

# **“What’s at Stake: The Spiritual Heart of Plymouth’s Budget”**

Notes from the Deacons (Sue Astin, Annette Atkins, John Cairns, Peter Eichten, Jasper Jonson, Sarah Lehman, Lynn Moline, Jay Matre, Mike McCallister)

In June, the congregation passed a six-month budget to allow time for us collectively to wrestle with the financial challenges and opportunities that face us. In response The Deacons will be hosting over the next six months a series of congregational conversations. The short-term goal is to inform the creation of a 2024 calendar year budget that reflects Plymouth’s priorities, our spiritual goals, and our financial responsibilities.

These conversations, that we’ve titled, have three intentions:

**to increase our capacity to talk and listen to one another,  
to help us live into our covenanted relationship with each other, and to deepen  
understanding as we make spiritually informed decisions about our budget.**

Beyond this six-month, budget-related process, and building on it, the Deacons will lead a multi-year visioning effort to discern together how we want to invest our time and resources to advance the Purposes of the Church, respond to the realities of being church in our current time and place, and envision how we are feeling called to evolve and change as an organization.

Here are some notes on our conversations so far (the notes are in black, **the Deacons’ comments in red**)

## **Session #2, June 21: What Questions Would You Like Plymouth to Take Up?**

Attendance about 35.

Individuals were asked to come up with the questions that they think Plymouth needs to talk about (especially as those relate during these six months to the budget-making process).

After small group discussion of the individual’s questions, each small group proposed a question or two for broader consideration.

From a longer list the following are the questions that received 10 or more “votes” as we tried to focus our concerns. (Each person was allowed three “votes.”)

- (17) How does Plymouth live out the example of Jesus’s life out into the community?
- (13) What risks can we tolerate?
- (12) What does the future of our building look like?

- (11) What is essential to Plymouth? What could be left out?
- (11) Is Plymouth at a point in time when we have scarcity or abundance?
- (10) What are the spiritual purposes of wealth?
- (10) How will we simply and transparently to make sure our income and expenses are understood by the congregation?

After studying this list and many of us participating in the first two sessions, the Deacons were affirmed in our sense that such discussions are really important – in part for the information that they yield, but perhaps even more for strengthening our understanding of each other, for seeing the range of views among us, and for making more opportunities to speaking together.

We also are determining the topics of the July – November conversations in light of these expressed concerns. We will hold future conversations about wealth/abundance and about giving; about our building (how we use it, care for it), and perhaps especially about Plymouth’s priorities.

We had identified these as budget discussions without any numbers, but we have picked up some anxiety about the relationship between them and the actual budget making. How will our talk about the spirituality of the budget connect to the final numbers.

The Deacons have, therefore, set up a working group of members of the Deacons, Board of Finance and Administration (BoFA), the Leadership Council, and the clergy to make sure that information is flowing freely among all of these and whose responsibility it is to connect them. (We’re working on how to do that – more information will be coming.)

Please note – the Deacons embarked on this process, responding to the urgency and importance of our immediate issues, by deciding on a framework for what we think Plymouth needs. We’re fleshing that out as we go along and as we hear from members of the congregation.