

“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 have been and will continue to host through November 2023 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**)

Note: According to Plymouth bylaws and practice, DeWayne and Anne Gustafson will be presenting a draft budget to the the Board of Finance and Administration (BoFA), which in turn will make a recommendation to the Deacons who will make a recommendation to the Congregation (this year at a special congregational meeting in January, unlike previous years when we met in June).

Many people have asked how our “What’s at Stake” conversations will inform this process and these decisions. Here’s what we’re working toward: a working group of Deacons and BoFA members, the Treasurer, and DeWayne and Anne are meeting to build bridges between the two processes. We’re attempting to capture the views and concerns that these conversations are lifting up. A survey (more info on that below) will be another vehicle for collecting information.

Our hope and plan is that by talking openly, honestly, frequently, and in various settings we not only increase our capacity to hear one another but increase, as well, our understanding of how to reach the future that our Church needs/wants/is called to.

Session #4, August 16: Giving in relationship to our Values

Attendance about 50

The intention of this session was to explore the connection between where we give and our values by considering the question, “How do you think we should allocate our resources as a community?” Participants were asked to allocate \$100 across seven value groupings that were identified in our first session in May. The value groupings were:

Tradition/Legacy/Stewardship, *Reliability, Stability, Continuity, Familiar, The Building Beauty/the Arts*

Activism/Justice/Systems Change, *Voice in the World*

Faith/Worship, *Hope*

Church Community/Relationships, *Caring, Love*

Spiritual Growth/Education, *Curiosity*

Outreach/Service/Charity, *Making a difference*

This values grouping that we proposed raised many questions among the participants: What does this mean? Why is this with that? Isn't there a lot of overlap among the categories? All important questions and ones that suggest that when we do this exercise in the future we need to refine and perhaps reorganize the categories.

The Deacons are currently at work devising a survey that we're planning to distribute to the congregation. The small group discussions have and will continue to offer an opportunity to explore our pressing budget concerns among those who attend. A survey will give us information from a broader sweep of the congregation. Both are important. We expect to distribute that survey in September. Stay tuned.

After completing the individual allocation exercise, we spent time discussing and reflecting on our learnings in small groups and all together. These are some of the thoughts that came up in those conversations:

What stood out in your group conversations? Similarities? Differences?

In one group the largest \$ went to Stewardship/Legacy and in another group this was the smallest allocation.

Faith/Worship, church community and spiritual growth are all intertwined.

Charity versus justice – some groups wondered what the difference was between these two values and others expressed appreciation that they were listed as different values.

Tradition/Legacy = staff

Lead with purpose (Voice in the world) and the rest will follow.

Noticing that it is hard to say no to something.

Not all of these values require money to nurture.

Hard to quantify what the members do to contribute their time and talent.

Noticing tension of not starting with worship and leading with justice.

We weren't necessarily starting with the “need”. More of a ranking of preferences.

Are there any missing values?

When thinking of how to spend money, spirituality tips the scale toward others.
Faith/Worship, church community and relationships for spiritual growth should be one item.

Recovery, healing, solace

Value of volunteerism - what can be done by volunteers versus money.

All are welcome regardless of identity, race, faith.

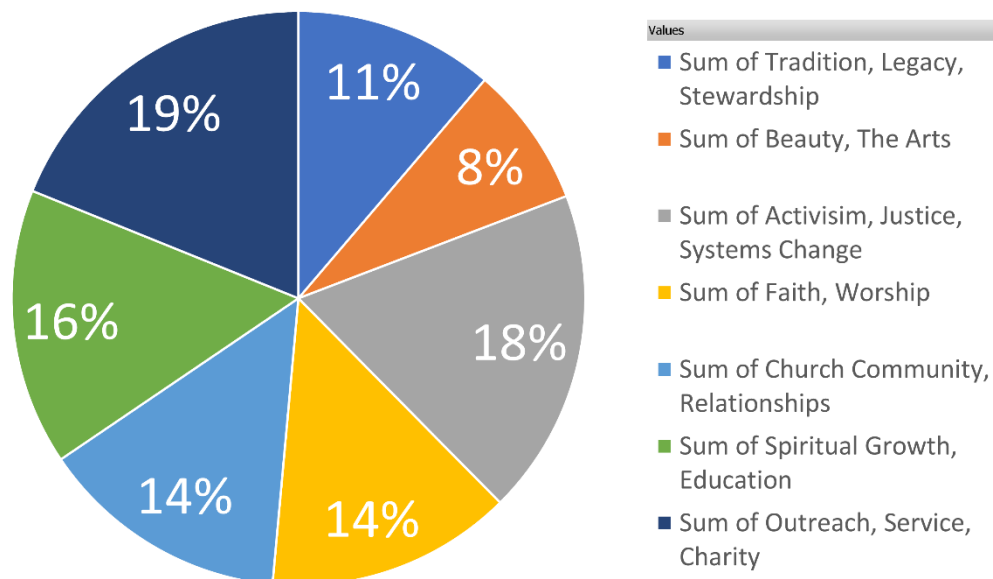
Specifically, anti-racism.

The value of the teaching of Jesus!

When looking at this information we're keeping in mind that it represents a rough view of the views of the 50+/- participants at one gathering. Statisticians warn us amateurs to keep in mind that such gatherings do not represent a cross section or a random sample of a population. The results, therefore, speak for those who showed up.

The second caution is that the directions may have been interpreted differently (as the list of values itself was), so keep that in mind as well.

Here is a representation of the information collected through the allocation exercise (a pie chart):



Thank you all who have participated in these discussions, who have read these updates, who care about Plymouth.