. Spiritual formation programs this year will include some familiar rhythms and patterns as well as some experiments. I've enjoyed putting together a variety of offerings, and I'm looking forward to seeing which ones will become new traditions.

We can describe the goal of spiritual formation in several ways. I've included a few here, and I invite you to decide which description entices you the most. In biblical language, the goal of spiritual formation is to fulfill the commandment to love God, love our neighbor, and love ourselves. To use the language of the Purposes of the Church, spiritual formation helps us seek and serve God within, among, and beyond ourselves. More generally, spiritual formation is a continual process of bringing our spirituality and our lives into better alignment, recognizing that each informs the other.

However we define spiritual formation, the question underlying the endeavor is: how do we live a faithful life? Growing and deepening our spirituality asks us to consider, for the first or fiftieth time, to what or to whom we plan to be faithful and what that faithfulness looks like. (This could be a journaling prompt if you'd like to practice putting it into words.) Over the course of the program year, spiritual formation offerings will be an opportunity to reflect on these questions and others.

Spiritual formation programs, classes, and gatherings will offer time and space to:

- Understand more fully the Christian tradition and our place in it.
- Deepen relationships—with God, with others, with nature, and with yourself.
- Engage in self-reflection as individuals and in community.
- Increase knowledge of non-Christian traditions and practice interfaith dialogue, beginning in winter 2024.

The goal of these programs is not to corral everyone into one vision of what spirituality or faith is. Instead, my hope is that each person can find and nurture an expression of spirituality that feels authentic to them—one that offers hope, challenge, comfort, accountability, and nourishment. I invite you to let me know how I can support you in this, whether it's a conversation over coffee or a list of your suggestions for future classes, book studies, or field trips.

Programs for this fall include:

- **Scripture Study** led by clergy and other facilitators
- **Spiritual Practice Sampler**, a monthly gathering to learn and experience various forms of prayer, sacred reading, and other spiritual practices
- **Stories of Our Spiritual Journeys**, a discussion and reflection group
- **Plymouth Reads:** *Serving Money, Serving God: Aligning Radical Justice, Christian Practice, and Church Life* by Sheryl Johnson, a new book about creating a church structure that honors and reflects our congregation's commitment to justice
- Saturday morning mini-retreat on practices of discernment
- **Book Study:** *The Third Reconstruction: America's Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century* by Peniel E. Joseph, led by Peter Eichten

A more complete listing of fall spiritual formation programs, as well as registration links, can be found on the Plymouth website.

# What's In Store for Fall with CCYF

NINA JONSON, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & YOUTH MINISTRY

September 10, 2023, begins my 43rd year attending Plymouth Congregational Church! Of course, I don't remember all of the years, but I do have so many memories seared into my brain of my time growing up in this place. Such as climbing out my classroom window onto the roof above the minister's office to collect pebbles to make a miniature Mt. Sinai with salt dough and a styrofoam cup in Ruth Steimle's kindergarten class. Singing Christmas carols with the entire church led by Denise Bue during the Living Nativity. Cheering on my dad, Nancy Gores, and others at Plymouth Rocks softball games, participating in spaghetti dinner fundraisers led by my parents when I was in junior high, and then running spaghetti dinner fundraisers with my husband Jasper Jonson when we ran Junior High. Mentoring 10 different young people through their confirmation process. Walking down the center aisle of the sanctuary to my beloved when we got married. The days when our girls got baptized or meeting our best church friends as we sat and talked together on Wednesday nights outside the Young Voices classroom, and on and on and on. For me, there are through lines that have kept the most incandescent memories in my head, and these are what unifies them:

- Welcome & Belonging—at Plymouth, we are our best when we are actively caring more about the person next to us, or better yet, the person not even here yet, than ourselves.
- Joy & Fun—being spirit-filled does not require somberness. Joy is life-giving, life-fueling, and life-sustaining. It also attracts others to us.
- Community—In so many of the pictures I have of Plymouth, either in my head, or from the times before Covid, we are gathered in circles, where everyone can see one another, the circle can always widen to fit one more in, and we are all collectively doing things for a common end: singing, cheering, building a house, scoring a home run, eating spaghetti, figuring out how to survive toddlerhood. No one exists in isolation.

As I write this, I am working on our plans for fall church school and Wednesday evening programming. These plans are not happening in isolation, but in consort with Marie Scholtz, our Associate Music Director and First Service Music Coordinator; Madeline Severtson, our Director of Spiritual Formation; Minister of

Congregational Life Beth Hoffman Faeth; the Board of Spiritual Formation; the Committee for Children, Youth and Families; and others. When we work together with more minds at the table, we are hoping to create fewer silos and more unity across our programs, as well as ensure that more of what we do is focused on the same goals and the same why.

As I think about our fall programming for children and youth this year, I am focusing both our curriculum and activities around the themes listed above. Our Sunday school curriculum will weave together stories from the Bible with more foundational information about our church—who is Plymouth? What do we believe? And why does their family choose this church? I am excited to go on this journey in our classrooms. I am also working on more opportunities for community and fun, including outings for families, tweens and teens. Helping “people find their people” is an important part of my work, because it is much more enjoyable and meaningful to be at church when you've got a friend, you feel like you belong, and you understand why you're there. I'm excited to work on creating more opportunities for engaging and fun activities, and training our children and youth to be leaders at welcoming others. Let's make the 23-24 program year a year of abundant joy!



# A Spectacular Summer for the Young People of Plymouth!

NINA JONSON

This summer with our children and youth we were delighted to serve a wider range than ever before, expanding our programming to include smaller children from Academia Elze in our Preschool Peace Camp: Our Busy, Beautiful City, as well as kids from different school districts, cities and out of state who participated in our Magic, Science and Faith Peace Camp and our Musical Spectacular. A big part of the work we do with young people at Plymouth is about helping them develop positive relationships with one another, find meaningful ways to give back, and grow into leaders and role models of positive, progressive, faith-minded action for those around them. The children and young people in our programs this summer were able to do all of this and more. Here's a bit about each of our unique experiences.

**Middle School Trip to the Duluth:** Nina Jonson and Pan Graham took 7 middle schoolers on their first trip since years before COVID. We lived like tourists in our own state, visiting Betty's Pies, walking the Duluth Lake shore, feeding otters at the Great Lakes Aquarium, carbo-loading elbow to elbow with marathoners at the community spaghetti dinner fund raiser, checking out the pre-marathon expo and cheering on the 5K runners, before experiencing a traveling lock-in at the lovely Peace United Church of Christ, nestled in the hills overlooking Lake Superior. In the early morning, they left Duluth, and headed to Jay Cooke State Park, where we spent the day hiking, exploring, and swimming, grabbed candy and souvenirs at a truly unique sweet shop in Northern Minnesota, and headed home. Nearly all of our travelers were the youngest sibling in their family, and during the weekend, one of the sweetest moments was hearing one of the kids say "for the first time, I finally feel like 'a big kid', instead of always being 'the little sister.'" A truly empowering experience for them all.

**Preschool Peace Camp—Our Busy, Beautiful City:** Three rising 7th graders, Annabelle, Adella and Sebastian, accompanied by Nina, ran 3 half-days of camp for 6 preschoolers. Each day our middle schoolers led the campers through 5 activities, including circle time, an indoor game, an outdoor game, a service project, and an art project, along with free time, snacks, story time, washing hands, band aids, and the occasional tears. The little children learned about the different jobs people have in the city such as construction workers, mail carriers, fire fighters and librarians, how Minneapolis sorts garbage,

compost and recycling, and how to be Earth superheroes, watched workers climb under Nicollet to do some repairs, and made a cardboard city of their own! Our middle schoolers arrived early every day to do set up, prep snacks, plan who would lead each activity, pick up the children, and stayed after daily to clean up and debrief. At the end of camp all three said they wished it could be a 5 day camp and immediately volunteered to work at it next summer. One of the preschoolers said "Camp is like the most special school with the best teachers," and one of the middle schoolers said "I didn't know I would like working with little kids as much or be so good at it."

**Peace Camp—Magic, Science and Faith:** The Bible is literally filled with fantastical stories, from oceans splitting in half, to bushes that burn without heat, to gigantic balls of wings and eyes, to people walking on water—it is the perfect entry point into conversations about belief, and doubt, and evidence, and magic! With the priceless help of teens Dashiell, Otto, Clara, and college student Gina, 14 campers journeyed through a week of mind blowing experiments and even visited the Science Museum. The campers received their own lab coats, PhDs, safety goggles and magic wands. The perfect blend of fantasy and safety. They learned slight of hand tricks as well as many science tricks that can be done with items from their houses. They also talked about and broke down the ways some of the Bible stories could be explained now that we know more about science, and even did experiments where water was turned into "wine," bushes were burned with a heatless flame, and all of us got to walk and run on water.

On Friday, a host of fun guest scientists, and 8 middle school friends who aged out of camp joined us for an afternoon science fair, where we dropped eggs from the roof, made explosions with mentos and diet coke, and tried magic berries that make the sourest lemon taste like the sweetest candy. A text from a parent after camp said "what a difference camp made. Last week my child's dream was to be a you tuber when they grew up. Now they want to be an engineer." Another parent shared "It was really meaningful for my child to see multiple females throughout the week doing science experiments and being excited about science. And it is amazing to have a camp where science and faith can happily coexist."

**Youth Canoe Trip, Namekagon River, and Habitat for Humanity Youth Work Day:** In an effort to ensure that our young people get exposure to as many amazing adult





role models in our community as possible, Gina DelCorazon and Andy Holdsworth took young people ranging from 7th-12th grade for a weekend canoeing adventure. The kids loved, saying “the canoeing was really fun, but the adults were even better. They were so nice, and funny, and fun!” Thankfully, Gina and Andy have already agreed to another longer trip next summer! At the time of article submission, our teen day with Habitat for Humanity hasn’t happened yet, but a big thanks to longtime Habitat for Humanity volunteers John Humphrey and Jim Christenson for stepping in to work with our teens on a Brush with Kindness project. Creating meaningful inter-generational relationships is a key to a vibrant church community, so keep your eyes peeled, or share your own ideas, for ways to build bridges between generations!

**Musical Spectacular—Museum: Impossible:** In 1995, Janis Hardy started Theater Playshop as a summer offering for the children of Plymouth; Nina was in the first production. 28 years later, original musical theater productions in the Conn continued with this summer’s production. Our 24 actors worked with 6 teens and college students who were in charge of instrumental music, lights, set, props, and costumes. Nina Jonson and music teacher and member of VocalEssence Mari Scott directed, choreographed, and taught vocals. In just 4 and a half days, kids pulled together a 40 minute musical with 5 songs, costume changes, fight choreography, and an important message about the purpose and the true ownership of art. Kids grew by leaps and bounds over the week, coming out of their shells to memorize lines, take on leadership roles, and sing solos in front of a very large audience Friday afternoon. Theater has always been a safe space, and with over 25% of our cast and crew being nonbinary, it was really wonderful to see even the youngest campers carefully and respectfully using correct pronouns and names, and holding peers accountable for treating everyone with dignity and respect. At the final performance, a parent shared that “this week was about more than just a show. This week was about my child feeling comfortable with who they are, feeling loved in this place, and knowing everyone here cares about them.” Our program helped build strong relationships and strong kids—to quote one of the song lyrics “we won’t break, we’re not just flesh and bone.”

# The Unique Gift of Teens Choosing Church in 2023

THE 8TH-12TH GRADERS OF PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Young people have always been a group that skews away from church attendance more than other age groups, but within non-evangelical protestant Christian churches, no group saw a more dramatic decline post-Covid closings than teens and young adults. And yet, at Plymouth, we did not see that same drop. While nearly all of our young people of employable age picked up jobs during the pandemic that they have continued to work since and their schedules continue to be busy, the engagement level of our teens and young people has not wavered. The group regularly staying in contact during youth group, special events, via text, working at the church, getting together socially outside of church, group chats or reminding each other to come to church or mid-week mingle. I asked a variety of Plymouth young people, grades 8-12, the same question:

“In 2023, fewer young people attend church than at any time in history. Your family attends church, do you have to attend with them? Whether yes or no, what are your own personal reasons for “choosing church?” Why are you here?”

I spoke to 20 of our young people. Five of them are able to drive themselves and come without being told to; six of them are not able to drive themselves and have the choice to come or not come and choose to come; five of them are not able to drive themselves, are required to come and would choose to come even if they were not required to; and four of them are required to come, and might or might not come if they were not required to (extra sleep, sports, not having a friend there were the reasons given for why they wouldn't come).

Here are some of the wonderful responses from our young people.

So, why do *you* choose church?

*The people who go to Plymouth are very caring and are so fun to talk to. It's very easy to make friends with the people here, even if you don't see them outside of church.*

*-11th Grader*

*I choose this church because it helps me talk about things I can't talk about at school, and it is a place where kids can be friends with people who are little kids or teenagers and no one makes fun of them.*

*-7th Grader*

*I choose this church because of the people here, who have always been very kind and accepting of me. I choose this church because I am able to speak my mind when it is important and people take me seriously.*

*-9th Grader*

*I come to our church for the sense of community, the kindness of the people and a connection to something greater.*

*-11th Grader*

*I chose Plymouth because I felt that I have a part in my community and they want me here.*

*-11th Grader*

*I choose this church because I have been to other churches, and I don't feel like they want kids there. Nina and other people here make sure we know we are wanted here. We can wear jeans, or headphones, or have a day where we cry, and people don't make us feel bad. It is okay to be a teenager here.*

*-11th Grader*

*I choose Plymouth because it is a community I feel welcomed into even when I have not been to the church in months. It is always an accessible community place.*

*-12th Grader*

*I go to church because it is about more than religion. I think a big part of it for me is the community and the connections I make with people around me.*

*-8th Grader*

*I choose church because it is where I learn important lessons. Where I have fun with friends at camps and church school. Church is somewhere I'm excited to go because it's a safe space for all and I get to choose how I worship.*

*-7th Grader*

*I choose this church because it is fun to be there, and to see the community grow and support each other consistently.*

*-12th Grader*

*My mom has been coming here for so long that I've grown up here and I can't imagine being anywhere else. Now that I am in high school, it gets much harder to make time to get to church, but seeing my best friends every time I come back makes the commitment worth it.*

*-10th Grader*

*This is a place where everyone is really comfortable with one another. Everyone always says hello, and they are accepting of each other.*

*-9th Grader*

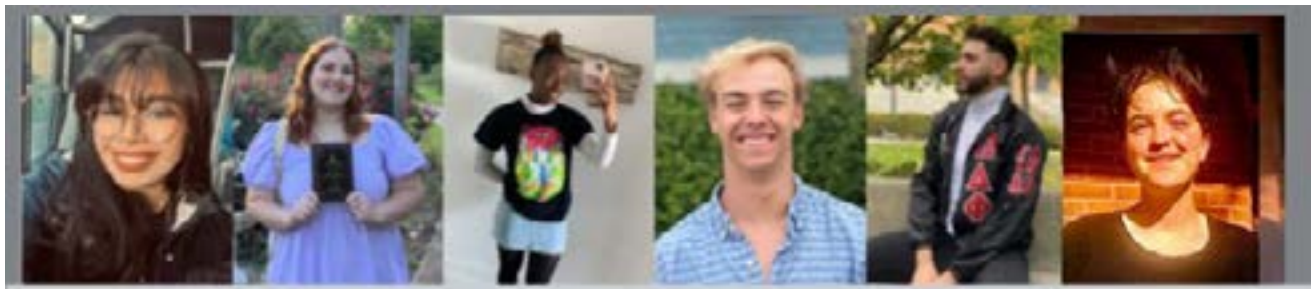
# Visit to Nogales Arizona Border, July 2023

JOHN HUMPHREY

I received the following e-mail recently: “The Casa Alitas Hospitality Center is in need of volunteers to assist at the center, to meet new arrivals being released at the border into the United States and guide them to the center, a three minute walk. Once at the center, the new arrivals receive refreshments and assistance making plans to travel on to their destinations or by bus to Casa Alitas, Tucson, for additional assistance. The bus to Casa Alitas in Tucson departs center at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. Volunteers are needed between the hours of 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday thru Thursday. Any amount of time you can volunteer during these hours is appreciated. Spanish is helpful but not required.” The writer added a P.S.: “I was at the center this morning, met and walked with new arrivals from Guatemala (1 Mam speaker), Guatemala (1), Russia (5), Haiti (1), Cuba (4) and Venezuela (4)! It is a great feeling to be the first smiling face they encounter after such an arduous journey! This is time very well spent!”

My initial thought was, “I can do that.” So I did. I almost succeeded in getting another Plymouthite to accompany me, but the plans fell through so I went on my own. It was a great opportunity to follow up on our Immigrant Welcoming Work Group trip this past February, where I volunteered at the Casa Alitas shelter in Tucson for a week, with enjoyable and skilled colleagues Karen Canon and Judy Takkunen. Ann Manning was an inspiration and a driver for me in my immigrant volunteer work. I knew she would have done this if she could. Jerry Davis offered his support for my going, as did several other members of the work group. I felt the call.

Each day we received about 70 immigrants. Another 10 or so had already arranged their own transportation, pick up by family members already in States, Greyhound, or flight from Phoenix (which is much cheaper than from Tucson). The first day was rocky. The staff person on site that day either didn't know how to or didn't want to use volunteers whose Spanish was not, in their estimation, good enough, so they mostly did everything themselves—I watched a lot. The next three days were totally different, largely because of a talented and delightful group of BCA (Border Community Alliance) interns.



They had been volunteering on both sides of the border for the last five weeks. They had become quite skilled and were able to do many of the things normally done by the staff. They were also good at incorporating newcomers, like me, of whom there were a few every day. Several of the volunteers spoke no Spanish, but communicated with English, smiles, gestures, facial expressions, and Google translate, and they managed to get along and to be helpful to the new immigrants.

In addition to accompanying newly arrived and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)-processed immigrants from CBP headquarters on the border to the hospitality center a block away in 110-degree heat, I also learned how to do intake. Intake involves collecting necessary information about them to share via computer with Casa Alitas Tucson, which was actually very enjoyable. Before that, however, the first thing I did when we arrived at the center would be to offer and serve them a beverage. Then they would typically want to call family or friends in the United States to let them know they had arrived. Next we would do intake.

One gentleman from Cuba was so excited when he finally got through to his family that he had to step outside, and even then, we could hear him yelling and laughing through closed doors for the next half hour! A couple from Mexico had been trying to get documents for twelve months. When they finally did and arrived in the States, the woman was overcome, laughing and crying, speechless for several minutes. The man hugged me. They both took selfies with me, the angel (their word) who had welcomed them with smiles and kind words upon arrival.

An older gentleman, also from Mexico, walked with a cane. He had only waited six months to get his approval papers. A gentleman from India said he had waited ten years to get his! When we started intake at the center, we realized the U.S. government had misspelled his name. We called CBP and they said he had to come back and get it corrected immediately or be in violation of the law. He was perfectly gracious, asking only to leave his suitcase at the center, so he wouldn't have to lug it back to the CBP building and then back again. He said mistakes happen, and he was glad to get it caught early, so he wouldn't have to be deported for attempting to get in with faulty papers.

My last day there, I got to volunteer with Sura Wahlin, a co-founder of the Green Valley—Sahuarita Samaritans. She had such sparkle; it was inspiring to be in the same room with her. She enlisted young children to help her “deliver” water to people who had just arrived. The adults' faces lit up when greeted by smiling children with cups of cold water, and the kids' faces lit up to see how happy they had made the adults. When older children arrived, she would throw them an orange when they entered; she threw it so that they always caught it and enjoyed her making a game of it.

For me, the best part of the experience was the feeling of helping people escape from a life-threatening situation and have a chance for a better life. I did not meet one person I would not be happy to have as a neighbor or co-worker or friend. Their joy in having this possibility was palpable, and that gave me joy.

I took few photos of faces to protect identities, but I did want to share one, which captured a small piece of the joy I was just describing. This child's face shows that joy. I would walk 500 miles to help this child have a chance at a decent life. I know many of you would, too.



# Conn Gallery Exhibition “The Lines That Got Me Here”

LYNETTE BLACK

Artist Melodee Strong

**September 10–December 31, 2023.**

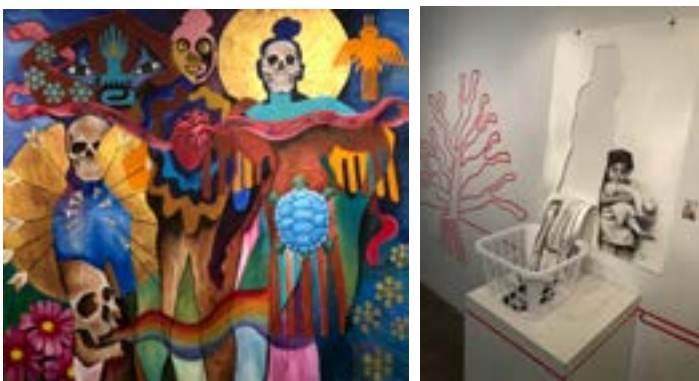
**Opening Reception September 17**

**Sunday Forum Artist’s Talk October 29, 2023**

“The Lines That Got Me Here” is a follow up exhibition from last year’s “Lineas de Sangre” (Bloodlines) in which artist Melodee Strong examined her experiences growing up as a “mixed” girl in Minnesota. This exhibition is based on the realization that our stories don’t begin at birth, it’s a continuation through the bloodlines of our parents, their history and trauma unfolds within us and around us through our upbringing. The choice of where to raise a family also contributes to our identity and culture. Through reflective writings, recordings, research, and sketches Melodee decided that solely creating work about race was not enough. She examined the traditions and beliefs that collided together from two completely different cultures to shape who she is.

“The Lines That Got Me Here” chronicles many aspects of Melodee’s lineage, stories about abandonment and loss, alcoholism and dependency, assimilation and racism. It also embodies her lineage from the Andes of Peru and the cobble streets of Lima to the dirt roads and poplar trees of Minnesota. Where all lines have converged to bring her where she is now. The linear experiences to prepare and lead her to the path ahead. Melodee says “I stand here with my ancestors, with my parents, and with God”.

The exhibition speaks about a journey navigating through a rural (mostly white American) upbringing while still trying to preserve her Peruvian heritage, maintaining a pride of who she is and where she comes from. “These are the lines that got me here.”



## Film Club

JOAN THOMPSON

*Before each film, coffee & tea is available upstairs. Bring your own lunch or order from a local restaurant to pick up.*

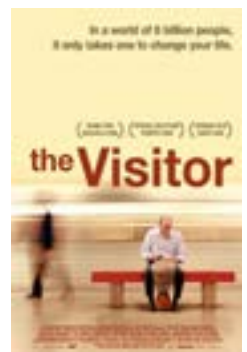
**The Visitor** (1 hr. 43 min., fiction)

Sun., Oct. 29, 12:30 in Jackman. Guest Host—Immigrant Welcoming Work Group (IWWG). Joan Thompson and Erika Charlesworth-Seiler from IWWG will co-lead a discussion after the film.

A lonely widower’s life changes through a chance encounter with an immigrant couple, confronting them with issues of immigration and racism in post-9/11 New York City.

Shown at film festivals throughout the world in 2008 and 2009, *The Visitor*, an independent feature, received 35 award nominations and won 19 awards. Roger Ebert wrote that “this is a wonderful film sad, angry, and without a comforting little happy ending. . .

[but] the whole point of serious fiction is to show people changing, and how they change in *The Visitor* is the film’s beauty.” Please join Plymouth Film Club and IWWG to view and discuss this top notch film.



**Mr. Holland’s Opus** (2 hr. 23 min., fiction)

Sun., Nov. 12., 12:30 in Jackman Guest Host—Philip Brunelle. The film is loosely based on the life of high school music director Glenn Holland.

A promising young musician and composer’s career is interrupted by family needs, and his new teaching career leaves little time for his art.



This big-budget Hollywood drama has a heart, intelligence, and excellent music from rock to classical. The film was nominated for 10 awards, including Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for Richard Dreyfuss as lead actor, and a Golden Globe nomination for Best Screenplay. Please join us to view this warm, smart, musical elegy on life goals and changes.

# Camp Plymouth

PHOTOS FROM NINA JONSON & TIM BRUNELLE



# Find Your Group, with One More Chair

We always have room for “one more person—one more chair.”

If you haven't checked out the 15 small groups listed in the One More Chair brochure and on the web site, we hope will! Some are long standing groups that meet once a month (Bridge, breakfast and book groups) and others span the range from playing the ukulele to outdoor adventures to game nights and WAY MORE. On the website click “Connect” and then “Small groups”. Or pick up a brochure at the Welcome Table. Also, check out our table on Rally Sunday. There is ALWAYS room for one more! Questions? Linda Seime 507-269-2799 or [rlseime@gmail.com](mailto:rlseime@gmail.com).

One More Chair facilitates both small groups and opportunities to meet for fellowship. Small groups meet regularly as determined by the participants. Larger fellowship opportunities organized by the OMC Planning Committee occur three to four times a year, including museum visits, theater events, tours of local landmarks, and potluck gatherings.

People appreciate the small group format to grow friendships while sharing common interests. The many small groups are described in this booklet. Please reach out to the contact listed to learn more about or join one or more of the interest groups. Love all around us. Young people remind us of who we were, but their pureness and potential also have the power to help us remember who we still CAN BE, if only we listen to what they are telling us.

## Music and Arts

### Plymouth Booster Club

Judy Takkunen: [judyptakkunen@gmail.com](mailto:judyptakkunen@gmail.com)

To support our amazing young people involved in choir, sports, theater, etc., Participants would choose events to attend and be a presence there. (Nina provides the calendar, the boosters show up!)

### Exploring Theater 45°

Linda Seime: [rlseime@gmail.com](mailto:rlseime@gmail.com)

Plymouth is HOME to its own professional theater group! Let's explore this art form and use our community to go beyond experiencing the actual performance!



Perhaps we will attend a performance together and meet afterwards to explore the story, its spiritual questions, its transformational power, and how we can deepen our own humanity. Perhaps we meet with one of the actors or with Seth to discuss the play. This group is still being defined! We plan to start this group in the fall but would like to know now if you are interested. Theater 45° funding will determine if this group starts.

### Ukulele Group

Jill Nelson: [jillary17@comcast.net](mailto:jillary17@comcast.net)

Gather with others to play the ukulele! The focus will be on songs of joy, community, and inspiration. Meeting time: 3rd Monday/month, 10:30 a.m., at Plymouth, Room 205.

## Active in Mind, Body, and Spirit

### Younger Adult Group

Madeline Severtson: [madelines@plymouth.org](mailto:madelines@plymouth.org)

Join other Plymouth young adults (20s and 30s) for conversation, games, and other fun. Have ideas? Send them our way!

### Outdoor Adventures Group

Dana and Pat Chabot: [dana@chabotcpa.com](mailto:dana@chabotcpa.com)

In addition to hiking the metro area trails, this social group might consider walking tours, bird and other wildlife watching, and snowshoeing.



### **Makers Group**

Cheryl Davenport: [c2daven@gmail.com](mailto:c2daven@gmail.com); Roxie Schenzel: [roxiedoremi@hotmail.com](mailto:roxiedoremi@hotmail.com)

Create as you connect! Gather with other Makers to work on your own portable project while socializing with others. Portable projects might be calligraphy, sketching, knitting, origami, watercolor, card-making, quilting, beading and more. Meeting time: 4th Tuesday of the month, 10 a.m.-noon, Room 202, Plymouth.

### **Duplicate Bridge**

Mariana Shulstad: [marianarshulstad@gmail.com](mailto:marianarshulstad@gmail.com)

OMC Duplicate Bridge welcomes social bridge players who enjoy the added challenge of duplicate bridge. The atmosphere is friendly and relaxed, and no prior duplicate experience is necessary. Games begin at 6:45 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month at Plymouth or in members' homes.

### **Game Night—Plymouth**

Beverly Gores: [bgores@yahoo.com](mailto:bgores@yahoo.com); Sandy Steiner: [ssteiner5060@gmail.com](mailto:ssteiner5060@gmail.com)

The group will most likely start by playing Rummikub but is open to other board/card games as well, depending on the interests of the group's participants. All ages welcome. First game: night: Thursday, July 13, 6:30 p.m. at the home of Sue Astin.

### **Church Gardener**

Tom Anderson: [tompand@yahoo.com](mailto:tompand@yahoo.com)

There are opportunities on weekends or weekday mornings for people of all ages to have a hand in keeping our church grounds attractive. There's nothing like working alongside other people to spark new conversations and connections.

### **Overbooked!**

Judy Schneebeck: [jschneebeck@comcast.net](mailto:jschneebeck@comcast.net)

Instead of traditional single-book study, this group is for those who love to read books of their own choosing. Participants will gather to share information about books they have read or are reading. The group meets the first Wednesday of the month, 3:00-4:30, the Conn Gallery, Plymouth.

### **Men's Book Group**

Bob Grams: [rwgrams69@gmail.com](mailto:rwgrams69@gmail.com)

We meet monthly on the third Tuesday of the month from 7 to 9 p.m. in members' homes. Our readings include fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

### **Women's Book Group**

Mary Steinson: [marysteinson@gmail.com](mailto:marysteinson@gmail.com)

We meet on the third Wednesday of the month from 1:30 to 3 p.m. at church. In December, we select fiction and nonfiction books for the next year and rotate facilitators.

### **Fellowship with Food**

#### **Lunch Bunch Group**

Jim Christenson: [christensonjim@msn.com](mailto:christensonjim@msn.com)

This group is now deciding on lunch/dinner and venue (metro area cuisine like Eat Street, BIPOC eateries, ball parks). There's still time to add your name to the list!

#### **Women's Breakfast Group**

Sue Specker: [sue@specker.com](mailto:sue@specker.com)

We meet monthly on the second Thursday, 8:30 to 10 a.m. for breakfast and fellowship. Our location rotates between members' homes or area restaurants.

#### **Men's Breakfast Group**

Jim Christenson: [christensonjim@msn.com](mailto:christensonjim@msn.com)

We meet at 8 a.m. on the first Monday and second Wednesday of each month for an hour or so of fellowship and conversation. Attendance on a regular or occasional basis at one or both breakfasts is welcomed. The First Monday Breakfast is at The Egg & I, 2550 University Ave. W., (University & Hwy 280). The Second Wednesday Breakfast is at The Lowry, 212 Hennepin Ave, S. There is always room for one more chair at breakfast.

### **Upcoming OMC events**

#### **Learning, Laughing, and Lawn Bowling**

Sunday, September 17, 2023, 3-4 p.m. Option to stay afterwards and eat at the Grill next to the Lawn Bowling area. Brookview (Golden Valley).

#### **Winter Warm Up**

Saturday, January 20, 2024, Loring Green West, evening.

For additional information and to receive invitations to upcoming OMC events contact Linda & Rick Seime (Co-chairs, OMC Planning Committee), [rlseime@gmail.com](mailto:rlseime@gmail.com).

# Come and See the Treasures in the Archives

DORENE BRUNS

After Rally Sunday, the Archives will be open during the 10 o'clock hour for you to come and visit in the Bovey Room. There will be a volunteer there every Sunday to introduce you to the Archives' Collection.

What are some treasures that you might find interesting?

- We have the pulpit Bible from the Fourth Street Church—Plymouth's first building.
- The Journal of the Plymouth Congregational Society from 1860 to 1907. The Society was the governing body of the church in those days. They were responsible for the financial responsibilities of the church. Plymouth Church provided the finances for the missions the church supported.
- Interesting sermons: Rev. Nichols' sermon prior to the burning of the Fourth Street Church; the sermon Rev. Howard Conn preached the Sunday after JFK was assassinated, including his bulletin that he made changes in for the service; and the sermon by Rev. Dewey after the sinking of the Titanic.
- Photos of the Habitat for Humanity trip to Manila including one of President Jimmy Carter working the crowd on that plane.
- The book in which Howard Conn kept records of all the marriages, baptisms, and funeral services that he performed during his time as pastor at Plymouth.

So, if you think the Archives is a bunch of dusty stuff, please come and see all of the treasures we have for you. Ask for any other historical questions you may have, and we will do our best to find an answer for you.

Sundays at 10—come and hunt for treasure in the Archives.



# Technology Tips to Help Us Stay Connected

NANCY GORES

Here are a few technology options for connecting with each other and being informed about our work together.

There are two options to find contact information for a Plymouth member:

Via the website: go to our web page at [plymouth.org](http://plymouth.org). Scroll to the bottom. On the left side of the page click on "Member Login." Once you have logged in, click on "Directories" at the top of the page. Then search by name. You can use all or part of a first name, last name, or both, and the system will show you matches.

On your cell phone: download the Church Life App from the Google Play or Apple App Stores. Log in using your same credentials as for the Member Login page on the website, then search People. The Church Life app will also search on partial first or last names. The Church Life app also has Plymouth's calendar.



To find the monthly minutes for meetings of Plymouth's Deacons, Leadership Council, Boards, and RJI: Go to our web page at [Plymouth.org](http://Plymouth.org). Scroll down to the bottom. On the left side of the page click on "Governance. On the right side of the page are several choices including "Minutes." If you click on "Minutes" all the monthly minutes are waiting for you to click open and read. A Deacon's agenda is also posted on the Governance page a few days before their meeting. The review and approval process may take a month or more from the date of the meeting until the minutes are available on the web page.



# Learning, Laughing, and Lawn Bowling

JUDY SCHNEEBECK

You are all invited to join Plymouth's One More Chair for the Second Annual Lawn Bowling Event on Sunday, September 17th from 3 to 4 p.m. We'll meet at Minnesota's largest Lawn Bowling facility located at Brookview Golf & Lawn Bowling, 316 Brookview Parkway S., Golden Valley.

We have reserved 8 rinks (lanes) and can accommodate up to 64 bowlers! Guests are welcome. Free parking is available adjacent to the venue. Rink-side seating is available for spectators.

The event cost is \$5 per bowler which covers the rink rental and a game official who will provide instruction and officiate the games.

The Three One Six Bar + Grill is near the rinks and offers a full menu of beverages, snacks, or a meal. Ample seating is available in or outside. It's a great place to gather after bowling! Please send your response and the number attending to Judy Schneebeck [jschneebeck@comcast.net](mailto:jschneebeck@comcast.net) by Thursday, September 14.



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## Sunday Forum

REBECCA MILLER

Please join us on Sunday Forums at 10 a.m. in Plymouth's chapel or remotely. You will hear more about each session in advance in the Friday emails and at the Plymouth Sunday Forum webpage at [plymouth.org/explore/forum](http://plymouth.org/explore/forum). Below what is happening each week.

**September 17 – Thoughts from our Clergy Team.** Dr. Rev. DeWayne Davis, Lead Minister; Rev. Beth Faith, Minister for Congregational Life; Rev. Seth Patterson, Minister for Justice and the Arts

**September 24 – Recovery Sunday: A Family Problem Requires a Family Solution.** Sherry Gaugler-Stewart, Director of Family & Spiritual Recovery

**October 1 – Partnering with Dakota Friends on Racial Equity.** Member Jeff Hall, founding partner of Hall Sweeney Properties and Twin Cities and Milwaukee real estate developer.

**October 8 and 15 – Meet the Living Stones, Part I and II on Israel and Palestine.** Member Joan Deming, retired United minister and tour group leader to Israel and Palestine.

**October 22 – The Story of the Chapel Windows.** Greg Venell, Archives Volunteer and Committee Member

**October 29 – Identity.** Artist, Mellodee Strong discusses her exhibit

**November 5 – Avivo Village**

**November 12 – Restorative Justice:** Dialogue That Builds Bridges of Trust Across the Divides. Ted Lewis, Restorative Justice consultant and trainer

**November 19 – Public Church Framework,** part of Augsburg University's Riverside Innovation Hub's Thriving Congregations grant. Nina Jonson, Director of Children and Youth Ministry, with members, Jean Tracy and Theresa Voss

**December 3 – Align Minneapolis and Plymouth -** Our work to End Homelessness Together. Katie Dillon, member and Director of Align Minneapolis

**December 10 – Beneficiaries of Plymouth's Christmas Offering.** E.J. Kelly, Chair of Plymouth's Board of Outreach

**December 17 – Freeway to the Inner Life.** Member & poet, Jim Lenfestey

And speaking of archives, there is a healthy history of past Sunday Forums that began with using zoom in the fall of 2020. If there are any Sunday Forums you've missed, would like to revisit, or share, go here. This collection is directly due to our outstanding production staff that have supported us so well.

We look forward to seeing you this fall!

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Editor: Elizabeth Blanchette  
Communication & Marketing Manager

Submit items for publication to Elizabeth Blanchette, ElizabethB (at) plymouth.org, no later than October 30 for the Christmas and Advent issue. Please only submit articles related to Christmas and Advent.

Articles for the Winter edition are Due January 22

We reserve the right to edit or delay the publication of any article.

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Tel: 612/871-7400; Fax: 612/871-0014

Plymouth Congregational Church

1900 Nicollet Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-3789

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WEEKLY OFFERINGS

# Offerings in person and online

More information may be found on [www.plymouth.org](http://www.plymouth.org).

### Weekly Sunday Services

#### In-Person and Online

9 a.m. and 11 a.m..

[www.plymouth.org/worship](http://www.plymouth.org/worship)

### Coffee and Fellowship @ 10 and Noon

### Sundays @ 10 Begin September 10

Sunday Forum  
Group Discussion Hour  
Church School

### Midweek Mingle Returns

Young Voices  
Creative Quarterly  
Choirs

More information at [Plymouth.org](http://Plymouth.org)

### Contemplative Prayer

available  
Fridays mornings at 9 a.m.  
online

### Gentle Yoga

Saturday 9:30 a.m.