

We're "Virtually" Alive and Well

Plymouth Church is increasing its virtual presence, with a dynamic website and a new Facebook page.

Bookmark www.plymouthchurch.com and check back often for current events and information about Plymouth Church. The site is updated frequently.

And, if you're a member of Facebook, look us up there. Search for "Plymouth Congregational Church" and click "Like." Then remember to "share" the comments you think your Facebook friends would like to know about.



You're bound to look a little more relaxed in your "Plymouth in the Community" t-shirt than this model does – whether you're sporting it at a variety of Plymouth events offsite, or just at the grocery store. Get yours quickly, before they're gone.

You Look So Good in Red

Buy Your Own "Plymouth in the Community" T-Shirts

Now you can proudly show your support for Plymouth Congregational Church, whether you're serving food at a shelter, working on a home build, raking leaves or just taking a walk in your neighborhood. We Plymouth folks are everywhere in the community, and it's time we let people know.

You can purchase your own red t-shirt with "Plymouth in the Community" printed on the front for just \$10. Plymouth's GLBT group has produced the shirts in sizes small through XXL and will sell them after worship services on:

- Sat. May 22 & Sun. May 23
- Sat. May 29 & Sun. May 30
- Sat. June 5 & Sun. June 6

Let's face it – there's no place you **can't** wear it to demonstrate Plymouth's ministry, involvement and service in the community.

Join Plymouth Church at Capital City Pride

Once again, Plymouth's GLBT group will walk in the Capital City Pride Parade on Sunday, June 13. And you're invited to join in the fun. It's a great opportunity to demonstrate to the community our pride in being an open and affirming church.

Plus, there's no better place to debut your "Plymouth in the Community" t-shirts. Watch upcoming issues of the *Contact* newsletter and church bulletins for details. But mark the date on your calendar now. It promises to be a fun and family-friendly afternoon.

"We agree to differ. We resolve to love. We unite to serve."

Come to think of it....



David Ruhe, *Senior Minister*

Another Annual Meeting of the congregation has come and gone; and, as Annual Meetings go, this was a pretty good one. There was a reasonably good turnout—maybe about 60 people as I guesstimated it. The Annual Report is impressive: about 60 pages or so detailing the remarkable activity in the life of the church this year. You can find it via our website, www.plymouthchurch.com. It's worth a visit, and offers a pretty good picture of what we've been up to.

Jennifer Hines took some time to walk us through the financials, which are strong. We finished 2008 \$58,000 in the black, and 2009 ended up \$16,000 to the good. 2010 is off to a promising beginning, as well. We noted that much of this is due to control of expenses and particularly some of the open staff positions in the pastoral, support and custodial areas. So the folks who are here are doing more with less, and there are times when it shows. But on the whole things are very solid.

We looked at the situation of our debt, noting the formal conclusion of the Faith Forward campaign at the end of 2009. There is roughly \$1.9 million dollars remaining on our loan, and the coming year will bring some clarity regarding our options for dealing with that indebtedness. We have paid ahead on the principal, so no principal payments have to be made until 2017. But refinancing the loan in any of a variety of ways might reduce the interest we pay. And we'll be working to plan a final push to finish off the loan altogether. That's in the future, but it's on the radar.

Frank Thomas talked about the Transition into Ministry program, how thrilled we are with Aaron James' and Anissa Bacon's placements and how splendidly Jeanette Brodersen and Stephanie Haskins are doing at present. Frank mentioned the grant renewal request pending with the Lilly Endowment to help us expand the program to include residents in nearby rural ministry settings. We're waiting to hear from Lilly about that. I talked about the upcoming planning process we'll be engaged with for the remainder of 2010 and into 2011. We'll be working with the Reverend Susan Beaumont of the Alban Institute, a specialist in large church ministries. (If you want to sneak a peak at the sort of thing she does, visit her blog at <http://insidethelargecongregation.com>.) Often summer seems more relaxed around church, but this year there will be a lot happening behind the scenes.

At the end of the meeting I talked a little bit about our numbers in worship attendance and membership, all of which are pretty much flat. In church parlance we say that this is a sign of being "plateaued," and that's a pretty good word for us. This is no small accomplishment when you take a serious look at what is happening in general to churches like Plymouth. But getting serious about sharing all the good things we have here needs to become a priority.

I came away thinking that this is a remarkable church that more people need to know about.

See you in church,

David Ruhe

Community Outreach

Personal Needs Collection

It is time for collection of personal needs items again! The Board of Benevolences thanks you for your ongoing generosity to local organizations. We are asking for your help again in May for another local organization, the Family Violence Center. Please drop off the following types of personal needs items to the baskets outside Waveland Hall this month: diapers, baby wipes, baby powder, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, bars of soap, razors and feminine hygiene products. As always, your generosity is most appreciated!

— *The Board of Benevolences*

Brown's Woods

Do you love nature? Do you love parks that have hiking trails? Did you know that Plymouth is an Adopt-A-Park Sponsor for Brown's Woods? Members of the Board of Christian Social Action will be leading volunteers the first Saturday of the month on a mission through the park to remove invasive species. We meet in the parking lot at 10 a.m. and work for about two hours. Join us to help ensure the continued enjoyment of this urban forest preserve for all generations.

Questions? Contact Karen Barnhizer at 238.6031 or by email at kbarnhizer@gmail.com.

Try on the Plymouth Career Closet

Schedules can ease a little over the summer, so this could be a great time for you to sign up for a shift at Plymouth Women's Career Closet. We invite you to come work with us on a Tuesday from noon to 4 p.m. or Thursday from 3 to 6 p.m. this summer and see what all the excitement is about. Two or more volunteers wait on women who come for the free clothes needed to wear to work, and they sort, label and display the newly donated items that come to us each week. Each shift is different and each experience worthwhile. No long-term commitment is required.

We also need one or two people who could regularly take outdated or out-of-season clothes to Goodwill. That job could be done any week day.

Contact Jan Franck, PW Vice President of Service, at 289.9009 or Jan@franckcom.com for more information or to schedule yourself to help.

To donate SUMMER women's career clothes, put them in the labeled bin that's just inside the south door to the preschool door on Level 1. There's parking space to unload in the alley drive. Please donate the type of current clothes, shoes and accessories that YOU would wear to work. Thank you.

GREEN TIP: Planting season is upon us and what do you do with all those nursery pots and trays you accumulate? Ask a few questions before you buy and then make your purchases from an earth-friendly vendor. Many of our local garden centers (including Home Depot and some Earl May stores) offer to recycle your nursery pots. They may send them off to nurseries for reuse or to a facility that shreds the pots to produce recycled plastic products. You can put them in your compost and they'll disintegrate within two years. Many plants now found in garden centers come in peat pots with a removable paper or plastic collar. A little investigation will help keep your garden green!



Civil Rights Milestones

In recognition of the significance of Plymouth Church's recent endorsement of Marriage Equality, the Board of Christian Social Action is pleased to highlight several other civil rights milestones occurring in 2010.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Anna Quindlen said, "Look back, to slavery, to suffrage, to integration, and one thing is clear. Fashions in bigotry come and go. The right thing lasts." The UCC has been against every type of bigotry through the years. It was the first denomination to ordain an African-American pastor, the first to ordain a woman pastor, and the first to ordain an openly gay pastor. Lydia Chapin Taft, the first woman to vote in a public election in America (1756) was a Congregationalist.

Making women's suffrage the law of the land was a gradual process in the United States. Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho were the first to give women the vote. The amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which said that the right to vote could not be denied on the basis of sex, was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate in 1919 and Iowa was the 10th state to ratify. It was adopted in August, 1920. The argument against the amendment was that the presence of women in the home and in the classroom provided them adequate voice in government. Their ability to influence men, whatever that was, was their only source of power.

We are now celebrating the 90th anniversary of a woman's right to vote in the U.S. As always, we can be proud of the role of the UCC in accomplishing this important step to fairness and equality.

The Center for Spiritual Growth

Adult Education Opportunities AMENS

The AMENS Group (All Men Experiencing Nurturing Spirituality) meets **every Tuesday morning at 6:45 a.m. in Burling Room** for fellowship, a short program and lively discussion. All are welcome.

Weekly Centering Prayer

Mondays, 6-7 p.m., in the Center for Spiritual Growth, Inspiration Lounge. All are welcome.
Questions? Call Kathy Reardon at 280.3861(h) or 274.4006 (w).

Shawl Knitting Ministries

Join us in the knitting ministry as we offer our hearts in this simple way. All ages, genders and levels of experience are welcome.
**Center for Spiritual Growth,
Welcome Lounge on Tuesdays from
5-6:30 p.m.**



If you know of someone in need of a shawl or would like more information, please contact Jean Walker at 277.9630 or Janet Jennings at 222.0831.

Something's Brewing

First Tuesdays at Raccoon River
Is on hiatus for the summer

Wednesday Morning Adult Bible Study

Join Matt Mardis-LeCroy on **Wednesday mornings 9:30-11 a.m. in the Coffee Shop through May 26** for an in-depth study of the text for the upcoming weekend. No prior knowledge of scripture is expected and all are welcome!

WISE (Women In Spiritual Exploration)

Thursday mornings from 7--8 a.m. in the Burling Room. All women are invited to meet for the purpose of spiritual growth. The WISE statement of purpose reads: *To focus on and grow through the experience of Our Spirit, in a community of love, friendship and spiritual intimacy. To support, nurture and exercise Our Spirit through meditation, prayer, study, work and play. . . and by being together.*

Common Thread

**First Thursday of each month
7-9 p.m. – Waveland Hall**

Speakers and discussions pertaining to Spiritual/Metaphysical studies. Are you curious about Common Thread? Go to our new site, <http://thecommonthreadadm.blogspot.com/>

Common Thread will also present spiritual DVD flicks on the third Monday of each month in Greenwood Room from 7-9 p.m.

Fellowship Forum

Join us in Waveland 1 and 2 every **Sunday from 10:10-10:50 a.m.** for conversation about scripture, current events and the life of faith. All are welcome to participate. Hosted by Matt Mardis-LeCroy.

Igniting Your Divine Spark

**Sunday mornings, 10:10-10:50 a.m.
Inspiration Lounge**

Moderated by Marsha Hines

This series will feature brief presentations from a variety of presenters and topics, allowing plenty of time for spontaneous insights and inspiration. Consider it meat to sustain your every day reality. All are welcome.

Plymouth Men

The Plymouth Men meet for lunch the **first Friday of every month** at Legends Restaurant, 50th and Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines. **Our next meeting will be Friday, June 4.** Mark your calendars so you won't miss it. We gather at 11:45 a.m. for this "dutch lunch." All Plymouth men are welcome to join us.

Plymouth Book Discussion Group

The Plymouth Book Discussion Group has scheduled discussions of the below-listed books in the Harmony Conference Room of the Center for Spiritual Growth, **Sundays at 10:10 a.m.:**

June 6	<i>A History of Tractors in Ukrainian</i> by Marina Lewycka
July 11	<i>Driftless</i> by David Rhodes
August 1	<i>House of Daughters: A Novel</i> by Sarah-Kate Lynch

Please join us for discussion.

Your church home

The ADA and How It Pertains to Plymouth

History

The **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)** is a law that was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1990. Its long title is “An Act to establish a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.” It was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H. W. Bush, and later amended with changes effective January 1, 2009.

The ADA is a wide-ranging civil rights law that prohibits, under certain circumstances, discrimination based on disability. It affords similar protection against discrimination to Americans with disabilities as the Civil rights Act of 1964. Disability is defined by the ADA as “A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.”

In Everyday Life

Plymouth Church strives to be fully accessible to people with disabilities. All levels of our church are accessible via elevator or chairlifts. We have put a lift in the chancel, and elevators to all floors. We have replaced our internal doorknobs with flat handles that are easier to open. We have hearing assistance devices in the sanctuary, so people can hear the sermons. We make printed copies of the sermon available each week for the hearing impaired, and large-print bulletins are available for those with vision impairments. Restrooms are equipped with stalls or sufficient floor space to accommodate wheelchairs. Wheelchairs are located at all the outside entrances to the church, and the parking lot is designed to accommodate vehicles with side-loading wheelchairs. The drinking fountains that were installed on the ground floor this past year are also ADA compliant. Plymouth received an award some years ago from the national United Church of Christ for our efforts to make our church welcoming to those with disabilities.

Just recently one of our members, Diane Krell, suffered a bad fall down her basement steps resulting in two broken ankles. Diane is very aware of the ADA and all that it has accomplished in helping those who become disabled. She was especially appreciative of Plymouth’s compliance as she arrived at church on a recent Friday, driving right up to the circular drive and entering with her walker with no problems navigating and opening doors.

We often do not realize all the special efforts that make our house of worship safe and welcoming for all people. Let us celebrate the enactment of the American for Disabilities Act for 20 years of improvement.

Last chance to sign up!

Have you ever had any interest in going on a mission trip? Here is your chance to go on one that is fairly close to home. We still have four openings on the trip to Chicago, so we are opening the trip up to students just completing eighth grade and adults. The trip is July 11-16 and the cost is approximately \$560. We will be working with DOOR – Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection. Please contact Barb Godwin at 255.3149 or bgodwin@plymouthchurch.com.

Part-Time Custodial Help Wanted

Plymouth Church has an opening for a Sunday custodian. This position requires occasional lifting and the ability to move heavy items. Applicant must be able to communicate in English. Criminal background check is required.

Duties include opening the church, placing outdoor parking signage, setting up tables and chairs in meeting rooms, assisting Deacons with sanctuary prep, and coffee and continental breakfast prep for fellowship hour. During winter months, responsibilities include sidewalk maintenance. Approximately seven hours per week from 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

To apply, or for more information, please contact Dan Olson, Plymouth Church Facility Manager at 419.5194 or dolson@plymouthchurch.com

It's 'Hearts of Plymouth Season'—

the time of year to invite members of Plymouth to attend CPR classes! You are welcome to attend “Family and Friends Courses” for free, and if other classes are desired, members may take 20 percent off the cost of the class by adding ‘Plymouth’ to the “coupon/discount” space of the registration. Anyone who is employed or volunteers for Plymouth may take any class of their choosing at merely the cost of supplies (usually \$20 for book/CD and two-year certification.)

This offer runs from May 1 through June 30. The registration, calendar and cost of classes is on the website www.IowaCommunityCPR.com. Please call Gina Strickland at 360.4721 if you have questions or concerns.

Your church home

To Err is Human, To Forgive is Divine.

2009-2010 Statistics

If you were at Plymouth Church's annual meeting on Tuesday, May 11, you'll want to make note of the following statistics. The version published in the annual report was actually from the previous calendar year. The version printed here correctly reflects statistics for 2009-2010.

Reprinted annual reports will be available on Sunday for those of you who attended the annual meeting and received booklets with the incorrect information. Please look for them outside each sanctuary door or at the membership table.

STATISTICS

Baptisms	42
Weddings	31
Funerals	15
Membership as of May 1, 2009	3,014
Transfers	-7
Deaths	-22
New Members	115
Reinstatements	3
Revisions of Rolls	-13
Membership as of May 1, 2010	3,090

Paula Wilkerson

Membership Secretary

Your church home

Congratulations to the following confirmands and their families and “*thank you*” to our guides.

The 2010 Confirmation Class

Nicole Ann Allen	Maia Marie Hove
Joel Russell Allison	Abigail Marie Hudson
Sierra Phelan Ballard	Rachel S. Hwang
*Lauren E. Barkey	Sarah Elizabeth Iles
Mary Helen Brightman	Chloe E. Kenworthy
Blaise Ritter Brown	Alexander W. Kruse
*Parker Ankeny Brown	Charles Joseph Lynch
Emma Victoria Buchanan	Zoey Parker Mauck
Briles James Christenson	Jayne Nell McKeon
Austin William Clark	Payden Lucille Moore
Katherine J. Crowley	John Sullivan O’Brien
Olivia Young Dahlquist	*Lyndsey Marie Ripper
Emily Ruth Davis	Anne Eddy Rodruck
Allison Danielle Doyle	Caroline E. Scott
Michael Henry Eppink	Emma Summers Shafer
Ethan N. Foley	Katherine Leigh Spoon
Grant Allen Frey	Emily Katherine Stavneak
Sydney Ann Henricks	Katherine Anne Sterk
Alyssa Ann Hewitt	Thomas Benjamin Stone
Carly Rose Hewitt	Joshua James Studebaker
Mark L. Hill, Jr.	Sarah Parker Turner

*chose not to be confirmed at this time

I chose to be confirmed because (thoughts from this year’s confirmation class):

“Plymouth is family.”

“This is my church. And this is my decision.”

“At Plymouth I get closer to God and other people and I get to discover what I have to offer.”

“God is still speaking to me and Plymouth is the place where I want to listen.”

“My relationship with God keeps growing. There’s a lot more to learn. I need to keep asking questions.”

“Everyone is welcome here. That’s important to me.”

Our deep appreciation goes to our confirmation guides. Some worked for one year and some for two years. All of these adults have shared their time, talents, questions and faith with our kids with great love, compassion and care. They have been mentors, teachers, guides, friends, companions on the journey and a great blessing not only to our kids but to our whole Plymouth family. For their gifts, we say: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

This year’s 7th grade guides were: Sam Anshutz, Karen Downing, Anne Koch Gaer, Jennifer Gelner, Denise Gerdis, Mike Glover, Kathy Goetz, Lynnae Hentzen, Eden Pearson, Amy Reeves, Linda Sullivan, Marty Ungs, Bill Watson, and Linda Wilker.

Our 8th grade guides were: Amy Anderson, Lisa Holderness Brown, Beth Clark, Sara Davis, Helen Eddy, Mike Glover, Ann Graham, Melanie Hewitt, Lori Iles, Marty Kennedy, John Kenworthy, Amy Lynch, Jane McKeon, Allen Shafer, and Marilyn Stone.

Gay Pride Brunch/Fundraiser

In celebration of Plymouth’s Open and Affirming and Marriage Equality policies, the Plymouth GLBT Advisory Board is sponsoring a brunch/social. Everyone is invited to attend Sunday, June 6 from noon to 2:30 p.m. Allen Vander Linden and Michael Thompson will host the event at their home, 7500 Benton Drive, Urbandale.

A minimum donation of \$10 is requested to benefit activities of the Plymouth GLBT Advisory Board. Please RSVP to Allen or Michael by Wednesday, June 2 at 266.7638 or alvanlin@yahoo.com

The Arts @ Plymouth

Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow.

Sunday, May 16 was our bell director, Patrick Gagnon's last day with us. He has accepted a choir director/organist position at the UCC church in Eldora where he lives. We thank Patrick for sharing his talent and gifts with us. Blessings to Patrick and his new congregation!

Get to Know the TiM Associate Ministers—

check out the Lucite cases at the west end of the gallery for the biographical story of our Associate Ministers Jeanette Brodersen and Stephanie Haskins.

In the Gallery:

Taming the Prairie—an exhibit by Lee Middleswart.

“The goal of my art is to preserve segments of Iowa’s old buildings and farm heritage so future generations can see the history we have witnessed. My art is produced from vintage lumber and rusted pieces retrieved from old buildings and salvage shops in Iowa. Found pieces are sometimes carved, wood-burned, sanded or stained to create design effects.”

Taming the Prairie assemblages depict an emotional portrayal of the pioneer spirit.

For information on purchase, contact Nancy Slotterback at 255.3149 or nslotterback@plymouthchurch.com

Plymouth Women

Interesting Books, Interesting Women

Women’s Fellowship Faithful Readers meet the fourth Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Inspiration Lounge for a lively discussion of an interesting book. Our schedule includes:

May 27 *Hole in the Gospel* by
Richard Stearns

We’re looking at our world through new lenses, and we welcome newcomers! Let’s get together! For more information, call Jean Nelson at 255.5019.

Plymouth Women’s Annual Meeting and Scholarship and Awards Brunch

Date/Time: Saturday, June 5, 10-11:30 a.m.
Place: Waveland Hall
Cost: \$10.00, payable the morning of the event

Please join us as we celebrate our Plymouth Women’s accomplishments this year and present the awards to this year’s scholarship recipients: Jenna Bishop, Meredith Ver Steeg, Katherine Jares, Suzanne Wedeking and Kelsey Mitchell.

The guest speaker will be Sally Pederson, Former Iowa Lt. Governor and Plymouth member. Reservations can be made through June 1 by calling the church office at 255.3149. If childcare is needed it must be requested at the time of your reservation.

Moms & Moppets

Moms and Moppets provides an opportunity for mothers of young children to gather on a regular basis for fellowship, education and support, while at the same time offering a separate peer social group for their children. Questions to Molly Hagkull at 279.0398, m.hagkull@mchsi.com or Emily Bissel, emilybsn@gmail.com.

The **support group** meets the third Thursday of each month, 9:15-11:30 a.m. in the Youth Room at Plymouth Church, September through May. Non-church members welcome.

May 20: End-of-the-year brunch. Potluck brunch and celebration slideshow.

Calendar

Saturday, May 22, 2010

5:30 PM AA
5:30 PM Worship (Casual)

Sunday, May 23, 2010

7:30 AM Brass Warm Up
8:15 AM Matins Warm Up
8:30 AM Infant - 2 years old
Childcare
9:00 AM Worship/Communion
9:15 AM 2 year olds - 6th Grade
Church School
10:00 AM AMOS Workforce Groups
After-Worship Fellowship
10:10 AM Fellowship Forum
Igniting Your Divine Spark
10:15 AM Chancel Choir Warm Up
11:00 AM 2 Year Olds – Kindergarten
Childcare
Worship/Communion
12:00 PM After-Worship Fellowship
12:30 PM Chancel Choir
Year End Picnic
1:00 PM AA

Monday, May 24, 2010

7:00 AM Tai Chi
9:30 AM The Cozy Ministry
4:30 PM Arts, Memorials &
Architectural Changes
Meeting
5:15 PM Yoga
5:45 PM Centering Prayer
6:30 PM Buddhism Class
7:00 PM Boy Scouts #50

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

6:45 AM AMENS
12:00 PM Al-Anon
5:00 PM Shawl Knitting Ministry
7:00 PM Church Council

Wednesday, May 26, 2010

7:00 AM ROC
9:30 AM Adult Bible Study
11:00 AM Saturday Worship Planning
Team Meeting
12:30 PM Tai Chi Class
5:00 PM Foundation Board Meeting
6:00 PM AA
Matins Dinner
Re-membering Soul
7:00 PM Matins Rehearsal
Plymouth Bells Rehearsal

Thursday, May 27, 2010

7:00 AM WISE
2:00 PM Board of Christian
Stewardship Shelter Meal
Prep
5:30 PM Committee on Ministry
Meeting
6:00 PM Chancel Choir Music
Library Clean Up
7:00 PM Plymouth Women Faithful
Readers
7:30 PM AA - WOD

Friday, May 28, 2010

9:00 AM Bulletin Collators
7:00 PM Movie Night

Saturday, May 29, 2010

5:30 PM AA
Worship (Casual)

Sunday, May 30, 2010

8:15 AM Matins Warm Up
8:30 AM 15 months - 2 years old
Childcare
9:00 AM Worship
9:15 AM 3 year olds – 6th grade
Christian Education
10:00 AM After-Worship Fellowship
10:10 AM Fellowship Forum
Igniting Your Divine Spark
11:00 AM 2 Year Olds – Kindergarten
Childcare
Worship
12:00 PM After Worship Fellowship
1:00 PM AA

Monday, May 31, 2010

8:30 AM Church Closed for Memorial
Day. No Church Events.

Tuesday, June 01, 2010

6:45 AM AMENS
12:00 PM Al-Anon
5:00 PM Shawl Knitting Ministry
5:30 PM Board of Christian
Stewardship Picnic/Meeting
at Greenwood Park
6:00 PM AMOS Core Meeting
7:00 PM Stephen Ministers

Wednesday, June 02, 2010

7:00 AM ROC
8:30 AM CONTACT Crew
11:00 AM Saturday Worship Planning
Team Meeting
12:30 PM Tai Chi Class
6:00 PM AA
Matins Dinner
7:00 PM Matins Rehearsal

Thursday, June 03, 2010

7:00 AM House and Space Committee
WISE
10:00 AM Plymouth Women Board
Meeting
7:00 PM Common Thread
7:30 PM AA - WOD

Friday, June 04, 2010

9:00 AM Bulletin Collators
11:45 AM Men's Lunch Group
7:00 PM Movie Night

Sermon

By David Ruhe • Sunday, May 16, 2010, 9 a.m.
“One for the Road” Based on Acts 16:16-34

I have no idea who first came up with the idea of baccalaureate, but I'll bet you it wasn't somebody who was graduating from something. Sure, this is a time of transition, and anything important in life has a religious dimension... but, really! One more chance to hear a speech? Either you've been looking forward to this weekend and you can't believe it's finally here and you're all ready to celebrate; or it's no big deal and you wonder why everybody's making a fuss. Either way, people usually don't of their own free will stand in line to hear one more person try to talk about what it means.

But we talk at times like this because something important is happening. Our relationships are changing: not all at once, but in ways that we can't control and can never undo. The toothpaste will never make it back into the tube. We love you, we're proud of you, we look forward to the new relationship we're going to have... but it's scary, too. So we talk to calm the fear: to frame the moment, to give words to the peril and the possibility and to lift all of that up to God.

In recent years, Angie and Matt and I have taken turns with this. Delightfully for me the responsibility is mine this year, and I get to use it doing what Angie and Matt can't do: sharing a personal experience that happened a very long time ago.

Once upon a time, long ago and far away, I was a young minister serving in my first full-time position in Branford, Connecticut. The church there was founded in 1644. It is a place where they measure church attendance in generations, as in, “How long have you been attending church here?” “Oh, four generations or so.” “How nice! Do you think you're going to like it here?”

My role in the Branford Church was to be the Assistant Minister for Christian Education. I directed the Church School,



David Ruhe

met with the Board of Christian Education, and worked with the Jr. and Sr. High youth groups. Guitar-toting, retreat-leading youth minister: that about sums it up.

Wherever there are youth groups, there are fundraisers. One of the brilliant schemes we hit on was for the senior highs to prepare and

serve the dinner for the Annual Meeting of the Church, which took place on a Thursday evening in January. Here at Plymouth the Annual Meeting of the congregation is a non-event. We bribe people with free dessert and still get a modest turnout. But there, as is common in smaller churches, everybody turned out for the Annual Meeting, and the youth could make what seemed like a lot of money.

Driven by God-knows-what demonic impulse, we settled on spaghetti. It seemed easy enough: vats of boiling water cooking the spaghetti, a cauldron of sauce at the ready, ladle the stuff out and serve it with salad and bread, brownies for dessert. We liked the menu because it promised to be the first church dinner in history that did not include Jell-O, which of course was the substance that allowed the Pilgrims to survive their first winter in New England.

The best part about spaghetti was that the sauce could be cooked up ahead of time and frozen. One of the kids had a terrific recipe for sauce and a flair for math, so he was able to convert the recipe to serve six into a recipe to serve 150. So far, so good. We did the shopping and the sauce preparation on Saturday, several days before the dinner on Thursday evening. That way we could just heat it up and we'd be ready to go.

One of the unusual features of the kitchen at that Branford Church was an old ice cream freezer: a long and narrow thing shaped ominously like a coffin. The lid was hinged in the middle, and could be opened from either side. It was designed to hold tubs of ice cream, but we could immediately see that it had a far better use. Why bother with a bunch of containers for the sauce? What a hassle! Why not simply line the freezer with a big plastic bag, and pour that old spaghetti sauce right in there? Good thinking, huh? Now, we knew of course that liquid expands a bit when it freezes. But we allowed for that. We packed a few paper garbage bags in around the outside to allow for expansion, set the freezer on its coldest setting, poured in the sauce, cleaned up the kitchen and never gave it another thought. Everything was under control.

Around noon on Thursday I thought it might be a good idea to check in on the sauce. I figured I'd need to let it thaw gradually, perhaps by turning the freezer off an hour or so before we needed to get it out. Gosh, it had grown! I remembered it as being about halfway up the sides of the freezer; but it came nearly to the top, this huge, red, angry-looking mass. I poked at it a little bit and discovered that it was pretty hard... something like concrete, actually.

My quick mind grasped the implications immediately: maybe this would need more than a couple of hours to thaw out! Perhaps I should get it out of the freezer—since the freezer walls were so well insulated that no heat would get to it in there. Here, I'll just get these bags out of here and lift it right...

Over the next several hours, gradually more drastic measures were employed. By four o'clock, visitors to the kitchen were treated to quite a sight: the freezer lid had been completely removed, and I had a space heater mounted above the freezer, along with a fan blowing hot air onto the spaghetti sauce glacier. And there I was, on my knees, astride the thing and wielding a hatchet, grunting and raining blows down upon the sauce block. The full picture would have to

include my red, white and blue striped bellbottoms, blue work shirt and red bandanna, and bright red Converse canvass high tops. With each blow, spaghetti sauce flew all over the room and all over me, so that I looked like some sort of gruesome ax murderer, growing more insistent every moment because, apart from the incredible mess I was making, my efforts were having little effect.

At about that point the Senior Minister walked into the room. He had heard the grunting and the hatchet blows. He saw the sauce all over the place before he saw me. I can imagine what he must have been thinking: “Is this what they’re teaching them at Yale Divinity School these days?” He looked at me and said, in a tone of utter disbelief, “David?” Looking like a wild animal interrupted while devouring its prey, I wheeled on him and snarled, “What?” He looked at me, and at the freezer, and at me, and around at the sauce-stained room. He sighed, smiled faintly and said, “Carry on,” and walked out of the room.

Actually, it all sort of turned out OK. Eventually my efforts paid off and we managed to get the sauce out in chunks, which then went into every pan the church owned for thawing on the stove. Most of the folks who came to the dinner had no idea what had gone on behind the scenes; and those few who commented on the meal were very complimentary, remarking on the unusual metallic tang to the sauce. (Just kidding.) Best of all, nobody got sick... a happy ending.

I share that story not simply for its intrinsic entertainment value, but because it is a very important memory for me. Whenever I find myself impressed with my dignity, or competence, or importance, I find it useful to flash on that scene in the kitchen. Humility is always easier when we have something to be humble about. In that regard, some of us are more richly blessed than others.

But there is another side to this memory, and that is the response of Roger Manners, the Senior Minister. He didn’t explode or over-react in any way. He simply assessed the mess, recognized that I was aware of my evident stupidity, and left me to deal with it. Without

words he said to me, “Well, beloved colleague, you’ve gotten yourself into quite a mess here. But I know that you have within you everything you need to deal with it. You can handle this, and I’ll let you do it.”

That’s the way I’m feeling today. You haven’t made a mess that I’m aware of, most of you, but sooner or later you will, if you expect to grow up and accomplish anything. But you already have within you everything you truly need.

You probably know that we don’t pick the scripture readings; we take what we get from week to week. But if I had had the opportunity to choose a lesson, I would have picked the one we got for today. Paul and Silas are in deep trouble. They have been beaten for preaching their Christian faith. They are locked in a cell within a cell at midnight. And there in the dark, bruised and bloodied, what do they do? They sing hymns. They sing songs they know by heart: songs of encouragement and comfort; songs that remind them of who they are and who God is; songs for the dead end in which they find themselves and the road to new beginnings that lies before them. They sing from the hymnals of their hearts.

What we’ve been trying to do for you all this time at Plymouth Church is to give you a hymnal of the heart to fall back on when you need it most. They’re not all really hymns, of course, these hymns of the heart. Some of what’s in your hymnal might actually have a melody attached to it: *God is Our Refuge and Strength; Many Gifts, One Spirit; This Little Light of Mine*. But a lot of what’s in there is just stuff you’ve heard over and over and over again: “We agree to differ. We resolve to love. We unite to serve.” “Our purpose is to grow in love of God and neighbor.” “No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, you are always welcome here.” Even though we don’t sing those things, they’re in your hymnal, too.

Sometimes it turns out that the most precious things in our hymnals of the heart are things we have grown pretty tired of hearing. One time many years ago, when one of our sons was “negotiating” not to have to go to church so much, he said, “It’s the same thing every week: God love you so love each other, God loves you so love each other,

God loves you so love each other... I get it, already!” He was right. That’s it.

But what he didn’t know then, but knows now, is that not everybody believes that or really seeks to live it; and that when it’s midnight and you’re locked in a dark prison—perhaps of your own making—these simple songs mean everything. And he has within him everything he needs.

That’s what we’ve tried to give you: a tune for the road, a reminder of who you are, an inspiration to change the world, and a promise that we’ll always belong to one another because we belong to God.

God loves you, so love each other.
That’s all: sing it when you need it.
Amen

BOOK OF LIFE

As of 5/17/10

BAPTISM:

Elle Nicole Isaacson, 5/16/10,
daughter of Mark and Atessa
Isaacson.

WEDDING:

**Meredith White and Nicholas
Martin**, 5/15/10

Plymouth

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Frank Thomas..... Coordinator of TiM
Jan Van Wyk..... Director of Plymouth Nursery School
Susan Waller Director of Youth & Children's Music
Angie Witmer..... Minister of Young Adults and Youth

Support Groups

AA: Monday nights, 7:30 p.m. at Plymouth Place, Dave Creighton, 240.6667

AL-ANON: Church Office, 255.3149

GLBT: (Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgendered) Ron Sallade, 249.5627 or www.plymouthglbt.com

LADOS: (Life After Death of Spouse) DMARC, 277.6969

Plymouth offers the Stephen Ministry Program for one-to-one Christian care. Contact Faith Ferré at 255.3149 ext. 16 or Bev Burns at 224.9571.

Worship

Saturday Worship

5:30 p.m.
Waveland Hall

5/22/10

Angie Witmer
Acts 2:1-21

5/29/10

Stephanie Haskins
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Sunday Worship

9 & 11 a.m.
Sanctuary

5/23/10

Matt Mardis-LeCroy
Acts 2:1-21

5/30/10

David Ruhe
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

The Contact

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9 a.m.
Sundays