

THE YEAR
2008–2009
AT PLYMOUTH CHURCH



Coming Together

This annual report tells the story of a living and growing community of faith. It is one chapter in the living history of this congregation. Words and numbers bear witness to our growing vitality and spiritual health.

The literature on the so-called “vital signs” of a healthy church is vast and varied. But there is agreement on some common “vital signs.” Here are a few of them that describe our congregation.

A positive experience of worship—Like all churches, we differ about some of the details of our worship, but I have the strong impression that our worship together is one of our strengths. We sing well, listen intently and are inspired by our Sunday morning experience at Plymouth. Sunday mornings we love God with all our selves. Or, to put it in modern language, our worship is a “spiritual” experience.

A growing sense of community/strong relationships—A common theme runs through my conversations with Plymouth members old and new. What attracts people to and keeps them at Plymouth is the strong sense of community that is the center of our life together. Coffee Hour after church is truly a continuation of the worship experience at Plymouth. Conversations on the street and, as the New Testament puts it, “from house to house” bear witness to growing relationships and love of neighbor that characterizes the Christian faith.

Outward focus—We are learning to serve our neighbors near and far. The Christian Help Committee is working hard and strategically to implement the Othmer task force’s recommendations for use of the Othmer outreach endowment. We continue to focus on and support the Mission School of Hope in Cameroon. We had more volunteers than Habitat for Humanity could handle for the projects in which we participated. We sent nearly 100 letters to congress in support of strategic government participation in combating world hunger.

Strategic focus and purpose—Our congregation is gathered around Jesus’ Great Command to love God and our neighbors. Our leadership is moving toward strategic planning for the future of our congregation. We are identifying strategic priorities for the church and planning ways to accomplish them.



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Beyond those “intangible” signs of vitality there is, of course, our continued growth. We will add 31 new members this year for a total of 310 resident, active members. Our attendance average is now well over 200. We baptized 8 infants this year and, in a very difficult economic environment we are holding our own financially.

I hope you are encouraged by participating in the life of this congregation and that you will read these pages with an eye toward what God is doing “between the lines” of these reports and our lives.

Grace and peace to all of you,

David C. Fisher
Senior Minister

Coming Together and Looking Forward

Tough times can pull a church apart. What’s surprising is the same difficulties, if approached with faith and joy, can also bring a church together. No one will be startled to hear that the 2008–2009 church year has been difficult financially for Plymouth Church, and I’m pleased to report that we have gathered together as a congregation.

Plymouth’s rallying goal continues to be our attempt to implement the Greatest Commandment—Matthew 22: 36–40: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

The Greatest Commandment was the guide for our work on the Council and the committees at Plymouth this year. The Great Commandment was adopted by the Council three years ago. The basic idea was to ask the following question when planning programs and events for the church: “Is what we are planning here loving God and loving our neighbor?” If it is, then go ahead. If it isn’t, then perhaps we need to rethink what’s being planned.

This past year the Council has taken on the following priorities on behalf of the Plymouth congregation:

- **Some tough financial issues:** While this is an exciting time at Plymouth Church, we are faced with some major problems including an endowment that has declined approximately 30% over the past eight months. This resulted in a complete review of operating expenses for this fiscal year and next. In the past we have been able to rely on our endowments to fund budget deficits—this is not currently an option. The Council may in fact need to borrow money from a bank to cover this year’s projected deficit.
- **An expanding organization:** Plymouth is a blessed congregation with a growing membership, greater participation in weekly worship (200 on the average Sunday and 450 this Easter, including

100 children) and an expansion underway for Plymouth Church School (ultimately increasing enrollment to 150+ students). In addition, we are renting our spaces more frequently to outside organizations (including a theater school on Saturday mornings) turning Plymouth into a true 7-day-a-week operation.

- **Long term planning:** Last summer the Council began thinking and planning the future of Plymouth Church. We started the process of looking at what our church would like to become. What do we want to be doing as a congregation? What do we want to have happening in our buildings and gardens? How many members do we want to have? Some Council members think 750 members is about right. All these are good questions for the Council and congregation to be asking. While we have yet to arrive at answers, the Council feels it's important to begin this planning process.

All three of the above priorities have been taken into account as actions have been taken by the Council. Examples of specific actions taken this past church year include:

- Developing and implementing a plan for using Plymouth endowment funds on outreach and church needs.
- Continuing to retain the church's investment advisors to handle Plymouth's investment accounts.
- Approving expansion of Plymouth Church School and appointing a Council representative to manage this important project.
- Completing the new roof on the sanctuary and the handicapped access ramp to the sanctuary and completion of the handicapped bathroom.
- Outsourcing Plymouth's custodial operations.
- Planning Plymouth 2022, a long-term study of programs and facilities usage for our complex of five buildings and three gardens.
- Sponsoring the NACCC Congregational Theological Symposium on *Congregationalism in the Public Square: Past, Present & Future*.
- Supporting the Green Plymouth study and implementation.
- Conducting a phone-a-thon to members to increase pledge participation.
- Holding a May 2009 retreat to plan FY2010 Council priorities.
- Hiring a new church administrator.
- Fully supporting David Fisher's ministry here at Plymouth.

It's been an important year for Plymouth Church. The Council is convinced that when we gather together with Christ in joy and faith (as it says in our church logo), anything is possible.

Jim Waechter
Council President

Coming Together





Coming Together

Coming Together for Plymouth



Plymouth Church is a vibrant community of faith in historic Brooklyn Heights. In providing a safe and loving place for all, we are a congregation striving to live in a covenant relationship with God and each other. For 162 years, Plymouth Church has been a vital presence in New York City. In 1961, our sanctuary was designated a National Historic Landmark. Aware of our unique history and influence, Plymouth continues to serve our community with regular worship services, the Plymouth Church School (preschool) and summer camp, choral music for adults and children, Christian education for all ages, and charitable programs for those in need.

In the 2008–2009 year, all members of the Plymouth community—church members, school families, and ministerial and support staff—came together to help build for the future. Major repairs and renovations helped preserve and modernize our beautiful and historic buildings. Increasing numbers of people sought out Plymouth Church and entered our doors, whether it was for worship, learning, special events or community gatherings. Many more came to know Plymouth through the church’s growing outreach ministry that touches lives in Brooklyn, across the U.S. and around the world.



Even in difficult times, Plymouth can celebrate this time of coming together to sustain and nurture a vibrant and vital church.



Rev. Dr. David C. Fisher, *Senior Minister*
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2009–2010 Plymouth Council:

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