BY: SUSAN WALLER

You may remember an article I wrote in last June’s issue of the Contact about an idea that LeAnn and I had to connect our HS Youth with older congregation members in the early days of the pandemic. The idea was for our youth to write a note to these older members to say hi, inquire about their wellbeing during the lockdown, and ask how these older folks handled getting through big global events of the past.

What developed was a ministry that we called HS Youth Note Writers. From this grew some really cool and wonderfully generative relationships. One such is the “pen pal” relationship between Grace Sundstrom, a senior and Alden Heberd, former minister and congregant at Plymouth. Grace and Alden have been writing each other for almost a year now.

This past fall, Grace wrote an essay for her Common Application (a single online college application form used by over 700 colleges and universities) about her experience writing to Alden. Just a few weeks ago, part of Grace’s essay was featured in the New York Times as it was included in an article about essays written by college seniors during the pandemic.

To read the full New York Times article, visit: tiny.cc/NYTimes-College-Essay. We are also including Grace’s entire essay here in the Contact. What an amazing story of friendship and hope in an unlikely time and place.

ESSAY BY GRACE SUNDSTROM

The telltale sound of my dog’s frantic barking meant he’d spotted the mail carrier. Waiting eagerly for the mail is a highlight of my daily pandemic routine. After the mail slid through the slot, I pawed through catalogs, coupons, and endless college brochures until I found an envelope with my name handwritten on it. Like every letter Alden wrote to me, it began with the same four words—Dear Young Friend Grace.

Alden and I had been penpals since the middle of April, when I received his address through my church youth choir. Because of the pandemic, the choir’s weekly dinners and rehearsals, along with our Sunday morning performances, had been canceled. In an effort to eradicate our boredom, the choir director started a letter-writing group to elderly church members.

(continued on page 3)
Caring

CONDOLENCES
• to all those who have lost someone to COVID-19.
• to Barbara Wells whose mother died.
• to Amy Cox whose mother died.
• to Tammy Boldt whose father died.
• to Chad Waller whose cousin died.
• to students, alumni, and colleagues of Dr. Robert Larsen from Simpson College.
• to David DeForest Colvig whose father died.
• to Georgia Sheriff whose mother died.
• to the family and friends of Mary Susan Gibson.
• to the family and friends of Sandra McCleary.

CONGRATULATIONS
• to Jill & Patrick Schacherer’s on the birth of their first child, Maya!

Reflections from Linda Knodle
Eight Years as Church Council Secretary

BY: CINDY EATON-EKLUND

For nearly eight years, Linda Knodle had a front-row seat to the business of Plymouth Church. From the time that former Moderator Pam Duffy asked her to sub as Church Council Secretary in 2013, until she stepped down this year to reorient, Linda says it has been an exciting time to see the church grow and change.

“Worship services have introduced new ways of doing things and are working to retire some older traditions,” she said. “Senior ministers have gone and come and gone. We’ve welcomed new Associate Ministers in the TiM program and watched them go on to do wonderful things. Staff changes have occurred, bringing new folks with new ideas into the fold.”

Times have changed as far as her role as secretary too. Linda says she had served as council secretary at her previous church, and during those times she took minutes by hand. Using a computer more recently has made her job easier and more accurate.

As for the most monumental or significant change that Linda has seen during her stint as Church Council Secretary, she recalls that it clearly was the Black Lives Matter banner initiative. “Monthly we were updated by the Board of Social Action about the research, discussion and other happenings within the church community related to the banner. On the night the Church Council was to vote, we had a full house of both council and church members,” she says. “I sat and listened as then Moderator Donna Paulson went around the large Church Council table asking each person to express their thoughts, if they wished to. I listened to many folks who had struggled with their decision. It was moving and showed how seriously each of the council members had taken their decision.” After the tight vote, the banner was approved.

Linda remains active in one volunteer opportunity at the church, but says it’s time to let others have the pleasure of serving.

“Find something that interests you and participate in it,” she advises. “Whether it’s serving on a board, a committee, volunteering in the office, working with children or youth, singing in the choir or any other of the many opportunities the church has to offer. You will meet new people and laugh and, in many cases, work hard. It is so worth it.”

Linda clearly speaks from experience. She’s been active in many aspects of Plymouth beyond just Church Council Secretary. Moderator David Johnson recalls the many ways his and Linda’s paths have crossed throughout the years.

“I first met Linda when she and I served as Deacons together, then again when we served on Board of Spiritual Growth, and then, of course, as she served as Secretary to Church Council. Linda has been a constant presence with an always-on smile and willingness to help and lead (as just one example, she has to be in contention for most “substitute Deacon” appearances),” according to David Johnson, who currently is serving as Church Moderator (among his many volunteer duties). “I am deeply grateful for her service to our Plymouth community, including her years faithfully recording the minutes of Council business.”

From all of us at Plymouth Church, thank you good and faithful servant. ✝
At first, I was hesitant. Could interacting with someone who's old enough to know how to dial a rotary phone ever replace the community I experienced in my choir, surrounded by kids my age?

But, with boring days stretching out before me, I decided to join the letter-writing campaign and was assigned Alden. I wrote him a short letter to let him know he was being thought of and threw it in the mailbox, not expecting him to write back. A week later, I was shocked to receive a lengthy response. After reading about the simpler college entrance process in the 1940s (“SATs and guidance offices were in the future,” he wrote) and life in a nursing home during a global pandemic, I warmed to the idea of letter writing. From that moment, what I expected to be a one-time exchange turned into a months-long correspondence.

I struggled initially to write about topics to which we could both relate. Though Alden and I lived in the same community, I was convinced the similarities ended there. He’s a former minister who has been retired longer than I’ve been alive. I’m a high school student trying to figure out my future. But what I’ve learned is we both feel lonely. While I miss my friends and grandparents, Alden is unable to see his wife of decades: “I am still not permitted into the healthcare center, so I must be content with telephone visits with Betty,” he wrote. Sharing letters helped us both feel a bit more human during these bizarre times.

At first, I was reluctant to get political in my writing, not knowing where the conversation would lead. As our letters flew back and forth, I decided to take a chance and share my disgust about the treatment of people of color at the hands of police officers. To my surprise, Alden responded with the same sentiments and shared his experience marching in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Here we were, two people generations apart, finding common ground around one of the most polarizing subjects in American history.

When I arrived at my first Black Lives Matter protest this summer, I was greeted by the voices of singing protesters. The singing made me think of a younger Alden, stepping off the train at Union Station in Washington D.C. to attend the 1963 March on Washington, moved by a group of Black South Carolinians singing the famous Civil Rights song, “Oh Freedom!” before making his way to the National Mall to hear Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak about his dream. I was encouraged by Alden’s recognition that, “your generation has once more taken up the torch.”

Throughout the months we’ve spent writing, I’ve discovered Alden and I actually have a great deal in common. This realization inspired me to transform what was going to be a youth-only anti-racism book group at church this summer into a multi-generational venture. I look forward to the day I’m finally able to tell him just how meaningful his letters have been, and let him put a face to his Young Friend Grace.
Easter Special Offering

As we celebrate Easter during this season, please consider a Special Offering gift that supports our Just Peace covenant: working toward economic and social justice for our Des Moines Metro Area neighbors. Donations are being accepted through Friday, May 28. For more information about recipients and how to donate, visit: plymouthchurch.com/news/easter-offering-2021.
Sounds of the City: Lawn Concerts

Sounds of the City: Lawn Concerts Summer 2021 will see the return of Plymouth Church’s well-received “Sounds of the City” Lawn Concert series from last fall, which features a variety of local performers. Join us on the Ingersoll lawn at 7 p.m., on the First and Third Fridays of June, July, and August; and 6 p.m. in September for concerts (June 4, 18; July 2, 16; August 6, 20; September 3, 17).

The Saturday Night Band will open and close the series on June 4 and September 17 with a wide variety of performers in between. Also, join the Matins Choir for a special concert on Friday, June 12, 7 p.m. on the lawn! Bring a chair, a refreshing beverage, and enjoy the “sounds of the city”! You do not need to register for these events.

Friday Music with Seth Hedquist Returns

Summer 2021 will see the return of “Friday Music with Seth Hedquist,” Plymouth’s beloved Saturday Night Band leader. Each Friday, Seth will help you wind down the week on Facebook Live at 5:30 p.m.

Join Seth at 5:30 p.m., on the Second and Fourth Fridays of June, July, August, and September for these desk concerts (June 11, 25; July 9, 23; August 13, 27; September 10, 24).

John McCutcheon Virtual Concert

Join us for a virtual concert on May 1 at 6:30 p.m. (CDT) by John McCutcheon. John has preformed for Plymouth Church several times in the past, and 30% of the ticket sales of this concert will benefit Arts@Plymouth. For more information or to purchase a ticket, visit: tiny.cc/McCutcheon-May21
ONLINE WEEKLY OFFERINGS

STAY IN TOUCH!

During this closure, we have many virtual offerings available to you throughout the week on a variety of platforms! Email, Facebook Live, Zoom, and YouTube. On this page, you will find a list of all of our regular weekly offerings during the month of April!

If you would like to receive our email offerings, visit: eepurl.com/dhGrYv, and fill out the form with your first and last name and your best email address.

MONDAYS...

Monday Moderator Minute: On Mondays, you will receive an email update from our Moderator and Moderator-elect.

Weekly Kick-Off: At 12:30 p.m. join Karen Jeske on Facebook Live, and she will offer a short preview to the coming weekend’s worship.

TUESDAYS...

Your Faith @ Home: On Tuesdays, you will receive an email with the week’s scripture, a journal prompt, and Plymouth staff recommendations.

Evening Prayer: At 5:30 p.m., join our ministers on Facebook Live for a service of prayer.

WEDNESDAYS...

Evening Prayer: At 5:30 p.m., join our ministers on Facebook Live for a service of prayer.

Wednesday Bible Study: At 7 p.m., join Rushing Kimball for bible study on Zoom. To join, visit the Plymouth website, and click the Wednesday Bible Study icon.

THURSDAYS...

Plymouth Weekly: On Thursdays, you will receive an email with a list of highlighted activities going on at Plymouth Church.

Evening Prayer: At 5:30 p.m., join our ministers on Facebook Live for a service of prayer.

SATURDAYS...

Weekend Worship Service: Our Weekend Worship Service will be available beginning at 5:30 p.m. on our Facebook Page each Saturday.

SUNDAYS...

Weekend Worship Service: Our Weekend Worship Service will be available beginning at 9 a.m. on our YouTube Channel each Sunday.

Fellowship Forum: Sunday morning at 10 a.m. join us for our weekly conversation about God, life and whatever happens to come up. To join, visit the Plymouth website, and click the Fellowship Forum icon.

IN-PERSON WEEKLY OFFERINGS

ABOUT IN-PERSON EVENTS...

We will continue to offer the following in-person events, so long as it is safe to do so. Masks and distancing will be required at all times for any in-person events both indoors and outdoors. If an event is outdoors, we recommend bringing a camping chair or folding chair along, so that you have somewhere to sit. If you are concerned about inclement weather, please visit our Facebook page for updates if an outdoor event is canceled or moved inside.

SUNDAYS...

Outdoor Worship: Join us on the Upper Level Parking Deck for Outdoor Worship each Sunday from 9-9:45 a.m. We have a capacity of 150 participants at these services. Registration for this event is encouraged, but not required. Register here: tiny.cc/outdoor-worship-21.

Indoor Worship: Beginning May 9, join us in the Plymouth Sanctuary for our Indoor Worship service each Sunday from 11:15 a.m. to 12 p.m. We have a capacity of 100 participants at these services. Registration is required for all indoor services. Register here: tiny.cc/indoor-worship-21.
JOY MADE COMPLETE

Our theme for the Eastertide season, Joy Made Complete, comes from the Gospel of John. When Jesus speaks to his disciples for the last time, he tells them he wants their joy to be complete right before reminding them of his commandment that they love one another as he has loved them. This message is echoed in Paul’s letter to the Philippians where he reminds followers of Jesus that our joy is complete when we look out for the interests of others.

Our Joy Made Complete Guide can be found here: plymouthchurch.com/joy-made-complete.

DIGITAL LIBRARY

Have you been missing the cozy comfort of the Plymouth Library and Reading Room in our Center for Spiritual Growth? Now you can access digital books from your home! Go to plymouthchurch.overdrive.com and set up your login. You may sign up for an Instant Digital Card on your smart phone using the Campaign Code: puccwinter20. Remember to select United States for your phone country code. If you need help signing up, email the Library Committee (overdrive@plymouthchurch.com).

CALL IN TO LISTEN TO WEEKEND WORSHIP

Instead of watching our service on Facebook or YouTube, you can now listen from your cell phone or land line! To do this, call 1.833.612.1926!

STORIES FOR THE EASTER SEASON

Stories are catalysts to create and share meaning and grow community. During Eastertide (the season immediately following Easter), Plymouth is exploring JOY. When Jesus told the disciples he would make their joy complete, he had some notion of both how important and how fleeting joy can be. From the silly stories when you laughed so hard your stomach hurt, to the challenges that have taught you to savor joy when it appears, we want to hear your stories about JOY.

Questions/Prompts:
Joy found me when… Can you finish this sentence? If so, go for it! If that feels too broad or you need help homing in, take a look at the prompts below and choose one that speaks to you. See if you can fill in the blank in two sentences or 35 words or less. What else do people need to know to really get it? Growing out from this kernel will be easier than trying to cut down a bigger story.

• I laughed so hard my stomach hurt when...
• I thought I’d never feel joy again when...
• I jumped for joy when...
• I felt joy when I least expected to when...
• I knew my joy was NOT complete when...
• I did something that brought me joy...

For more information, visit: plymouthchurch.com/news/stories-for-the-easter-season

NEWEST MEMBERS WELCOME SUNDAY, MAY 23

Did you know that 20 people have joined Plymouth church during the pandemic? Join us as we welcome our newest members to Plymouth on Pentecost Sunday, May 23, during outdoor worship. It will be an opportunity to see old friends and welcome new ones. It’s been a challenging year for Plymouth, but we have been blessed with new members who wanted to join and be involved in the work of Plymouth. We want them and we need them, so let’s give them a warm welcome. You’re invited to stay after the service to meet and greet them. What a wonderful way to experience the Spirit being let loose in the world!

STEPHEN MINISTRY

What is Stephen Ministry? Our Stephen Ministers are trained members of Plymouth Church who are available to help bring a spiritual presence into your life through caring, listening, and prayer. If you are struggling with something in your life and looking for someone to walk it with you, please reach out. Contact LeAnn Stubbs at 515.255.3149 or lstubbs@plymouthchurch.com to discuss having a Stephen Minister assigned to work with you.

CHANCEL FLOWERS

You may notice flowers during our Weekend Worship services. If you would like to donate flowers, visit: tiny.cc/chancel-flowers. When you talk to your florist, please arrange to have the flowers delivered by noon on Thursday. This will allow us to get them in place before the service is recorded on Thursday afternoon. If you have questions, please contact Diane Hayes at her email: dhayes@plymouthchurch.com.

PLYMOUTH KIDS CLUB

Summer fun is just around the corner! Be on the lookout for information about:
• Summer Family events beginning in June
• Vacation Bible School (July 12)
For more information, email: gsheriff@plymouthchurch.com.

NICU HEART PROJECT

Child and Family Ministries and Plymouth Quilters are teaming up for a fantastic project! This summer, we will be making cloth hearts for babies in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit. To get started, we are asking for donations of supplies. Supplies needed:
• New or gently used sheets or pillowcases
• Fabric markers
Items will be collected in May at the Outdoor and Indoor Worship Services. Or, to arrange pickup or dropoff and for more information: gsheriff@plymouthchurch.com.