

The Herald

Plymouth UCC Dodgeville

April 2025



OUR VISION "To be a welcoming and thriving Christian Community, living our faith through reflection and action, while remaining grounded in God's love."

OUR MISSION "To grow and share our faith, worship God, and follow Jesus Christ in the ways of love, peace, compassion, justice and the nurturing of God's creation."



Greetings!

First, I want to thank all of you for the warm welcome I have received as your pastor here at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ. From my very first meeting in the call process, I felt there could be wonderful opportunities in mutual ministry with this church family. It feels like a great match, and I look forward to the blessings God has planned for us together.

Next, I want to share a bit about myself, especially for those I have yet to meet. I am a lifelong resident of Wisconsin, born and raised in La Crosse, but South Central Wisconsin has been home for over 30 years. I have two amazing children, a son, Nicholas, who lives in Florida and a son, Alexander, who with his wife recently moved to California. I joke with them that they have become a math problem for me—one is two hours behind me in time zones the other is one hour ahead. I spent the first portion of my career in media and communications and then moved into health and human services where I spent some years in various administrative roles with Wisconsin's Long Term Care programs. My faith background has been in the United Methodist Church where, over time, I grew deeper in my faith until becoming a licensed pastor in 2018-2019. I served multiple United Methodist churches before pausing ministry for a time to assist my former spouse who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. I and our children continue to support her in the ways that we can as that illness progresses.

I have been eager to return to part-time ministry and based on the wonderful clergy and faith families I have met and served alongside over the years in the United Church of Christ, I decided to explore pastoral opportunities in the UCC in this part of the state. I am so excited to have had God guide me here to Plymouth. My hope each week is to explore together how God's word applies to our lives today.

These are challenging times for churches across all denominations, but I believe that together we can discern the path God has for this great church family. I look forward to getting to know you all in the days ahead.

Blessings as we live our faith,

Pastor Michael

Church Office:

Office Administrator Hours

Tuesday & Thursday

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Wednesday

8 am - 2:00 pm

Pastor Hours:

Tuesday 10 am - 2:00 pm

In office

Thursday 10 am— noon

Remote

Pastor:

Michael Hammond

608-935-5727

Emergency 608-636-0357

puccdodgeville@gmail.com

Office Administrator:

Mary Haag

608-935-5727

plymouth@mhtc.net

Organist:

Marilyn Dunn

Faith Explorers

The following article provides an overview of the long-standing Faith Explorers group—its background, discussion themes, structure, and information on how to participate.

Currently, we have about 10 active members who meet by Zoom every Wednesday at 11:00 am. It's easy to join – just send your email address to wearlbarnes@gmail.com or davepearson3973@gmail.com and you'll receive a link to the Zoom meeting with information about what we're discussing that week. Dave Pearson is the moderator who acknowledges people who indicate they wish to speak. Conversations are friendly and flow smoothly.

Faith Explorers was an outgrowth of a Bible study group which was started by former Plymouth Pastor Todd Smith-Lippert about 15 to 20 years ago. After his departure, the group continued to meet on its own once a week, discussing books, videos or even movies that interested us. Our earliest members were Ralph Martin, Vince and Jane Kavaloski, Dave and Gretchen Pearson, Anne Bachner, Jude Clayton, Julie Weiskercher, Earl and Shirley Barnes.

As we found ourselves drawing closer and closer together, we delighted in the exploration of new ideas and began to feel safe in revealing our beliefs and doubts about Biblical and spiritual matters.

Some of our early favorite books were Marcus Borg and John Dominick Crossan's Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time and The Last Week, Matthew Fox's Original Blessings, Steve Paulson's Atoms and Eden and Bishop Spong's Unbelievable. Life-long Plymouth member Ralph Martin was one of our most dedicated and questioning members, and when he moved to Crestridge our group met there for several years until he passed away.

One of our most memorable experiences was meeting twice via Zoom with John Dominick Crossan, an internationally known expert on Jesus and his times. Crossan and his wife were long time friends of our Faith Explorers member Julie Weiskercher who made the arrangements.

During the Covid years, we began meeting on Zoom which allowed people living far from Dodgeville to participate. Currently, we have members who live in Mineral Point, Spring Green, Madison, Montello, the Chicago suburbs and New York City, as well as Dodgeville.

Generally, we discuss books that touch on religious or spiritual matters but often stray into the subjects of history, philosophy or other secular topics. Some of the recent books we've particularly enjoyed are The Cave and the Light by Arthur Herman, The Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Des-

Usher/Reader/Communion

April

5 - Chuck and Jill
12 - Steve and Jenny
19 - Mark and Lisa
26 - Rick and Mary

May

3 - Steve and Jenny
10 - Chuck and Jill
17 - Mark and Lisa
24 - Rick and Mary
31 - Steve and Jenny

Joyful Noise

April

5, 12 - Friendship Center
19, 26 - Feeding Friends

May

3, 10, 17 - Mini Pantry
24 - Strengthen the Church
31 - Mini Pantry

Fellowship

April

5 - Easter
12 - Stellick
19 - Pepelea
26 -

May

3 -
10 - Mother's Day
17 - Pepelea
24 -
31 -

Watch Worship online via our
Facebook page,

Sun-
at 10



days,
am.

mond Tutu, and The Bonobo and the Atheist by Frans de Waal. We read a chapter a week which usually is about 35 pages. So, it is not too demanding time wise.

Currently we are discussing a new book, Why We Remember by Charan Ranganath, which claims that our memories drive our choices in life and that it is the prefrontal cortex that is largely responsible for our remembering or forgetting. We found the book to be quite readable but wondered about its claims. Steve shared an interesting story about the fallibility of memory when it comes to jury trials.

If this is a group that you might find interesting, please let us know.

Earl and Dave

Meeting Minutes

To keep our congregation informed, we'll be including brief summaries from each Church Council meeting in our newsletters. These highlights will share key discussions and decisions. Full meeting minutes are available by request after they're approved at the following Council meeting.

No matter where you are on your journey, there's always a place for you here. We hope these Council updates help you feel connected.

Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ

Congregational Meeting

December 14, 2025

The meeting was called to order by Moderator Lisa Pepelea at 11:10 a.m. 12 members were present.

The proposed 2026 Budget was reviewed. Steve Pieroni moved to accept the Budget, Rick Stellick seconded. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 11:20.

Submitted by Mary Stellick, Clerk

CHURCH COUNCIL

Moderator

Lisa Pepelea

Treasurer

Steve Pieroni

Clerk

Mary Stellick

At Large council members

Ross Bettner

Denise Whitish

Chuck Roethe

Meetings

On April 21, the Diaconate and the Council will meet at 6:00 pm and 7:00 pm.

Emergency Contact for Pastor Michael For urgent pastoral needs, you may reach Pastor Michael at **608-636-0357**. Please direct all non-emergency calls to the church office. We appreciate your help.

Newsletter submissions are due the Sunday following council meetings.

Plymouth UCC Council Meeting Summary

December 17, 2025

Members present: Lisa Pepelea, Moderator; Steve Pieroni, Treasurer; Mary Stellick, Clerk; at large members Chuck Roethe, Shirley Barnes (via phone), Pastor Katya Ouchakof

Absent: Denise Whitish

Guest: Rev. Rachel Bauman, Associate Conference Minister

The meeting was called to order by Moderator Lisa Pepelea at 5:00. Pastor Katya read a selection from the book To Bless the Space Between Us.

Rachel Bauman handed out a PowerPoint (Search Team Part 2) to review the next steps in our search process. She shared resources on the Conference website and ways to get candidates. If someone contacts us directly, we are to give them Rachel's contact information.

The minutes from the November meeting were approved.

Old business:

1. Our budget passed! The instrument maintenance line needs to be updated to \$1000. Mary moved and Steve seconded to move the additional \$200 from that line to Marilyn's salary as a COLA, to increase Mary Haag's PTO by one day (her request), and to look at an increase for Nicole in October. Motion carried.
2. Finalize MOU/Rental agreement with M&M – we discussed M&M requested changes and drafted a response to ask that both acknowledge each other on each other's home page of their website, and follow each other on any Social Media that both use. Steve moved to accept the revised version from M&M with our requested changes. Chuck seconded. Motion carried.
3. Pastor Gus is expected to sign contract to provide regular pulpit supply on Sunday.

The Pastor's Report and Committee reports available on request.

New Business:

1. It was agreed to schedule the Annual Congregational Meeting for January 25th, 2026, after worship. Reports are due to Mary H. by Monday 1/5.

Need to include slate of officers including Shirley's replacement on Council. Mary S. agreed to serve another term as Clerk. Candidates were suggested for the at-large seat and Chuck offered to contact them.



Help stock the **Little Free Pantry**. Supplies are running low, and our shelves are looking bare. Shelf-stable, unexpired items—especially proteins, cereals, and pull-tab canned goods—go a long way in supporting neighbors who rely on this resource.



Have you moved or changed your phone or email? Please let the church office know so we can keep our records up to date. Call **935-5727** or email **plymouth@mhtc.net**—we appreciate your help in staying connected!

2. Discussion about Trustee Committee – The committee has not been meeting and is losing their committee chair. Do we want to keep this committee going or have the Council be in charge of building matters? It will be put on the Annual Meeting Agenda. Steve agreed to be the contact person as needed for the time being.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:04. Next meeting January 21, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

Submitted by Mary Stellick, Clerk

Plymouth UCC Council Meeting Summary

January 21, 2026

Present: Lisa Pepelea, Moderator; Steve Pieroni, Treasurer; Mary Stellick, Clerk;
at large members Chuck Roethe, Denise Whitish

Absent: Shirley Barnes

The meeting was called to order by Lisa at 4:05 pm.

The minutes from the December council meeting and the email chains were reviewed and approved.

Old business:

Nicole updated the budget/payroll to increase Marilyn's pay by \$200 and add an extra paid day off for Mary H.

The Annual Report was reviewed and revised for Mary H. to send out as soon as possible.

Chuck contacted Ross Bettner, who agreed to be nominated as the at-large member to replace Shirley Barnes, whose term expires.

Mary moved and Denise seconded to provide a key card for Bridget Dickler, who is with the Recovery Group. Motion carried.

There was no Pastor's Report. Committee Reports are attached.

New Business:

Last week's interview with a potential pastor was discussed. Lisa will contact him with some additional questions. Steve will contact his references. We were sent the Profile of another candidate and we agreed to interview her. Lisa will contact her and try to schedule it for next week.

The Call agreement and Half-Time Pastor Position Description documents were discussed. Pastor Rachel made a couple of recommendations for the job description. The consensus was to make the suggested changes on the job description and approve the Call agreement as written, with final approval after negotiation with the called pastor.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:50pm. Next Meeting Wednesday February 11, time TBD.

Mary Stellick, Clerk

Plymouth UCC Council Meeting Summary

March 18, 2026

Present: Lisa Pepelea, Moderator; Steve Pieroni, Treasurer; Mary Stellick, Clerk;

at large members Chuck Roethe, Denise Whitish;

Michael Hammond, Pastor

Absent: Ross Bettner

The meeting was called to order by Lisa at 7:03. Pastor Michael was officially welcomed and he offered a prayer.

The minutes from the January council meeting and the two email votes were approved.

Old business:

1. Nicole is making the change for Marilyn's cost of living increase and will include back pay from start of January.
2. ICE raid protocol - Lisa made a sign with contact info to be placed inside of the doors to "private rooms" for approval, and have a training document that, upon approval, will be given to Steve (our contact person) and M&M for their contact person and general knowledge, and Mary H. for her information and to be kept in the church office. Steve moved and Denise seconded to approve the sign and training document. Motion carried.

No Pastor's Report, Committee reports are available upon request.

New Business

1. Lisa will check with Ross as to his schedule and Pastor Michael will determine his office hours before setting a regular monthly meeting time.
2. Issues with church being left unlocked and sanctuary being used/left in disorder outside of worship (has happened twice so far).
It was agreed to:
 - Send notice to all building users reminding them not to use or exit through the sanctuary without approval.
 - Keep sanctuary door near overflow room closed and post sign reminding building users to not enter the sanctuary unless their event was specifically scheduled there and not to exit through the sanctuary.
 - Post a sign inside the vestibule reminding people not to exit through that door but to use the Main Street glass door.

3. Manual on Local Church - Zoom lectures through the Conference for anyone interested, will include in Announcements
4. Use of Plymouth during emergency situations – Mary moved and Denise seconded to continue the agreement with the County Emergency Management to be listed as a location for use. Motion carried.
5. New M&M sign design – Denise moved and Steve seconded to approve the design for a Merrimac & Main sign to be placed to the left of the Main St. entrance. Motion carried.
6. It was agreed by consensus, for transparency and clarity, to send out the revised 2025 budgeted vs. actual expense report when corrected.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:20.

Next Meeting: April, date and time TBD

Submitted by Mary Stellick, Clerk



Come meet Pastor Michael for Worship. If our church has been meaningful to you, share it with someone who might need a community right now. Your invitation could be the one that helps them feel at home.



Plans are underway to open our church to the community for a monthly time of quiet prayer and meditation. When we have more details on days and times, we'll share the specific days and times. This will be a peaceful opportunity for anyone to sit in our beautiful sanctuary, breathe deeply, and spend a few moments in prayer or reflection.



This Sunday, as we celebrate the beauty of God's creation, we'll be doing a little caring for it too. After fellowship, everyone is invited to stay for a gentle Garden Clean-Up. Come as you are — or slip into some gardening clothes — and join in the joy of tending the earth together.