



**Plymouth
Church**
UNITED CHURCH *of* CHRIST

Annual Report 2025



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Minutes from the 2024 Annual Meeting

Called to order at 11:21 by David Turner, President of Council

A quorum (minimum of 75) was determined to be present with 82 members in the Sanctuary.

Rev. Matt Wooster gave the opening prayer.

Reading of the 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes:

Kendalle Cobb moved to dispense of reading the minutes from last year.

Christine Bretz seconded the motion.

Approved by all.

Approval of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes:

Marcia Wittenbrook moved to accept the minutes as presented in the Annual Report.

Sigrid Reynolds seconded the motion.

Approved by all.

Report of Senior Minister. Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster:

I celebrate to be with you for my fourth congregational meeting of Plymouth Church, in our church's 108th year since the founding in 2016, and our church's 101st year in this sanctuary.

Looking back at the past year, I recognize a time of both transition and stability, of honoring traditions and innovating.

With Christmas Eve falling on the fourth Sunday of Advent, we celebrated the Christmas pageant in the morning worship service with some appropriate changes. It was well received, but also reminded people why we value worshipping at a later hour closer to Christmas Day.

In January, a group of church members made a pilgrimage to the southern border in Arizona, learning about and joining humanitarian relief ministries. Continuing discussion and engagement from the wider congregation this year included planning for another pilgrimage this January, which is co-sponsored by the UCC Heartland Conference.

Through the faithful generosity of this congregation, you eliminated about \$320,000 of medical debt held by neighbors in Cuyahoga county that had gone into debt collection, in partnership with the organization R.I.P. Medical Debt. This debt sometimes weighed like a millstone around a person or family.

You shared resources for children and families of the Mound STEM school in the Slavic Village neighborhood of Cleveland, to provide children's clothing, warm hats and scarves and mittens, supplies for the start of a new school year, and groceries for Thanksgiving.

You supported a number of missional partners, including local organizations that provide support and

transitional housing to people and families experiencing homelessness, addiction recovery, and food insecurity; transition from prison; nature conservation and education; and advocacy for LGBTQ rights.

You gave comfort and strength and love to people and families experiencing momentous life passages of illness, injury, and the death of a dearly beloved person. You also shared joyous milestones when extra support is a great gift, including marriage, the birth of a child, or a move to a new home.

Here at home, the building and grounds of the church are among our strong assets for ministry, and they continue to receive the attention due to an old building receiving robust use. A number of projects are small repairs and emergency responses, such as a repair to the elevator shaft. Other projects make a bigger and more noticeable impact. This year, those projects focused on the appearance of, and accessibility to, the church from the road. A new and lasting sign replaced the fondly familiar yet deteriorating wood sign on the front lawn. And the parking lot was completely renovated, from the base layer up, including some areas where there was no base layer, and widening of three entrance/exits with the elimination of one. The annual issue of pot holes is now behind us, and the church is more welcoming from the very first impression.

We said farewell to members of the church staff. Rose Munn cared for the church facility for over 15 years before her retirement, and we honor her service here. More recently, Linda Watson served as office administrator for three years, and Chris Gillooly provided technical support for the worship livestream services for one year. And we are so grateful for the interim music leadership of Lia Bendix, John Mills, and Tom Clark-Jones, along with David Turner's volunteer leadership.

While we said goodbye, we also welcomed new staff members in the past year:

George Sargeant, Director of Music and the Arts

Brenna Threatt, office and communications administrator

Derrick Williams, church sexton

Jacob Rogers, livestream specialist

And Lynna Bao as organ scholar.

Each of these people has brought new gifts and dedication.

I also want to recognize the ministries of:

Dillon Shipman, 21 months

Kathryn Kundrat, six years this January

Paul Holter, six years last September

Leslie Szalay, who will, on May 1, mark ten years with Plymouth Church!

In September, I invited the congregation to consider our place in the wide history and narrative of God's faithfulness with the theme Generation to Generation, to take a long view of the generations who came before, to give thanks for their gifts and to reckon with their sins, and to consider the long view of our legacy after our lives have ended.

This is the time that we have been given to live in, and we will need to take strength from those who have gone before us. We will need to remember, from them, how precious life is, so that we may take encouragement from the joy and love that we experience, and pay attention to the sources of kindness and goodwill. And as we remember the generations to follow us, let us plant seeds that will grow and bear fruit whether that growth is measured in years or decades or even centuries.

There are forces in the world that we cannot quickly pivot. The size of global and even national culture is like a giant cargo ship in the ocean. It can be turned, not quickly, but with persistence and dedication. We have the ability to impact the lives of the people around us, to impact our greater community, and to shape a vision for those who come after us. And little by little, day by day, faithful act by faithful act, God will bend the arc of the universe toward justice.

I look forward to a new year with confidence in the ministry of Plymouth Church.

50+ year member recognition:

Rev. Wooster recognized new 50-year members listed in the Annual Report.

Bill Menges was there in person and received his 50-year name tag.

Rev. Wooster then read the list of 50+ year members as in the Annual Report

After the meeting, a reception was held in the Parlor.

Treasurer's Report: Jeri Gerard (see Annual Report)

No foundation report

President's Report: David Turner

Good Morning

I find strength and reassurance in Plymouth Church. We are blessed with a community of dedicated, compassionate members who care deeply not only for each other but also for our wider community. We have staff who work diligently, week after week, to ensure that our ministries thrive, and church leaders that put in the effort required to support our mission.

I've been fortunate to attend a couple different department meetings, and it's inspiring to see so many members engaged and enthusiastic about making Plymouth the best it can be. If you take a look at the annual report, you'll see just how much is happening. I encourage everyone, if you have some free time, to join a ministry—there truly is something for everyone, and each department would be thrilled to welcome more members into their activities for whatever time commitment works in your schedule.

One item I wanted to bring up here is Coffee Hour, As many of you are aware coffee hour has been a challenge since coming out of the pandemic. We are in the process of restarting connection groups to help aid in this process. I want to thank Dillon for helping to organize and set these groups back up. In the meantime, church council is stepping up to fill in the weeks where we do not have any volunteers.

I want to take a moment and thank some church council members who are rolling off of a leadership position at the end of this year for all their hard work. When I call your name, if you can stand and be recognized.

Andrew Cleminshaw - clerk

Catherine Cleminshaw - member at large

Brenda Grauer – AFL Co Chair

Kathy Mau – AFL Vice Chair

Cindy Hill – Caring Vice Chair

Joanna Horn – C&Y Vice Chair

Mendle Adams – Giving Chair

Lisa Mann – Giving Vice Chair

Jay Horner – P&S Chair

We have a couple of church council members who will still be church leaders but in a different capacity and I look forward to working with them in their new roles but wanted to thank them for their work as well.

Robert Woolfrey – Member at Large

Lucas Hershberger – Member at Large

Kendalle Cobb – Worship Chair

I also want to recognize all the work that our 5 standing committees put in behind the scenes. Those committees are Finance, Foundation, Nominating, Personnel, and Pastoral Relations. Thank you to all those church members who sit on these committees, we appreciate all the time you put in.

Does anyone have any questions for Matt, Jeri, or myself before we move on?

Open Floor:

There was a reminder: the congregation to fill out pledge cards--give joyfully.

There was an inquiry as to the Building and Grounds budget for 2024.

Jeri Gerard, treasurer, answered that the total building and grounds department annual budget for 2024 was \$225,120.

Jane Corteville, Vice Chair of Building and Grounds, spoke of the need for planning specifically regarding the kitchen.

There was an inquiry as to the proposed constitutional changes.

David Turner, President, summarized that the changes involved updating language, cleaning up sections to make more sense, and documenting the current situation. He noted there was also talk of changing departments to ministries and softening some language regarding membership.

Report of the Nominating Committee:

Jeannie Clarkson, Nominating Chair, gave the report.

She thanked the Nominating Committee.

She listed the names of committee members and then introduced the candidates for the leadership positions. See the Annual Report for the leadership slate.

David Turner called for a motion to approve.

Paul Qua moved to accept the slate of officers.

Wayne Hall seconded the motion.

All approved.

Rev. Wooster then led a liturgy of commissioning with those elected and appointed leaders, declaring them commissioned.

Closing Prayer: Dillon Shipman led a closing prayer.

Adjournment:

Kendalle Cobb moved to adjourn the meeting.

Jane Corteville seconded the motion.

David Turner adjourned the meeting.

Plymouth Church Leadership Roster for 2025

Key: B&G: Building and Grounds; C&Y: Children & Youth; E&G: Evangelism & Growth; P&S: Partnerships and Service; (F) member of Finance Committee

POSITION	FINAL
President	David Turner (2)
Vice President	Russell Lamb (2)
Clerk	Kristin Sweeney
Treasurer	Jennifer Gerard (3)
Asst. Treasurer	Linda Sempliner (2)
Member at Large	Shelli Smith
Member at Large	Jeannie Clarkson
Member at Large	Mary Smith (2)
Member at Large	Danny Colvin
Youth Member at Large	Anders Beckman
Adult Faith & Life Chairs	Ken Rogers (2)
Adult Faith & Life Vice Chair	Charlene Nevans
Building & Grounds Chair	Steve Kaufman (2)
Building & Grounds Vice Chair	Jane Corteville (2)
Caring Chair	Yaa Ansah (2)
Caring Vice Chair	Patti Fine
Children & Youth Chair	Carolyn Jillson (4)
Children & Youth Vice Chair	Meghan Chrobak
Evangelism & Growth Co-Chairs	Carrie Wise & Jonathan Kraft (2)
Evangelism & Growth Vice Chair	Lucas Hershberger
Giving Chair	Reggie Williams
Giving Vice Chair	Dylan Stiles
Partnerships & Service Chair	Danny DeMarco
Partnerships & Service Vice Chair	Zach Lewis (2)
Worship Chair	Christine Bretz
Worship Vice Chair	Robert Woolfrey
Living Water Rep.	Faye Gary (4)
Living Water Rep.	Gloria Sturghill
Finance Committee	David Turner (President)
Finance Committee	Steve Kaufman (Chair of Building & Grounds)
Finance Committee	Jennifer Gerard (Treasurer)
Finance Committee	Reggie Williams (Chair of Giving)
Finance Committee	John Markt (Chair of Personnel)
Finance Committee	Russell Lamb (Vice President)
Finance Committee	Linda Sempliner (Asst. Treasurer)

Finance Committee Member at Lg	Paul Qua
Finance Committee Member at Lg	Marcia Wittenbrook (2)
Foundation (2025)	Mitch Sanborn (Director)
Foundation (2026)	Fred Steuber
Foundation (2027)	Mary Bright
Foundation (2027)	Ray Graves
Foundation (2028)	Brian Grube
Nominating (2026)	Joann Hall
Nominating (2026)	Margaret Reuthinger
Nominating (2026)	Gloria Sturghill
Nominating (2027)	Sandy Nimrick
Nominating (2027)	Ella Davis
Nominating (2027)	Peter Sweeney
Nominating (2025)	Kendalle Cobb (Chair)
Nominating (2025)	Bob Brucken
Nominating (2025)	Tracy Williams
Personnel (2026)	John Markt
Personnel (2027)	Jane Underwood
Personnel (2027)	Tommy Sutton-Lovett
Personnel (2025)	Jennifer Markworth
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Mai Moore (2027)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Wayne Hall (2025)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Paul Qua (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Chris Karr (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Betsy Kaufman (2027)
Pastoral Relations for Dillon Shipman	Kendalle Cobb (2025)
Pastoral Relations for Dillon Shipman	Norma Storer (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Dillon Shipman	Rick Johnson (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Dillon Shipman	Will Sanborn (2027)
Pastoral Relations for Dillon Shipman	Betsy Steuber (2027)

November 9, 2025

The Agenda for the Annual Meeting:

- I. Determination of presence of a quorum
- II. Call to Order & Invocation
- III. Call for motion to dispense with reading the 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes which appear in the 2025 Annual Report.
- IV. Call for motion to approve the 2025 Annual Meeting Minutes
- V. Senior Minister's Report
- VI. Treasurer's Report
- VII. Foundation Fund Report
- VIII. President's Report
- IX. Report of the Nominating Committee and Election of Officers
- X. New Business
- XI. Adjournment
- XII. Benediction

President's Report

Plymouth Church continues to demonstrate its strength as a passionate, dedicated community looking toward the future. Our members remain committed to fostering a place of connection, faith, and shared purpose, even as we navigate new challenges.

This year, our staff members continue to serve with energy and dedication. One significant change was the loss of the Lerner School as a tenant. While this was a disappointment, we are working diligently to explore how our building can serve the community in meaningful ways, including with other potential tenants. This year has presented a number of challenges, however, the church council remains focused on representing the needs and aspirations of our members. We continue to lay the groundwork for a long-term road map to guide Plymouth Church's evolution and service to both our congregation and the broader community.

We were proud to support our Senior Minister, Matt Wooster, as he took a well-deserved sabbatical this summer. During his absence, Associate Minister Dillon Shipman stepped into a leadership role with grace and dedication, ensuring that our ministries and spiritual life continued to thrive. The congregation is grateful for Dillon's commitment and the steady guidance provided throughout the summer months.

Despite the challenges, Plymouth's spirit endures. Our community's resilience and faith are evident in the ongoing support, creativity, and commitment of our members. We look forward to discovering new opportunities for growth and service in the year ahead.

Submitted by David Turner, Council President

Finance Committee Report

The Finance Committee is charged with overseeing Plymouth's finances. This includes the annual development of the operating budget, oversight of income and expenses in the operations of the Church, oversight of the use of Special Funds, and review of the use of Foundation Fund assets.

Plymouth is fortunate to have a seasoned finance team including a volunteer Treasurer in Jeri Gerard and Assistant Treasurer in Linda Sempliner. I recommend you review the Treasurer's report provided separately in this Annual Report.

Highlights for this year for the Finance Committee included:

- Creation of a Special Fund to manage donations for the memorial forest that the Green Team has launched;
- Funding for the re-lighting of our church steeple and the front porch of the church;
- Managing through the departure of the Lerner School from our Church campus and managing expenses accordingly;
- Development of a 2026 budget that reflects upcoming changes in tenant revenue.

Annually, our financial team undergoes an Agreed Upon Procedures review with a third-party accounting firm to ensure the Church's processes are followed by staff, volunteers, and elected members of the Church's governance structure. The review was received by Finance Committee and submitted to Council for its review. A number of variances from our established procedures and typical bookkeeping practices were identified. The financial staff has corrected these items and will report in more detail to Council regarding the findings.

The Finance Committee is fortunate to have at-large members Paul Qua and Marcia Wittenbrook to provide their insights as well as the chairs of Giving, Buildings and Grounds, and Personnel. Oversight and governance of Plymouth's financial resources are acts of good stewardship that Finance Committee members take seriously and execute well. I'm pleased to have led this group and feel confident they will continue to serve the Church's financial oversight well.

Submitted by Russell Lamb, Vice President of Council

Treasurer's Report

Plymouth Church's staff and leadership continue to keep our worship life vibrant and our building beautiful, safe, and functional. Even with major repairs this year—including important elevator maintenance—we've been able to meet our expenses and stay on budget.

Your continued generosity is especially important as we prepare for the loss of rental income from the Cleveland Clinic, which will no longer lease space from us in 2026. We are deeply grateful for our ongoing partnership with Heights Christian Church and the shared spirit that strengthens both congregations. As of August 30th, our foundation funds were valued at \$7,358,970.23, and our total current assets stood at \$8,036,839.56.

Our anticipated revenue for this year is \$1,127,436.48, and we are on track to receive this amount. Our expenditures through the end of August have been in line with our expectations based on our total annual budget of \$1,124,694.98.

Each year, Plymouth completes an external Agreed Upon Procedure Review to ensure that our accounting remains accurate and transparent. This year, even before the review, a small data entry error was discovered. After the review, the church contracted Amy Root as our new finance administrator, and she will work with Chris Karr in reviewing all data entries from this year. They will also adjust the configuration of our accounting software, if necessary, to better match our current budget categories.

Plymouth continues to thrive thanks to your generosity, your faith, and the many gifts shared by our talented congregation.

Submitted by Jennifer Gerard, Treasurer

Foundation Report

The Plymouth Church Foundation provides significant support for the Church's annual operating budget as well as funds for designated purposes. The Foundation is governed by a board consisting of the Church Treasurer plus 5 Trustees who are appointed by Council to serve for 5 year terms.

As of September 30, 2025, the value of the Foundation was approximately \$7.52 million. The assets consist of a broadly diversified portfolio of equities (stocks) and fixed income investments (bonds) overseen by Clearstead Advisors, LLC in Cleveland.

The Foundation's annual contribution to the Church for the upcoming year is calculated based on 5% of the average value of the portfolio on September 30th of the current year, and December 31st of the previous two years. For 2025 the Foundation distributed approximately \$275,000 for annual operating expenses and \$45,000 for special programs.

Submitted by Mitch Sanborn, Foundation Director

2024-2025 Membership Statistics

November 1, 2024 – October 31, 2025

Summary of Changes in Membership:

Total Membership as of October 31, 2024 437

New Members Received 2

Deceased Members 6

Members Transferred 0

Members who resigned 0

Total Membership as of October 31, 2025 433

Total Membership includes: Members 394

Associate Members 3

Student Members 36

Total 433

Total Membership does not include: Active Friends 35

Additions to Membership:

Members were received as follows:

<u>New Member</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Officiating Minister</u>
2 by Affirmation of Faith		
Eric Higgins & Chelsea Swick-Higgins	04/06/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster

0 By Confirmation

0 by Reinstatement by Church Council

Losses to Membership:

Removed by Letter of Transfer

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>
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0 Who Resigned Their Membership

Due to Death for whom a Funeral or Memorial Service was conducted at Plymouth Church or by a minister of Plymouth Church.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>	<u>Memorial/Funeral</u>	<u>Officiating Minister (s)</u>
Mary Ann Davis	01/28/2025	03/21/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Carol Miller	09/01/2025	09/14/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman
Harry Mercer	09/10/2025	09/28/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman

Due to Death (No Service at Plymouth Church)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>	<u>Service Held</u>
Eva Garden	11/19/2024	New Community Bible Fellowship
Mary Ann Wetzler	06/05/2025	
Sharon Mendelsohn	07/30/2025	Bullington Gardens

Other Funerals or Memorial Services:

Funeral or Memorial Services conducted at Plymouth Church or by Plymouth Church staff for a non-member:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Service</u>	<u>Officiating Minister</u>
David Ford	03/15/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Jean Craig	03/28/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman
Richard Ogle	04/12/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Thomas Schomburg	05/18/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman
Kevin Cronin	05/24/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Dee Strong	08/01/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman
Frances Namkoong	09/30/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Barbara Havighurst	10/03/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Oliver Henkel	10/20/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster

Baptisms:

Received the Sacrament of Baptism

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Service</u>	<u>Officiating Minister</u>
Lucas Alan Hershberger	02/23/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Luca Vincent D'Orazio	03/16/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster
Samuel Hayden Katz	03/23/2025	Rev. Dr. Matt Wooster

Dedications:

0 Received Service of Dedication

Weddings

<u>Names</u>	<u>Date of Service</u>	<u>Officiating Minister</u>
Kat Evans & Adam Schiffler	03/15/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman
Elliot Forhan & Nicole Fidler	08/23/2025	Pastor Dillon Shipman

Fifty Plus Year Members

50 Plus Year Members will be celebrated after the meeting

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date Joined</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Date Joined</u>
Jean Harper	05/04/1975	Gretchen Smith	11/19/1967
John Cannon	06/02/1974	Fred Stueber	07/07/1966
Kathy Lembright	06/02/1974	Tom Daniel	10/04/1964
Bill Menges	06/02/1974	Janet Daniel	10/04/1964
Kathryn Rodgers	06/02/1974	Holly Hitchcock	04/11/1963
Elizabeth Wagner	06/02/1974	Martha Forth	10/07/1962
Paul Qua	05/06/1973	Bob Brucken	05/07/1961
Elizabeth Davis	05/07/1972	Christina Webster	03/30/1961
Maggie Oviatt	10/03/1971	Jim Chaney	05/06/1956
Dick Pogue	10/04/1970	Barbara Ginn	03/06/1955
Merrill Mau	05/03/1970	Ruth Nowicky	01/02/1955
Deborah Palmisano	05/03/1970	Barbara Kacir	04/15/1954
Julia Welsh	05/03/1970	Terry Shockey	04/06/1952
Shelly Anderson	11/23/1969	Dick Brubaker	04/10/1949
Jeannie Chaney	03/02/1969	Carl Gray	03/21/1948
Helen Reed	03/02/1969	Marcia Christian	04/14/1946
Beth Sanborn	05/05/1968	Marion Hill	03/25/1945
Joni Gray	03/03/1968	Rich Gray	04/02/1944
Bryan Mau	03/23/1967	Joanne Ross	03/29/1942
Stephen Murphy	03/23/1967		

Senior Minister's Report

“Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” Isaiah 40:31

In my fifth year of ministry with Plymouth Church, I am thankful to have been able to witness the continuity and growth of the congregation over this handful of years. My sense of gratitude and honor to minister with this community continues to grow deeper as we share the seasons of our lives. The community of the church is created in the simple words that the apostle Paul shared in his letter to the church in Rome: we “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

In community, we have rejoiced to recognize milestone celebrations, including the sacrament of baptism for two infants, Samuel Hayden Katz and Luca Vincent D’Orazio, who were each brought to the church by their parents, and one adult, Lucas Alan Hershberger, who spoke to the congregation about his faith on the Sunday of his baptism.

In the past year, we also welcomed new members of the congregation; blessed youth as they went and returned from a week of service; and prayed with thanksgiving to bless those who served in new roles as department leaders and officers of the congregation.

On Sunday, May 4, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Leslie Szalay’s service to Plymouth Church in ministry with children and families. Leslie has served this community with integrity, meaningful impact, and a spirit of genuine Christian love, and her energy for creation care has made a meaningful impact on the congregation.

Such milestones and celebrations of new beginnings bring joy to our community.

Our congregation also supports one another in grief, remembering and giving thanks for beloved members of our community. On All Saints’ Sunday, November 3, 2024, I preached a sermon on the passage from Matthew 5 known as the beatitudes. In the sermon, I remembered the blessings of Plymouth members who had died in the preceding year: Bea Muller, Bob Sattler, Ginny Perkins, Layton Ives, Gail Hall, Gracia Green, Tom Cullinan, and Sarah Grube. May God’s blessings for these saints continue, by the power of God’s new life and restoration.

The marks of active ministry are visible around the church building and grounds. Pastor Shipman shepherded the construction of a new and larger free pantry structure to serve the community. The Green Team initiated the memorial forest at the northwest side of the property to host native and ecologically beneficial trees and plants, while also creating a memorial in a peaceful setting. An Eagle Scout project coordinated with Plymouth to construct an outdoor classroom and seating area with posts and sun sails to make a shaded place for gathering in the summer.

A significant change in the use of our building is the departure of the Cleveland Clinic Lerner School, who began operating an additional campus of the school at Plymouth Church during the height of the covid pandemic. This change leaves a number of rooms on the lower level unoccupied and creates an opportunity for us to determine how this space can best serve the mission of the congregation.

This year also brought a significant change in personnel, as Kathryn Kundrat’s service in the church financial office came to a close in late October. I am grateful to Kathryn for the integrity and commitment of her work for the church, and join the congregation in gratitude and prayerful hope for Kathryn in her next chapter.

During the summer months of June, July, and August, I took a sabbatical leave with funding from the Lily Endowment Clergy Renewal Project, which the church received in 2024 for this purpose. The grant allowed me to travel with my wife, Betsy, to spend time in places of historic Christian spiritual practice and innovation. Together, we were able to make pilgrimages to holy places in Italy, including Rome, Assisi, and Florence; the isle of Iona in Scotland; and sites around Dublin and County Clare in Ireland. The theme for the grant was “Generation to Generation,” which informed not only the itinerary for my travels, but a lens for our congregation’s worship and reflection during the past year.

At Plymouth, Dillon Shipman served as minister in charge, and he stepped into aspects of ministerial administration. Together with the worship department, he worked to invite and welcome a number of guest preachers during the summer, giving the congregation the opportunities to hear from a number of new and familiar voices and perspectives.

I am grateful to the congregation, members of Council, staff and Pastor Dillon Shipman in particular for the support of my sabbatical leave this summer. I consider it to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I returned from sabbatical feeling refreshed and renewed in my call to ministry.

On January 7, 2026, I will mark the 25th anniversary of my ordination to Christian ministry. I am grateful to continue sharing in God’s call of the community to ministry, and I am both hopeful and excited about the future that we will share together.

With trust in God’s power and love, now and always,
Matt Wooster

Submitted by the Reverend Dr. Matthew Wooster, Senior Minister

Designated Associate Minister's Report

Dear friends,

What a joy it has been to embark on our third year of ministry together. So much has happened in the life of our congregation since our last Annual Meeting. I'll begin all the way back in Advent 2024 – the beginning of the church's "new year." We started off with a successful Sugar Plum Workshop! It is such a blessing to witness the joy of both the children and families, as well as all the helpers that volunteer to make this community event possible. Plymouth hosted the ecumenical Blue Christmas service on Tuesday, December 17, welcoming parishioners from Church of the Redeemer UMC, Church of the Saviour UMC, Heights Christian Church, and Fairmount Presbyterian Church as together, we held space for those who may find the holidays to be a difficult time. We hosted a fabulous Lunch Club on Wednesday, December 18, with 60 folks coming out for a delicious lunch prepared by Shelli Smith and a dynamic holiday concert featuring Diane Menges on vocals and myself on piano. The Youth Group had our big Christmas party on December 22, where we also prepared to bring back the lighting and staging to the 4pm Christmas Eve pageant service. We had a blast getting to have the larger scale production for the pageant back this year! At both Christmas Eve services, we collected coats and boots for our friends at Mound STEM School.

My life was changed by being part of the Pilgrimage to the Southern Border from January 13-19. Together, many of us from Plymouth, joined by a larger group from across the Heartland Conference of the UCC, travelled to the Arizona and Mexico borderlands to participate in the Common Ground on the Border conference hosted by the Good Shepherd UCC in Sahuarita, AZ. I was profoundly grateful to be part of a group of fellow pilgrims that wasn't afraid to look squarely at painful history and a troubling present. I am awed by those I journeyed alongside who, having come from various backgrounds, brought everything they had with them on this pilgrimage. Our conversations about race, immigration and regionalism, human suffering, and what it costs to stand up for one's neighbors were deeply important to me, and I'll carry them with me for the rest of my life. I am grateful for the work and ministry of the Rev. Brenda Grauer, who made this experience possible for us.

Getting to work with our youth, with Leslie Szalay, and the Children and Youth Department, is one of the highlights of this ministerial call. We had the privilege of celebrating Leslie's 10th Anniversary of ministry at Plymouth this year on Sunday, May 4. Her dedication to and passion for serving this congregation is truly inspiring to me, and honoring and celebrating her and the ways she has touched the life of our faith community was so deserved.

The youth group continued to gather on the second and fourth Sunday evenings each month, with other events and programs sprinkled in. Alongside volunteering for church and community events, we also shared in fun at places like Pinstripes, Whirleyball, and Laser Tag Arcade. I'm touched at how our 6th through 12th graders have formed an ever-deepening relationship with each other. I have so much gratitude for our faithful youth group leaders, Gloria Sturghill and Paula Colahan-Sederstrom. They give so much of their time and talents to our youth ministries and shower our kids with love and understanding as they navigate the difficult waters of being a teenager.

Leslie and I, alongside the C&Y Department, continue to discern how to grow and morph our church programming to meet the needs of our congregation year by year. This year, we brought back a Mardi Gras party that took place after church on March 2, where we also burned the palm branches from last year's Palm Sunday service that would be used to make the ashes for Ash Wednesday. We moved our Fall Festival to being after church, where we invited the entire congregation, as well as members from HCC, to enjoy a chili potluck,

games, crafts, showing off Halloween costumes, and making remembrance flags for All Saints Sunday. We had a wonderful turnout! The church also hosted an intergenerational game night in February, which was great fun, and enjoyed by so many that we decided to have two more during the summer months. Many thanks to Carolyn Jillson and Meghan Chrobak for chairing this department with such passion and care.

Jeannie Clarkson and I continued to teach the High School session of Our Whole Lives (OWL) that we began in the fall of 2024. We were so thankful to share this time of learning with the nine students from Plymouth Church and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Shaker Heights.

A new group of confirmands began classes in September. I am incredibly grateful to Wayne Hall and Gloria Sturghill for serving as confirmation teachers alongside me. The way they share their lives and faith inspires me and our youth! We have classes every first and third Sunday of the month, with several other meetings built in. I ask that you keep our confirmands (BB Ansah, Finnley Caldwell, Iris Chrobak, Edith Grissom, Charlie Miller, and Alli Szalay) in prayer as they embark on this journey of naming and claiming their own faith and what that looks like in the context of our church community and the greater world.

After several years of not having enough participation to make a summer youth service trip happen, it was back on at Plymouth this year! On Sunday, June 8, eight Plymouth youth alongside myself, Gloria Sturghill, and Wayne Hall as the adult leaders left for Fayette County, West Virginia, to spend the week serving with Appalachia Service Project. Appalachia Service Project (ASP) is a Christian ministry, open to all people, that inspires hope and service through volunteer home repair and replacement in Central Appalachia. For our Plymouth crew, our job was to rip out and install new floors on the inside of a home, and put up house wrap, insulation, J channeling, and siding on the outside of that same home. Our family quickly became very special to us – they were light and love and showed us so much grace and hospitality during the week we worked on their home. There is no doubt that, at times, this was a tough week - physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually – and it pushed us out of our comfort zones, but it was a week of deepening relationships and transforming our faith. We met God in many beautiful and unexpected ways. We returned home and the youth led worship on June 15, sharing about their experiences of the past week with our church family.

On June 1, I stepped into the role of Minister-in-Charge and Head of Staff as Matt departed for his three-month sabbatical alongside Betsy! My goodness, what a three months it was. Summer is normally a down time for us, but not this year! It was a summer full of fun and fellowship, sharing meals, deepening friendships, meaningful worship, meeting God in unexpected places, and going with the flow when things didn't go as planned – including a fire during a Sunday service, a few guest preachers backing out at the last minute, and a couple of other surprises and challenges! Through it all, and most importantly, I thank you for all the love you radiate within and beyond our church family. What a blessing it was to serve in this way for Summer 2025.

Plymouth and Heights Christian Church have continued to deepen our relationships with one another, and I am immensely grateful to my friend, Dr. Kate Gillooly, Minister of HCC, for all the ways she supported me and our congregation during Matt's sabbatical. Our congregations continued our "Wednesdays Together," with a book group gathering on the first Wednesdays of the month, a meditative arts group gathering on the second Wednesdays, Lunch Club gathering on the third Wednesdays, and a Mid-week meditations service on the fourth Wednesday. Together, we oversaw the rebuilding of our Little Free Pantry together. Members from HCC and Plymouth have donated to its rehabilitation and are committed to its upkeep and restocking moving forward. Many thanks to my stepdad, Dan Baker, and stepbrother, Jacob Baker, for building and installing the new pantry! We were able to dedicate the pantry with a joint service on August 17.

One of the most sacred parts of my calling is journeying alongside those who have lost a loved one. This year, I had to preside over more memorial services than I would have hoped to, but it is a privilege that I don't take

lightly. I am grateful to the families of Harry Mercer, Carol Miller, Thomas Schomburg, Jean Craig, and Dee Strong for inviting me into the homes and their lives to share in grief and in celebration of the person they love so dearly.

Perhaps the other most sacred part of my calling is the time I share in providing pastor care to folks and getting to know all of you more. I've had the honor of visiting many parishioners at their homes, especially those who find it difficult to make it to worship in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. I've made my way to nursing homes, to hospital bedsides, to sporting games, and to workplace cafeterias. We've enjoyed dinners, many cups of tea, and even a few musical productions and performances. We've shared stories, many emotional moments, the sacrament of communion, and what parishioners' hopes are for this faithful community moving forward.

I remain ever grateful for all the ways you support my life, both at and outside of the church. It is a blessing to spend as many Fridays/Saturdays with my family in Painesville as I can, and the greatest joy of all this year is that I was able to welcome my partner Cody to Northeast Ohio to live here full-time after two years of living in different cities. Thank you for embracing him with open arms and open hearts as he has made his transition here to life in Cleveland!

I couldn't be more grateful for Matt, Leslie, and George, my ministerial partners, for the supportive staff of Brenna, Kathryn, Amy, Paul, Kevin, and Derrick that we have here. Plymouth, I'm remain ever thankful for all the work God has called us to do together, and am full of joy, hope, and expectation for all that is ahead for us next year!

Submitted by Pastor Dillon Shipman, Designated Associate Minister

New Projects

Green Team and the Memorial Forest

This past year the Green Team re-established itself and decided that its first project was going to be to focus on creating more native and natural habitats on the church property. The first project was to create a Memorial Forest at the far northern end of the property. We invited the congregation to donate in honor of or in memory of loved ones to build the forest and create a memorial sign. The project has been well received and is well on its way. We hope to have many of the trees and the sign in place in the spring/summer of 2026.

Harriet Dively Service Grant

The Children and Youth Department decided to create a service grant available to Plymouth Church youth in 6th–12th grades. Students are invited to apply for grants of up to \$1,000 to plan and implement a community service project that addresses an issue they care about. This is a chance to make a lasting, positive difference in our community while developing valuable real-world skills in leadership, community engagement, project planning and execution, budgeting and time management. The first grant was awarded to Alli Szalay and Georgia Colby-Simpson to install a meditation garden, for their Girl Scout Silver Award project. Their project was to create a space that invites people to spend more time outside, embracing nature, which we know is good for their mental health. Look for the shaded spot under our locus tree for the bench surrounded by native perennials and enjoy!

Outdoor Classroom

We worked with Boy Scout Nishanth Knot from Plymouth Church's Troop 15, who is earning his Eagle Scout Award, to create a shaded outdoor classroom for our Sunday School programs. The sun sails will be up seasonally to provide shade, and we will be adding additional benches to accommodate more people. We invite other groups, the Scouts, and neighbors to put this new space to good use! Thank you, Nishanth and Troop 15!

By the Numbers

Sunday School

For the 2024-2025 school year, we had between 8 - 24 students attending each Sunday. The classes were split into lower level elementary for pre-k-3rd grades, an upper-level elementary class for kids in 4th-5th grades, and a middle school class for kids in 6th -8th grades. Senior high students were invited to Coffee and Christ monthly. We used a combination of curriculums including Holy Moly, Connect and Re:form.

Children's Church

For our 2025 summer Children's Church program we used a Shine curriculum called Path to Peace with Creation. It was held outdoors in the Children's Garden during worship on Sunday mornings. Kids of all ages, from pre-school through High School, participated, with 4-16 kids each Sunday. We held a Children's Garden Farmer's Market in September and accepted donations for the Cleveland Food Bank.

This year, we raised \$272.00.

Special Events and Programs

- **Ice Cream Social** - We celebrated the start of Sunday School by sharing approximately 100 ice cream sundaes after worship on Homecoming Sunday.
- **Bible Sunday** - We passed out 4 student Bibles to fourth graders, and 2 storybook Bibles to kindergartners.
- **OWL** – In 2025, we held a k/1 grade class with 4 participants
- **Fall Fiesta** - In 2024 we held a Fall Fiesta that included a Halloween party followed by a Day of the Dead celebration with dinner and a movie.
- **Advent Wreath Building** - In 2024, we made 10 advent wreaths.
- **Sugar Plum** - We had approximately 82 children making approximately 710 crafts
- **Heifer** - In 2024 we received \$862.00 in donations to Heifer.
- **Christmas Pageant** –We went back to our traditional Christmas pageant and had 25 participants in the cast and crew.
- **C & Y Sunday** – We had approximately 23 students participating in our annual C & Y Sunday. We also collected \$563 for the Souper Bowl of Caring, which was donated to the Cleveland Foodbank.
- **Valentine's Cookie Baking** – We invited Plymouth members to bake goodies at home and make Valentine's cards to drop off at the church. The Sunday school students also made cookies and cards and then put together goodie bags. We then had volunteers make deliveries of cookies and cards to 15 church members.
- **Jr Egg Hunt** – We had approximately 30 kids participate in our Jr. Easter Egg Hunt. We once again held the egg hunt on the lawn in front of the sanctuary. Thanks to the Plymouth Youth groups, for stuffing 400 eggs this year.

Thanks to our Volunteers and Nursery Staff

Special thank you to the many volunteers involved in C & Y: our Sunday School teachers Carolyn Jillson, Angela Zawada, Keith Szalay, Beth Baker, and Chelsea Stiles, Coffee & Christ leader Keith Szalay, OWL teacher Jeannie Clarkson, Sugar Plum volunteers, the Christmas Pageant volunteers and participants, the C & Y Department including Carolyn Jillson, Meghan Chrobak, Jeannie Clarkson, Gloria Sturghill, Janet Wilkens, Shelli Smith & Dillon Shipman. Many thanks to our dedicated nursery workers Karen Sommers & Jodi Moran.

Submitted by Leslie Szalay, Director of Christian Education

Director of Music and the Arts' Report

Dear Plymouth Church family,

I have now been among you for a little over a year. Now that I am a bit more settled in, I am pleased to report that Plymouth's music program remains strong and is growing.

The Plymouth Choir continues to lead worship with inspiring musical offerings each week, augmented by Sunday Choir faithful once a month. Earlier this year the Plymouth Chamber Singers made its debut. This is a sub-group of the choir anchored by the section leaders which specializes in 6 to 8 part a capella music. This ensemble, along with the Plymouth Ringers and Plymouth Folk Revival, appears during worship monthly. All of our ensembles continue to achieve new heights of musical excellence.

Guest instrumentalists grace our worship from time to time. On Maundy Thursday we were joined by members of the Opus 2016 string quintet and on Easter by the Forest City Brass.

At the beginning of this year we filled the extended vacancy in the tenor section leader and soloist position as long-time Plymouth ringer Joel Fenstermaker stepped up. In March organ scholar Lynna Bao presented a recital of solo piano music. In May I presented a recital of organ music for the Easter season. Both concerts took place under the aegis of Arts Plymouth. In May we said good-bye to Lynna as she finished her master's degree in piano performance at Cleveland Institute of Music and returned to Toronto to seek professional opportunities there. Choral scholar Henry Hunizker completed his service as Choral Scholar as he left for college.

Over the summer the Arts Plymouth committee reconvened to discuss ways to revive our dormant arts programming and community outreach. This discussion was fruitful and we anticipate that African-American organist, pianist, and composer will be joining us to lead our worship and present a concert of his music on a Sunday in the not-too-distant future.

In August, we bid a fond farewell to John Mills after many years of faithful service as bass section leader and soloist. As the new program year began in September we welcomed Jason Fuh, Maggie Johns, and Philip Sotak as our new bass section leader and soloist, organ scholar, and choral scholar respectively.

As of this writing we are undertaking a survey of the congregation to identify its favorite hymns. The results will be tabulated and announced in November and selections incorporated into worship shortly thereafter.

Looking to the future, conversations are continuing about establishing musical programming for children and youth. We also expect to undertake restoration work on all of our musical instruments (two organs, three pianos, and handbells) over the coming years.

Submitted by George A. Sargeant, Director of Music and the Arts

Adult Faith and Life Department

In January, AF&L sponsored Plymouth Church's second Pilgrimage to the Southern Border, in collaboration with the regional Heartland Conference UCC and The Good Shepherd UCC of Sahaurita, AZ.

In February, AF&L coordinated a Winter Clothing drive at Plymouth to benefit the Cleveland field office of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). AF&L also hosted a "Knowing Your Rights" presentation, during which an immigration attorney from Catholic Charities legal office gave a presentation for immigrants and supportive neighbors to prepare for potential encounters with immigration officials.

In March, AF&L hosted "Movin' Right Along, Part II: Immigration in Ohio," a continuation of last year's "Movin' Right Along" but with different content. Instead of enacting immigrants on the migrant trails to the southwestern border crossing, this year's "migrants" navigated the borders in our own communities here in Ohio, as potential deportees. There were several area agencies who shared information on supporting immigrants: Catholic Charities-Immigration Legal Services, ASIA-Asian Services in Action, Immigrant Connections, ITRF-InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Columbia and AMIS-Americans Making Immigrants Safe.

As interest in immigration issues continued to be strong at Plymouth, AF&L continued its investigation of the UCC's Immigrant Welcoming Congregation designation. In May, the committee coordinated a visit to "A Symposium on Immigration and Reconciliation."

In June, AF&L provided funding for two Plymouth congregants, Brian Shields and Ella Davis, to serve as Heartland Conference delegates at the UCC General Synod in Kansas City.

Over the summer, AF&L provided funding for the Church Library Resource Center (CLRC). Mendle and Charlene Adams have provided tremendous leadership and many hours of labor to launch the CLRC and make it a strong resource for Plymouth Church. An open house in September for the CLRC was well attended.

In August, AF&L provided funding for the annual Porch Talks at East View UCC.

In the fall, AF&L began planning for the third annual Pilgrimage to the Southern Border in January 2026.

Submitted by Ken Rogers, Chair

Plymouth Church – Anti-Racism and Equity (ARE)
Subcommittee of Adult Faith and Life (AF&L)

In February, ARE hosted a “Lead with Humility” presentation by Dr. James Knight. Dr. Knight’s presentation was attended by about 65 people, about half from outside of Plymouth. Attendees were very engaged, feedback has been very positive, and there is interest in a book club discussion.

The “Building Community Through Storytelling” workshop conducted by ARE in March was well-attended (over 50 participants, the majority from outside Plymouth) and feedback was extremely positive; many participants said words to the effect of “we need to do more of this.” In some cases, people from the same church community or organization didn’t know other members from their group were coming. The event helped cultivate ARE’s bonds with Racial Equity Buddies and the East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church by showing people ways to make connections.

In May, ARE hosted a screening and discussion of the movie “Rustin.”

In June, ARE coordinated with East View UCC to present a Juneteenth Gospel Concert at East View.

In July, ARE conducted a second training session on 1:1 conversations for Plymouth Church members.

In September, ARE coordinated with several area faith communities on a “Protecting Democracy” forum at Pilgrim Church UCC, which was well-attended and very positive. It was a good opportunity to be in touch with other people working on progressive issues.

ARE plans to host another Kwanzaa celebration in Fellowship Hall this coming December. ARE will also sponsor a reading of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January 2026.

Submitted by Ken Rogers, Committee Member

Building and Grounds Department Report

It was another active year for Building and Grounds with major repairs completed and extensive plans underway for future maintenance and improvements. I want to first thank our facilities manager Paul Holter for diligently overseeing the many aspects of our large, complex, and often challenging facilities. He has worked hard to ensure that projects are completed well and at reasonable cost. The B&G team also invests significant time reviewing and discussing the many decisions we face. In particular, I appreciate the work of Vice-Chair Jane Courteville, whose extensive knowledge and experience in construction has been very valuable as well as the other department members David Turner, Russell Lamb, and Roselyn Gauchet. I also thank the many church members who have offered suggestions and comments. To facilitate communications between the congregation and the B&G Department, we have a feedback form that is available online and through the office.

Several projects were completed this year, with progress made on others. New lights were installed in Room 102, the porch lights and the steeple light were replaced, and new shades now cover the south side of the Sanctuary. For the steeple support and Sanctuary waterproofing project, an engineer has reviewed the project, and we now have architectural drawings. We are currently seeking contractor bids.

Of course, new challenges continue to arise. Indoor air quality issues were discovered in lower-level classroom spaces. We are working to resolve the issue cost-effectively. The elevator was out of service for several weeks, and repairs were costly. The roof over the bell choir and choir rooms was repaired, and we are now obtaining quotes to fix the ceiling. Once that work is complete, we will move on to painting, carpeting, and other much-needed upgrades in those rooms.

Looking ahead, many urgent and less urgent projects will keep us busy in 2026 and beyond. As always, we welcome feedback and comments from all members of our church community.

Submitted by Steve Kaufman, Chair

Caring Department Report

This year, the caring ministry began by reviewing the 2024 outcomes as well as shortfalls. We used that survey data to give structure to our 2025 planning.

The Caring Department now has 5 active ministries:

- **Knitting Ministry**

Led by Jeannie Chaney- The team provided the community with Prayer shawls, Hats, mittens, and baby blankets during the cold months. The ministry encourages members of the congregation to join this very comforting team as they wrap the community with love through knitting.

- **Flower Ministry**

This ministry is open to all members of the congregation who are led to provide flowers as a form of remembrance, bereavement, or honoring family and friends.

- **Food Ministry**

This was paired with the Little Free Pantry at the carpark to provide non-perishable food to the wider community. The ministry also organizes and provides meals to congregation members experiencing difficulties or illness. This was Led by Lashawn Caldwell. There are also 2 different food ministries that Plymouth members contribute to:

- Cleveland Food Bank – led by Paul Qua
- Shaker Heights Hunger Center, led by Charlene Nevans

- **Pastoral Care Team**

Continues to support the ministers and members of the congregation.

- **Plymouth Lunch Club**

This program has become very vibrant under the leadership of Pastor Dillon Shipman, who has brought in guest speakers to rejuvenate the program; many thanks to Shelli Smith for always providing heartwarming meals for the functions.

Raising Visibility for Plymouth's Caring Ministries:

- We designed a monthly **Bulletin Board** highlighting various Caring activities, such as the Food ministry, Flower ministry, Homecoming Sunday, and more. Yaa designed posters, infographics, and sign-up cards to encourage the congregation to participate.

Memorial Receptions

Unfortunately, in 2025, a few members were called to Eternal Glory. Thanks to the compassionate nature of the congregation and council, who contributed their time and baked goodies, the receptions were organized to the expectations of the bereaved family. The receptions were also personalized to commemorate the departed one's life passions and interests through the décor.

We thank God for the lives of the dearly departed. We pray that their souls continue to rest in perfect peace!

Completed projects from 2024

- The reconstruction of The Free Little Pantry - Under the guidance of Pastor Dillion and his family. We are very grateful to them.

Submitted by Yaa Oforiwa Ansah, Chair

Children and Youth Department Report

The Children & Youth Department continues to offer a variety of seasonal events and educational programming in an effort to reach as many families as possible in our mission to provide religious education and faith formation to Plymouth's children and youth. Our goal is to create a supportive, engaging environment where families can be actively involved in the life of the church.

Leslie Szalay and Dillon Shipman are our staff liaisons. We have a reliable department, with Carolyn Jillson as Chair, Meghan Chrobak as Vice Chair, and Jeannie Clarkson, Gloria Sturghill, and Shelli Smith as faithful members.

In May we **celebrated Leslie Szalay's 10 years of service to Plymouth Church**. Leslie has contributed so much to our community over the past decade—bringing creativity, dedication, and deep care to her ministry. Her vision and energy have enriched the lives of Plymouth's children and youth. Her love for the Church, the community, and the environment shines through in everything she does. We are deeply grateful for her leadership and friendship.

The youth community of Plymouth Church is active and growing. The C&Y department organizes events for each season and holiday, including: Sunday School curriculum for four different age groups (K–12), Summer Children's Church in the Children's Garden, Our Whole Lives (O.W.L.) classes (K/1 in the spring and 4th–5th grade in the fall/winter), Ice Cream Social on Homecoming Sunday, Bible Sunday, Fall Fiesta, Advent Wreath Building, Sugar Plum Workshop, Christmas Pageant, Children & Youth Sunday, Valentine's Cookie Baking, the Junior Easter Egg Hunt, and a Youth Service Trip.

This year, the department was **proud to launch the Harriet Dively Service Grant Program**, made possible by the Harriet Dively Fund. This new initiative offers students in grades 6–12 the opportunity to apply for up to \$1,000 in funding to design and lead community service projects that make a positive impact. The first grant was awarded to Alli Szalay and Georgia Colby-Simpson, who created a peaceful Meditation Garden near the Memorial Garden, complete with a bench and native plantings. This program represents an exciting new way for our youth to live out their faith through action and service.

The **Sugar Plum Workshop** was held in person again in Fellowship Hall on the first Saturday in December. We are grateful to the many volunteers—including Julie Washington, Jane Corteville, Angela Zawada, Norma Adams, Nicole Lozier, Shelli Smith, Carolyn Jillson, and Leslie Szalay—who helped plan and organize this first workshop following Shelli's "retirement" from leading the event after more than 20 years.

We are busy preparing for this year's event and hope to see you on December 6th to kick off the Holiday season! As always, the workshop depends on volunteers to help decorate and supervise the crafts at each table, so please sign up if you're available.

In Gratitude

The work of the Children & Youth Department would not be possible without the many volunteers who give their time, energy, and creativity. We are deeply thankful to our Sunday School teachers, event helpers, Sugar Plum elves, nursery staff, O.W.L. teachers, youth group volunteers, chefs and bakers who provide our youth with meals, dish washers, service group chaperones, and everyone who contributes behind the scenes to make our programs successful. Your care and commitment truly make a difference.

We are also grateful for all of the children in our community who show up in their own ways and participate in our programs. It is a real joy to be part of their lives and watch them grow.

The C&Y department remains an active and vital part of the Plymouth Church community. We continue to support families and engage children and youth through education, fellowship, and service.

Submitted by Carolyn Jillson, Chair

Evangelism & Growth Department Report

Plymouth Church welcomed two new members this year in the spring (and additional members TBD this fall). The new members are Eric Higgins and Chelsea Swick-Higgins. Additionally, two sessions were held of Plymouth 101, an opportunity to learn about the church, membership and ways to get involved.

Evangelism and Growth also organized the church picnic and participation in Cleveland's Pride celebration. The church picnic was held on the lawn June 1 with food from Swensons food truck. Plymouth Church co-sponsored a booth with games at Pride, and a group of about two dozen people attended to march and show support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Furthermore, the team designed a T-shirt for church members to wear at events to increase awareness in the community about Plymouth.

Finally, E&G took pictures of church members on multiple occasions to assist with updating the church's member directory.

Submitted by Jonathan Kraft, Department Co-Chair

Giving Department Report

“Dreaming God’s Dream:
No Dream Gift Too Small, No Dream Too Big”

The Giving Department oversees the Annual Giving Campaign at Plymouth Church. This oversight is mandated by the Plymouth Church constitution and by-laws. The Giving Department 2025 Annual Campaign, team formally consists of Reginald Williams, Chair; Dylan Stiles, Vice-Chair; and Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster, Senior Minister, whose quiet guidance and powerful words on Sunday propel us forward.

We are eternally grateful for Brenna Minniear-Threatt, the Office & Communications Administrator, whose invaluable assistance enables the Giving Department to realize its objectives. We thank Pastor Dillon Shipman, whose energy and spirit informs our efforts. We thank Bethany and Ben Miller, Beth Baker, and Janet Wilkens for sharing their heartfelt stories of faith with the church as part of the weekly Ministry Moments. Plymouth church replenishes our spirit weekly, and their testimonies were a vivid reminder of that. We also thank Rev. Mendle Adams, last year’s Giving Chair, for his ongoing support, insight and wit. We thank in advance those volunteers who join us in this journey as the time nears to make our follow-up calls.

Finally, we thank YOU, our beloved church community, for your pledges. Past, present, and future. Your commitment to the mission of our church glorifies God, keeps the church doors open, and ripples outward to those in need.

Our 2025 Annual Giving Campaign goal is \$650,000, a 4% increase from last year. As of November 3, 2025, approximately \$337,879 has been pledged, bringing us to about 52% of our goal. We, the Giving Department, are grateful to witness the church stepping up and standing tall even in these difficult times. The 2025 Annual Giving Campaign theme is “Dreaming God’s Dream: No Gift Too Small, No Dream Too Big.” As we move through the campaign season, please consider the scripture found in 1 Peter 4:10:

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” (NRSV)

The Annual Giving Campaign generates approximately 60% of the church’s operating budget. In 2024, that amount exceeded \$625,000. Ten percent (10%) of pledges received is set aside for benevolences chosen by our members for community outreach and justice ministries. The balance is underwritten by: i) entities that utilize our facilities for a fee payable to the church; and ii) the Plymouth Church Foundation, which provides significant support to our operating budget and for designated purposes.

Please join me in Dreaming God’s Dream of a better world and of a Plymouth Church that plays an ever more important part in getting the world there. Thank you for your stewardship.

Submitted by Reginald D. Williams, Chair

Worship Department Report

The Worship Department has had an active year!

Ordination Update

There are three Plymouth members in discernment for ordination: Dillon Shipman, Danny DeMarco, and J. Atlee Horner. Dillon's progress has been delayed due to administrative issues at the Association Office, but this should be accelerated in the next few months. He is licensed to allow him to administer the sacraments. Danny DeMarco is training/interning in clinical pastoral education and Jay continues to serve at Pilgrim Congregational UCC.

Music

Plymouth's music program became revitalized under George Sargeant's leadership. Lynna Bao was our organ scholar in the spring, and we welcomed Maggie Johns this fall in the same position. We said goodbye to John Mills, our long-time bass section choir leader, and welcomed Jason Fuh as his successor. The tenor choir leader role was previously held by Nate Bachofsky, who was replaced by Joel Fenstermaker. We are so grateful for the Plymouth Choir, the Plymouth Ringers, and the Plymouth Folk Revival for their enhancement of our worship experience. Various guest and Plymouth member musicians have also shared their musical gifts with us. A hymn survey is underway this fall for members to submit their 3 favorite hymns for consideration in future services.

Streaming

Jacob Rogers continues to provide our streaming service that has had some challenges this year. He is improving this system for those worshipping remotely since we know that this is an important link to Plymouth.

Advent & Christmas

We hosted Blue Christmas at noon with Heights Christian Church and in the evening for the wider local faith community. This service is rotated among area churches and will be held elsewhere in 2025.

The Children's Pageant will be held in the afternoon on Christmas Eve, and the Service of Lessons and Carols will follow at 9:00.

Children and Youth Involvement

Children and Youth Sunday was highlighted by youth serving communion, ushering and greeting. We welcomed Confirmants and enjoyed an intergenerational service.

Ash Wednesday and Easter Services

We held midday and evening services with Heights Christian for Ash Wednesday. The sanctuary was decorated with butterflies at Easter, and we discontinued using the flower cross, as it was too difficult to set up and maintain. Instead, we had an abundance of flowers on the altar to celebrate the day.

Summer Services

We moved to the Chapel for July and August with an earlier service start time. We are glad that Austin McMaken was again our sound engineer who managed our outdoor services. During Pastor Matt's sabbatical from June-August, Dillon led many of the summer services. We also were blessed with guest clergy from our own congregation: Mendle Adams, Danny DeMarco, J. Atlee Horner, and Andy Lang. Other guest ministers were Heights Christian's Kate Gillooly, Laurie Tenhave-Chapman and Rabbi Yael Dadoun from Congregation

Mishkan Or. We increased the seating in the chapel due to interest with our varied clergy. Huge thanks to Dillon for his worship leadership during the summer.

Communion

Yaa Ansah and her daughters, Beryl-Bethany Ansah and Denisse Ansah, continued to coordinate communion and we are grateful for their continued involvement.

Greeters

Led by Marcia Wittenbrook, this effort is vital for newcomers and members to feel welcome in our home. We appreciate all who volunteered for this ministry.

Liturgists

Thank you to Brenna Minniear-Threatt who coordinated the liturgists who read the call to worship and the scripture.

Ushers

We are grateful for the usher teams led by Beth and Chris Karr, Andrew Cleminshaw and Kendalle Cobb, Paul Qua, and C.J. Keyes/Marcus Henry. We said farewell to C.J. Keyes and welcomed Marcus Henry as the new team leader.

Congregational Participation

Many members and guests who haven't been specifically named participated to enhance our worship services. Plymouth is so very blessed that they shared their talents and time to make such meaningful contributions.

Submitted by Christine Bretz, Chair

Partnership & Service Department Report

Serving as the 2025 Chair of the Partnership and Service Committee at Plymouth Church has been an incredible honor and deeply rewarding experience. I've learned so much through my work alongside Zachary Lewis (Vice Chair), Pastor Matt, and Pastor Dillon during this first year. Representing our beloved church while connecting with inspiring individuals in our community, who are making a real difference in the lives of those in need, has been both humbling and fulfilling.

This year we focused on the following areas of concern in our community: Unhoused and Disenfranchised, Immigration, Hunger Relief, the LGBTQIA+ Community, the Environment, and Youth Leadership.

This year, Plymouth Church was able to provide total funding in the P & S budget of \$62,000. With an additional \$5,000 from designated gifts going to the Open and Affirming Coalition. All \$62,000 will be distributed to a total of 19 organizations. This year, we welcomed and granted funding to five new organizations: AMIS (Americans Making Immigrants Safe), Brookdale Orchard, We Think 4 A Change, Shaker Heights Youth Center, and the Cleveland School of Dance.

Whenever possible, we attempted to fully grant an organization the requested amount. However, that was not always possible, and we made an effort to provide some support within our budgetary limits.

Table of Approved Grants for Fiscal 2025

UCC: Living Water Association	\$14,000
UCC: Heartland Conference	\$ 1,000
UCC: National Setting: Wider Mission	\$ 6,500

Local Non-Profit Organizations

Community Service Alliance	\$3,000	Serving the Unhoused
DNA Rising	\$3,000	Serving the Unhoused
Fostering Hope Ohio	\$2,500	Foster Care
Haven Home	\$2,500	Unhoused (Women and Children)
Hunger Network	\$3,000	Food Rescue
Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries	\$2,500	Serving the Unhoused
Nature Center at Shaker Lakes	\$1,000	Nature Preserve
Radical Hospitality of Cleveland	\$2,500	Serving the Unhoused
Cleveland School of Dance	\$500	Youth Leadership

Brookdale Orchard	\$2,500	Social//Economic
Shaker Heights Youth Center	\$2,500	Youth Leadership
Thea Bowman Center	\$2,500	Serving the Unhoused
ONA Coalition UCC	\$5,000	LGBTQIA+
Family Promise of Greater Cleveland	\$2,500	Serving the Unhoused
Frontline Service	\$2,500	Serving the Unhoused
We Think 4 A Change	\$2,500	HIV/AIDS
AMIS	\$5,000	Immigration

The committee hopes that our church will continue partnering with these organizations throughout the year. Many of them have expressed a desire to engage more closely with our congregation. Some have asked to visit Plymouth and speak directly with us, while others have invited us to send delegates to learn more about their work firsthand. These opportunities reflect the ongoing need for volunteers and highlight how we can continue to be allies to both these organizations and the broader community they are striving to improve.

Submitted by Danny DeMarco, Committee Chair

Personnel Committee Report

We started the year completing a comprehensive revision of Plymouth's Employee Reference Guide. This was a significant undertaking which included adding several new policies and procedures via the recommendation of a third-party labor lawyer who reviewed our completed document.

In addition, at the beginning of summer, in coordination with the Building and Grounds Committee, we commissioned a Facility Study to determine if Plymouth could manage its facility and grounds more efficiently and cost-effectively.

To help find the answer, we brought in an experienced external consultant with both church facility expertise and a strong background in property management. We then created a detailed questionnaire to survey twelve houses of worship across Cleveland's suburban east side—chosen for their similar (or comparable) size to Plymouth.

Seven churches responded with valuable insights, and five shared in-depth details across key areas:

- Facility Demographics – Building age, size, and how their spaces are used.
- Staffing Models – Paid staff vs. volunteers, and how reporting structures work.
- Use of Subcontractors – Who handles day-to-day facility tasks.
- Tenant Relationships – How they manage paying and non-paying tenants.
- Cost Analysis – What it really costs to manage their facility (excluding capital campaigns).

The findings of this study prompted some additional surveying, and the results, takeaways and recommendations will be shared in detail with Council and church members before year's end.

Finally, when needed, we offer advice to our Senior Minister and Church Council leadership on staff alignment and service levels to optimize their effectiveness for Plymouth's many stakeholders.

The Personnel Committee:

John Markt, Chair

Jennifer Markworth

Tommy Sutton-Lovett

Jane Underwood

Submitted by John Markt, Chair

Plymouth Church Leadership Roster for 2026

This roster represents the elected and appointed leadership of the church. It assumes that the recommendations of the Nominating Committee (the nominees for the fall 2025 Annual Meeting and those nominated for appointment by Council) will be accepted. It is included in the Annual Report to add to that report's comprehensive portrait of the congregation and not to preempt the election or appointment process.

Note: Numbers in parentheses denote that this will be the person's 2nd, 3rd Etc. term. Years denote when the term expires for terms that are longer than one year.

*Key: B&G: Building & Grounds; C&Y: Children & Youth; E & G: Evangelism & Growth;
P&S: Partnerships and Service*

POSITION	FINAL
President	Russell Lamb
Vice President	Ben Beckman
Secretary	Karen Kolendo
Treasurer	Jennifer Gerard (4)
Asst. Treasurer	Linda Sempliner (3)
Member at Large	Shelli Smith (2)
Member at Large	Jeannie Clarkson (2)
Member at Large	Mary Smith (3)
Member at Large	Danny Colvin (2)
Member at Large	Charlie Miller
Adult Faith & Life Chair	Ken Rogers (3)
Adult Faith & Life Vice Chair	Charlene Nevans (2)
Building & Grounds Chair	David Turner
Building & Grounds Vice Chair	Jane Corteville (3)
Caring Chair	Bethany Miller
Caring Vice Chair	Adrienne Brockway
Children & Youth Chair	Carolyn Jillson (5)
Children & Youth Vice Chair	Meghan Chrobak (2)
Evangelism & Growth Chair	Lucas Hershberger
Evangelism & Growth Vice Chairs	Kristi Krueger and Jon O'Grady
Giving Chair	Lalana Green
Giving Vice Chair	Nicole Lewis
Partnerships & Service Chair	Danny DeMarco (2)
Partnerships & Service Vice Chair	Zach Lewis (3)
Worship Chair	Christine Bretz (2)
Worship Vice Chair	Robert Woolfrey (2)
Living Water Rep.	Faye Gary (5)
Living Water Rep.	Gloria Sturghill (2)
Finance Committee	Russell Lamb (President)
Finance Committee	David Turner (Chair of B&G)

Finance Committee	Jennifer Gerard (Treasurer)
Finance Committee	Lalana Green (Giving)
Finance Committee	John Markt (Chair of Personnel)
Finance Committee	Ben Beckman (Vice President)
Finance Committee	Linda Sempliner (Asst. Treasurer)
Finance Committee Member at Lg	Paul Qua (2)
Finance Committee Member at Lg	Marcia Wittenbrook (3)
Foundation (2026)	Fred Stueber
Foundation (2027)	Mary Bright
Foundation (2028)	Ray Graves
Foundation (2029)	Brian Grube
Foundation (2030)	Reggie Williams
Nominating (2026)	Joann Hall
Nominating (2026)	Margaret Reuthinger
Nominating (2026)	Gloria Sturghill
Nominating (2027)	Ella Davis
Nominating (2027)	Sandy Nimrick
Nominating (2027)	Peter Sweeney
Nominating (2028)	Happy Bengston
Nominating (2028)	Marcus Henry
Nominating (2028)	Ben Miller
Personnel (2026)	John Markt
Personnel (2027)	Tommy Sutton-Lovett
Personnel (2027)	Jane Underwood
Personnel (2028)	Jennifer Markworth
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Chris Karr (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Paul Qua (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Betsy Kaufman (2027)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	David Turner (2028)
Pastoral Relations for Rev. Wooster	Kristin Sweeney (2028)
Pastoral Relations for Shipman	Rick Johnson (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Shipman	Norma Storer (2026)
Pastoral Relations for Shipman	Betsy Stueber (2027)
Pastoral Relations for Shipman	Alissa Wible (2027)
Pastoral Relations for Shipman	Lisa Hunziker (2028)