



## Summary of Written Responses

### Report to the congregation from the Deacons October 12, 2017

Last August, following Rev. Carla Bailey's announced departure from the Church, the Deacons held several Listening Sessions. These weekly gatherings were held to give members of the congregation the opportunity to ask questions and express their feelings and concerns. Seven sessions were held, and attendance ranged from approximately 200 on August 13th to 25 on September 24th. All sessions were recorded and a summary of the Listening Sessions is provided at the end of this document.

Along with the Listening Sessions, the congregation was also asked to respond to three questions in writing to better clarify the priorities that members of the congregation have for the future of our church. Below are the three questions with a summary of the most prevalent responses to the questions listed in order of most frequent to less frequent. This summary is based upon the written responses of over 150 members of the congregation. *Please note that this is a summary of responses and therefore reflects differing opinions within the congregation.* Copies of all responses received by the September 24<sup>th</sup> deadline will be made available on request, with names deleted to respect the confidentiality of those who responded.

Given the number of responses, we consider this summary to be a good qualitative understanding of how the congregation feels about the Church and our priorities for the future. This information will be very useful for the Deacons and Leadership Council as we plan for the future and will help with the transition of ministerial leadership. We also recognize the pain that some in our congregation feel after Rev. Carla Bailey's departure and wanted to provide a vehicle for people to express themselves to the Deacons. The Leadership Council will supplement the qualitative responses to these three questions with a more quantitative survey. A second survey, very different in nature, will give more data to help the congregation better understand ourselves and our hopes for the future of the church. Watch for more information about this survey early in November.

We appreciate the time and effort that so many people took to respond to these questions. We look forward to our work together to build the future of our church.

#### **Question #1: What is so essential at Plymouth Church that it needs to be kept?**

Community outreach / social justice

- Living our faith through social action

Clergy leadership excellence

- Quality of preaching
- High quality of associate ministers
- Pastoral care

Music excellence

- Celebrating our connection to the divine through the arts

Welcoming community based on acceptance / inclusivity / openness

- Focus on building community through small groups

Progressive theology with acceptance of many faith traditions

Spiritual support & exploration

- Focus on religious / spiritual education for all ages
- Children's ministry

**Question #2: What is so problematic at Plymouth Church that it needs to be addressed?**

Church leadership needs to communicate better with the congregation

- Lack of transparency

Need to address how to improve current church governance structure

- Governance runs like business not church
- Congregation needs more input into major decisions
- New governance is working well
- Gratitude for Deacons for their hard work and dedication
- New governance structure is unnecessarily complex
- Deacons have too much power
- Operating boards should have more power
- Others felt confident this departure was handled well.

Need to address divisions within congregation created by Rev. Carla Bailey's departure, which some feel was handled badly by the Deacons.

- Others felt confident this departure was handled well.

Need to address structure of ministerial leadership

- Current structure places too much burden on senior minister
- Should shift to team ministry from current patriarchal senior minister structure
- It was unfair to call a new senior minister at same time as the implementation of a new governance structure
- Clergy should be more racially diverse

Need to address ongoing decline in attendance on Sunday mornings / size of new member classes/ aging of congregation

- Need to build membership with focused growth strategy
- Need to focus more on young people and families

Church needs to be more fiscally responsible

- Declining attendance / revenue/ endowment
- Need to find tenant for education wing
- Need to lower operating costs—too many ministers

Formality of main Sunday service needs to be addressed to be more open to visitors

- Current music program doesn't resonate for visitors—too performance-based / not accessible
- Need to be open to change & new ideas

### **Question #3: What are 3 things that the Plymouth's congregation should be doing going forward?**

Need to deal with the anger / grief felt by many in the congregation over Rev. Carla Bailey's departure

- Trust in the leadership of the Church needs to be re-established

Deacons and other leaders of the church need to communicate better and more often with the congregation

- Congregation wants to better understand governance structure and have more input

Need to focus on a plan for the future role of the senior minister

- Congregation is split on the need for an outside interim minister
- Focus should be on building team ministry structure
- Congregation and lay leadership have a responsibility to care for our ministers & staff
- Recruit dynamic younger clergy

Should focus on building community / connection among members of the Church by promoting small groups

- Congregation needs to be more respectful of differing opinions / politics
- Members should be more focused on serving (coffee hour, Third Sunday meal, etc.) not merely attending church services

Need growth strategy to build membership

- Church needs to be more welcoming to visitors
- Market to growing number of downtown Minneapolis residents
- Focus on engaging youth and young families by strengthening church school & youth programs

Need to be open to change in main Sunday worship service

- Less structured & patriarchal
- Broader music offerings

Continue to offer programs to promote spiritual transformation & growth

- Continue to offer alternative worship opportunities

Continue to focus on social justice issues

- Racial justice and white privilege of congregation needs to be addressed

**Conclusion:** This survey is only one tool to get a sense of alignment and direction from members of our congregation during this difficult leadership transition. The significant number of responses from the congregation indicates a strong commitment to the Church and our future. We believe these responses will help to ground the Leadership Council, Deacons and our ministerial team to plan for continued healing, a transformational transition plan and guide future programming and growth initiatives.

### **Your Plymouth Church Deacons**

**Claire Kolmodin, Moderator; Peg Birk; Pat Born; Ed Curtiss; Katie Dillon; Catherine Shreves; Brian Siska, Clerk; Jim van Iwaarden, Treasurer; Greg Zoidis**

## **Summary of Listening Sessions**

### **Report to the congregation from the Deacons**

#### **October 2017 *Flame***

During August and September, there was an outpouring of dialogue from the members of our church. The Deacons hosted a number of open listening sessions to hear from members, in addition to the many emails, phone calls and in-person conversations we have had. There has been much to learn from one another and we have found incredible value in the way so many of you have come together in care and concern for our church. Truly, we are humbled by the passion and dedication to our church that we have seen. As much as we are a congregation of varying beliefs and expressions of spirituality, so are we a congregation of varying opinions and approaches to the transition we have been going through as a congregation since the announcement that Rev. Carla Bailey would be leaving our church. We want to share back with you what we have heard and how that will shape the way we move forward.

First and foremost we have heard that many members were surprised, shocked and felt blindsided by the initial communication announcing Rev. Carla Bailey's separation. This was magnified by the tone of the communication, which did not fully lay out the process by which the separation agreement was reached, and was lacking in warmth and sensitivity to the topic of the separation. For that we are sorry. We have heard that many members of the congregation were incredibly sad to say goodbye to Rev. Carla Bailey and some are hurting and grieving and will be for some time. For some members, trust in the Deacons has been broken.

The Deacons' explanation of the process and discernment that led to the separation is not enough to satisfy the confusion and anger that some members feel, and while this is not something we can remedy it is important to hold space for it. Some members expressed that they believe the process should have been more open or that there should have been a congregational meeting related to Rev. Carla Bailey's ministry. Some feel that the Deacons overstepped our role and made decisions that were not consistent with the congregational way. Others support the Deacons' process and the way in which it was handled. Likewise, for some the new governance structure does not seem to be working, while others see this as a positive illustration of the governance model at work—though most agree that there should be some adjusting of our governance based on what we have learned over the last couple of years.

Transparency and communication are themes that have risen up throughout the conversations we have had. Our meetings, processes, and even who we Deacons are and how to contact us have been mysteries to many members. One of the primary roles of the Deacons is to be in ongoing conversation with the congregation, and it is clear that we have work to do on this. We recently have welcomed member guests to our regular twice-monthly meetings and have enjoyed an opportunity for members to hear our conversations and see more of how we work as a group.

In addition to the process and the Deacons work, we heard many of you reflecting and asking questions about our church as a whole. How do our church culture, our norms, our congregational affiliation and other aspects of our organization impact how a Senior Minister can fit into our church? What work should we be doing to understand who we are? Are there consistencies with or deviations from what is happening within Protestant churches overall? These conversations need to be central as we look to the future. We echo the sentiment that has been expressed by many members that the way in which members have spoken to one another openly and with respect during these sessions is vitally important.

*continued*

There is reflection work to be done on not only the process that we went through but how we as a church approach our work. Something we have heard from many of you is that we are not a corporation, we are a church. And while management of a large organization must be done with integrity, we cannot separate out what makes Plymouth a unique and visionary spiritual community. Our promise to you is that the work we have in front of us to grieve, heal, and be in community as we move forward will reflect our dedication to living into our covenant with one another and with God.

**Your Plymouth Church Deacons**