

# “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 #3, July 13: Attitudes Toward Money

Attendance about 50

This was a wide-ranging small group and large group discussion about how people feel and think about money. These attitudes shape how we approach budgeting, what risks we can tolerate, what values we apply to our spending (and saving). Do we feel/think about money as something to be saved for a rainy day, shared, passed on to children, given away? Does it represent power, control, safety, independence, etc.? Poet Wallace Stevens writes that Money is a metaphor – but likely a different one for each of us.

These are some of the thoughts that came up in those conversations:

What were your parents ‘attitudes to money?

They were responsible with money

Everyone was similar socioeconomic class - there wasn't as much stratification

Parents were generous with the church

Tithing was part of being in the community

Adversity drove frugality

There were fewer material wants

Parents' generation was more collaborative  
There was a strong connection between having money and having opportunities  
Parents had a dislike of debt

What is the connection between money and spirituality?

When thinking of how to spend money, spirituality tips the scale toward others  
Giving is not a spiritual impulse, it's a civic impulse  
Giving is part of the gift of being human  
Hadn't really thought about connecting spirituality to money  
What do we do to make ourselves, the world better - it's a hard question!  
Spirituality as gratitude - connection because giving is a way to say thank you  
Giving follows values - what else is there, what more can we give?  
Talked a lot about the tension - how much do you keep, how much do you give away  
Faith challenges you to take more risks  
Transactional vs. relational giving  
The bible challenges us to give it all away  
(It also talks about wealth as a reward, doesn't it?)  
Don't hold things too tightly  
Generosity of spirit, generosity in wealth (are they the same?)  
Conflicted - tension between holding on and letting go  
Jesus said your heart is where you put your treasure -- do we? Does Plymouth?

That final question is really key for this process. Of course Plymouth concerns itself with living an engaged, useful, giving, spiritual, meaningful life. Groups within Plymouth focus on different dimensions of living out what they see as the imperatives of their Christian commitment – environmental and racial justice, feeding the homeless, immigrant rights, robust programming for youth and families, education, spiritual enrichment, meeting God through the arts (and more), care for our neighbors and neighborhood. Do we have many missions as Plymouth? Do we use our wealth/resources in the widest way, or the most effective way, in the most communal way, in the most . . . way? Does our church spending reflect our Church priorities? What are our Church's priorities?

In all three discussions so far we've come back to the issue/question of priorities? Do we have enough? Do we have too many? Do we agree? What do we do when we disagree?  
The Deacons will be turning our attention toward this question. How do we discern the congregation's priorities is our question.