

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



First-Plymouth  
Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ

2000 D Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68502

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**Annual Meeting Agenda**  
**January 21, 2018**

Order of Business

1. Call to Order
2. In Memoriam
3. Approval of Minutes of Last Annual Meeting
4. Questions about Annual Report
5. Comments from Moderator
6. Comments from Senior Minister
7. New Business
  - a. Adoption of Budget for 2018
  - b. Report of Nominating Committee and Election
8. Other Business
9. Adjournment
10. Benediction

**ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES**  
**January 15, 2017**

The meeting began at 9:46 a.m. with Senior Minister Jim Keck welcoming everyone and introducing the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Stephanie Dinger, who acted as Moderator of the meeting. Moderator Dinger called the meeting to order. There were approximately eighty people in attendance.

Associate Minister Barb Smisek read the names of those who died in 2016 and a candle was lit for each person. In memory and honor of those who have passed, Senior Minister Jim Keck led the congregation in singing the first verse of Amazing Grace.

The minutes of the last annual meeting were approved by voice vote without objection after a motion and second from the congregation. The annual report is available on line and copies of the budget were made available.

Moderator Dinger asked if the congregation had any questions regarding the Annual Report. She said that in 2016 we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the church. In 2016 we had the highest worship attendance and raised the most money.

Senior Minister Jim Keck talked about the caregiving ministries of the church. He highlighted Associate Minister Barb Smisek. She is in charge of the caregiving aspect of First-Plymouth. Fifty of our members have each taken fifty hours of training to be a Stephen Minister. We have volunteers on our visitation teams who go to see shut-ins and those in hospitals. Senior Minister Jim Keck said First-Plymouth has a remarkable staff. The congregation applauded the work and commitment of Associate Minister Barb Smisek.

Senior Minister Jim Keck said that the main idea of this meeting is the budget. The Board of Trustees has approved the budget. He introduced Jennifer Lesoing-Lucs who is the Treasurer of First-Plymouth. This budget has been voted on by the various boards of the church and then to the Board of Trustees who shape the numbers. Then the budget goes to the Church Council who reviews it and then offers it to the congregation this morning. Moderator Dinger asked if there were any questions. There being none, Moderator Dinger asked for a motion and second to approve the budget. The motion passed with a voice vote with no dissent.

Moderator Dinger reported that there was a Nominating Slate for the various church boards. A motion was made and seconded to approve the slate as presented and the motion passed by voice vote with no dissent.

Senior Minister Jim Keck said that in order to assist the new board members in learning about their duties and responsibilities as board members, First-Plymouth is having a retreat and training in February and hopefully they all can attend.

Moderator Dinger asked if there was any other business to be addressed. She then accepted a motion to adjourn and the annual meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Shelley, Clerk

Moderator- Jim Lauerman  
 Assistant Moderator – TBD  
 Clerk- Judy Greenwald  
 Treasurer- Jenni Lesoing-Lucs

Council at Large- Kristin Ness (2020)  
 Council at Large- Jenni Lesoing Lucs (2021)  
 Council at Large- Lowell Nickolaus (2019)

### Nominating Committee

#### **Board for Children, Youth & Family**

##### **Ministry**

*Jessica Anderson-Anschutz	2021
*Mike Comstock	2021
*Chesney Johnson	2021
*Lindsay Beil	2021
*Betsy Seeba	2021
Anne Andrew	2020
Peggy Hart	2020
Jody Schmidt	2020
Sherri Ernst	2020
Ron Souliere	2020
Susan Crotteau	2020
Karen Bratton	2020
Jake Malone	2019
Mandy Coyle	2019
Katie Taddeucci	2019
Holly Matzen	2019
Chris Cary	2019
Scott Miller	2019
Diane Steinke	2019
Rebecca McCoy	2019

##### **Diaconate Board – Women**

*Lisa Bollinger-Radcliffe	2021
*Tina Walton	2021
*Marilyn Larson	2021
*Ellen Beans	2021
*Barb Hoppe-Johnson	2021
*Risa Udell	2021
*Marynelle Greene	2021
Deb Navratil	2020
Pat Genzmer	2020
Susan Simon	2020
Jana Langemach	2020
Joyce Sturdy	2020
Dorothy Anderson	2020
Jaci Hammer	2020

##### **Diaconate Board – Women cont'd**

Ann Kittell	2020
Maril Freese	2019
Arlene VanHorn	2019
Dee Weyeneth	2019
Sharon Rudeen	2019
Jean Keister	2019
Katie Keister	2019
Pat Boon	2019

##### **Diaconate Board – Men**

*Kelley Beasley	2021
*Dan Eisenhart	2021
*Dale Hauptmeier	2021
*Eric Hunt	2021
*Pat Beans	2021
*Bruce Johnson	2021
Doug Navratil	2020
Russ Genzmer	2020
Ralph Sturdy	2020
Dan Leuenberger	2020
Bruce Rudeen	2020
Ed Schulenberg	2020
Gordon Freese	2019
Andy Van Horn	2019
Dennis Van Horn	2019
Jack Davis	2019
Mike High	2019
Bob Meier	2019
Bob Shaw	2019
Tim Knott	2019

\*To be elected

**Nominating Committee****Board for Women's Ministries**

* Lee Ann Heflebower	2021
* Shelley Freeman	2021
* Linda Norris	2021
Nancy Howard	2020
Janie Rowan	2020
Susan Simon	2020
Darla Wanitschke	2020
Karen Creswell	2020
Nella Maynard (youth)	2020
Baylor Pope (youth)	2020
Jane Holt	2019
Charlotte Frank	2019
Allison Goering	2019
Rose Mackey	2019
Kelly Tyrrell	2019
Carole Curry	2019
Sheila Mehlhaff	2019

**Board of Trustees**

*Ann Finkner	2021
*Jessica Greenwald	2021
*Fred Rickers	2021
*Jon Michelsen	2021
*Steve Schmidt	2021
*Wynn Mehlhaff	2021
John Gerrard	2020
Bob Bartle	2020
Claudia Reinhardt	2020
Shelley Zaborowski	2020
Chris Cassidy	2020
Kevin Klein	2019
Derek Lester	2019
Kim Robak	2019
Meg Lauerman	2019
Jeff Johnson	2019
Bob Barth	2019
Ray Zeisset	2019

**Board of Christian Outreach**

*Annette Marquez	2021
*Jamie Cruise	2021
*Kathleen Maynard	2021
*Bosa Kanza	2021
*Charles (Chuck) Williams	2021
*Jim Johnson	2021
Faith Andrews	2020
Taylor Andrews (youth)	2020
Peter Barber	2020
Beth Hartman	2020
Judy Magnuson	2020
Kristin Ness	2020
Mark Schultz	2020
Ron Ramsey	2020
Ann Ramsey	2019
John Wilson	2019
Randy Clements	2019
Judy Greenwald	2019
Adrien Loehring	2019
Wynn Mehlhaff	2019
Connie Stentz	2019

**Board of Music & Fine Arts**

*Nancy Shelley	2021
*Diane Dinnel	2021
*Shelby White	2021
*Pat Riggins	2021
*Michelle Talarico	2021
Bob Boyce	2020
Lynette Boyce	2020
Joan Michelsen	2019
Sinda Dux	2019
Phyllis Owen	2019

\*To be elected

**SENIOR MINISTER**  
**Rev. Jim Keck**

First-Plymouth church is a very special spiritual community. There is a deep and abiding spirit of inclusivity, as well as a profound faithfulness to our Christian tradition. There is a free-flowing joy, but also a seriousness of purpose and a drive to excel. It is a place that is quick to forgive, slow to anger and ready to help.

I love our church and it is a profound honor to serve the congregation as your pastor.

By all the classic metrics for an American church we had a record year in 2017. We set an all-time high in worship attendance, new members joining, new financial pledges and total monies raised. But I am even more intrigued by the spiritual growth that is underway. We are GROWING in our faithfulness, justice seeking and Biblical knowledge. We are GROWING in our love of God and Neighbor. We are GROWING in the ways we seek to serve the wider community. We are GROWING in the key fruits of the spirit like joy, peace, forgiveness and patience.

This is the type of growth that a minister most desires. What an inspiration it is to be “on-the-grow” with you!

It is also a daily joy to work with the staff at FP. They love what they do and they bring incredible talent to bear. I thank God for them. And over the next 6 months we will be thanking God for the ministry of Barb Smisek as she moves towards retirement in July. She is the best Christian minister I have ever known. I have simply never seen the combination of dedication, caring, compassion, intelligence, endurance, steadfastness, creativity and servant-leadership that she possesses.

The thought of her leaving produces great sadness - heartbreak really - for me, and for our congregation. So, through our tears, let's praise God for the gift of Barb Smisek.

**ASSOCIATE MINISTER**  
**Rev. Barb Smisek**

Two thousand seventeen (2017) was a year of personal and professional growth. In February, my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer and in May my 96 year old grandmother died. While I've walked the journey of cancer and death with many, one can never truly understand it until it's your own. I will be forever grateful for the support and prayers of my First-Plymouth family. As of this date, my mother's cancer is in remission.

In June, I began a six-week sabbatical that included touring Washington D.C, officiating a wedding in Annapolis, Maine, visiting grand children in Memphis, Tennessee, and attending a week long Presbyterian conference on worship and music in Montreat, North Carolina. I returned to work in July ready to keep the work of the Spirit movin' ahead!

At the end of July, I led the Family mission trip to the Pine Ridge Reservation. This year marked our seventh year of service on the Ridge. Eighteen volunteered in July and nine in September. Likewise, it was our sixth year to volunteer building earthquake resistant homes in Guatemala, 33 made the trip in 2017. I am so pleased that our mission efforts in Guatemala, on the Pine Ridge and in Ghana continue to flourish and for leaders like Cindy Cox, Jeanne Johnson, Pastor Hollie, Jeff Horst, Ann Kaseman, Christi Keim and Lora Carpenter-Janike. Plans are in place for trips to all three places in 2018 and 2019.

Thanks to the dynamic leadership of Troy Stentz, chair of the Christian Board of Outreach, mission work in Lincoln flourished as well. The 22 dedicated members of the Board spearheaded mission work throughout the community working with the Gathering Place, Lighthouse, Habitat for Humanity, Food Bank, Tabitha Meals on Wheels and Clinic with a Heart, to name just a few.

Besides the privilege of helping lead worship on Sunday mornings before a Spirit-filled congregation, I am blessed every Saturday night to lead the Anybody Everybody Worship service designed for people with developmental disabilities. Thanks to the dedicated leadership of Cheri Bayley and many others who attend and provide weekly cookies, this congregation has turned into an ever-growing "family" that genuinely welcomes anybody and everybody that wants to experience the love of God! The congregation thanks Sinda Dux for playing the piano for us for 4 years and is happy to now welcome Tom Trenney and Risa Udell on-board.

Every year I am thankful for the opportunity to serve alongside the many "ministers" at First-Plymouth including our 38 Stephen Ministers and 9 members of the Pastoral Care Team. I'd also like to thank Jeanne Johnson, Karen Clarke, Jen Davidson and Jim Miller for the many hours of visitation, pastoral care and spiritual leadership they provided.

Lastly, I truly enjoyed the fellowship and opportunity this year to study the Ten Commandments taught by Joan Chittister with the delightful ladies of Circle 3.

Thank you to everyone that helped me and my family through a challenging year. May God continue to bless our shared ministry of inclusive love, hope, justice and JOY!

**ASSOCIATE MINISTER**  
**Rev. Patrick Messer**

My first year living in Lincoln and serving First Plymouth Church has been one of the richest gifts of my life. The joyful spirit that permeates this community is contagious. I am continually inspired by the way our mission to increase the love of God and neighbor is embodied with passion. In short, I love this place! Let me share a few of the ways I have shared in the life and mission of First Plymouth during 2017.

Receiving the torch from Jacob Buchholz, I lead First Plymouth's continuing efforts to bring our worship and spirit to east Lincoln. This was our fourth year worshipping at Kloefkorn Elementary School and it came with some big developments! Not only do we have a new preacher, but we also added a Children & Family Coordinator: Jessica Andersen-Anschutz. She has been instrumental in leading the growth of our children's ministry there, which has involved hiring new staff for a fully-equipped nursery and teachers for our revamped FP Kids programming. There has also been an increase in opportunities for people to get to know one another and form new friendships. The dinner and discussion group at my house during Lent, the book groups after worship, the potlucks, and special events like VBS - all of these have really helped create a sense of community at FP East. Big things are ahead in 2018!

An exciting new worship service was also created in 2017! Rev. Hollie Schmidt and I teamed up to create an intergenerational service that taps into the energy of contemporary worship music while embodying First Plymouth's core values. The result has been a dynamic midweek worship service each Wednesday at 6:15pm. Some come just for the worship to carry them into the second half of the week. Others come to let worship carry them into the classes and activities that follow. If you come on a Wednesday night, you'll see a sanctuary full of people of all ages - from preschoolers to retirees - all worshipping together in a breathtaking space filled with vibrant color and soul-stirring music. The turnout has been incredible and we can't wait to see how this service grows in 2018!

One of my favorite ways of serving First Plymouth in 2017 has been to assume the role of teacher. This happens most regularly in the group I started called Theology on Tap. It began as a Sunday night opportunity to share food and drinks as we explored a different bible passage each week. In 2018, Theology on Tap is moving to Monday nights and will offer the chance to learn the broad story of the entire Bible. Outside of Theology on Tap, I thoroughly enjoyed teaching periodic classes. Among those classes, I especially loved teaching about the history of the Bible's creation, the book of Jonah, Paul's final mission, the Parables, the Reformation, Centering Prayer, and even filling in for Jim's Thursday Bible Study occasionally. Each of those classes generated such wonderful conversation that enriched my learning and created new friendships along the way.

It's been a phenomenal year at First Plymouth Church. I cannot wait to see where the Spirit will carry us in the new year!

**MINISTER OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES**  
**Rev. Hollie Schmidt**

2017 has been a year of firsts for the Children, Youth & Family ministries at First-Plymouth! We did away with “Sunday School”, we took our first international youth mission trip and we had our first worship service for all ages as part of WNL!

We intentionally took a hard look at what has been the traditional Sunday school model and re-imagined what this could look like today in the church. Over the two years I have been here at First-Plymouth I have seen a need for change to the approach of teaching and learning for kids on Sunday mornings. I have also seen an increase in attendance on Wednesday nights which prompted a re-look at that as well. So, in September we did away with traditional Sunday School and launched FP Kids & FP Kids Studio.

FP Kids is a rotation-style creative learning approach to the stories of faith that uses art, science, cooking, drama, games and even a new computer lab to help kids learn and relate to the stories we read in the bible. We offer this every Sunday morning at 9am, 10:30am and at FP East. Since September we have seen an increase of an average of 20 kids on Sunday mornings. This whole experience is now bookended by an opening and closing worship for preschool-5<sup>th</sup> grade.

FP Kids Studio was created to bring in hands-on creative arts where kids get to choose what they want to do on Wednesday nights. We have been offering the K-2<sup>nd</sup> graders & the 3-5<sup>th</sup> graders each two choices per month. These choices range from classes such as Watercolor Wonder, Edible Science, Textured Art (with a guest artist), Photography, Writing Lab, Little Chefs and Super Hero Moves as well as many others.

In June I lead the first international youth mission trip for First-Plymouth, taking 22 people to Guatemala. It was a wonderful trip with a wide range of experiences from earthquakes and mudslides, to building relationships with the families as we constructed their homes. Many of the youth had never traveled internationally so it was a truly life-changing experience for them to immerse themselves into a new culture. It truly is a blessing to have these kinds of opportunities here at First-Plymouth to help our youth formulate a broader sense of serving the people of the world.

One of the main focuses of our department and board this year was to evaluate each event and ministry that we do to insure it fits our mission. One event that took on a whole new look this year was our Halloween Block Party which replaced the Trunk-or-Treat. By moving it to a Sunday afternoon, offering food, games, drinks & of course candy we opened up the opportunity to be in community with not only our families but also the families in our neighborhood. It was a huge success with over 350 people attending.

We held our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual youth musical this November. After weeks of auditions and rehearsals we had 23 youth participate in “There’s a Monster in My Closet” plus another 30 who helped with serving at the shows. We added a second show after selling out last year, and sold out both shows this year. This event’s first goal is to provide a ministry for youth to be creative and explore their gifts & talents and it’s second is to raise funds for youth missions. We could not be more grateful for the love and support from the congregation as they helped us raise over \$7000 for youth missions. But most of all, they came and supported these youth in ways that cannot be measured.

Once again, as I look back at a wonderful year of ministry here at First-Plymouth I am humbled and grateful to be serving as the Minister of Children Youth & Families here.

**MINISTER OF MUSIC**  
**Tom Trenney**

What a blessing to serve First-Plymouth Church and to partner with the hundreds of singers and instrumentalists who contribute their time and talent to our growing music ministry. The music in our more than 250 services each year invites us to experience the mystery and wonder of our faith, gathers us together to share in the timeless message of the gospel, and transports our spirits in unforgettable ways. With the devoted leadership and support of Drew Duncan, Rebecca Shane, Brett Epperson, Christopher Boilesen, Lacey Atkinson, Jessica Rajewich, Phyllis Owen, Tom Kelly, and Kim Salistean, and Ariel Merivil our music ministry strives to encourage our congregation's song—our community's joyful, passionate response to the promise of our faith. First-Plymouth is blessed to have seven choirs and six instrumental ensembles that regularly contribute to worship: Plymouth Choir, Cantorei, Te Deum, Compline Schola Cantorum, Alleluia, Choristers, Chorale, Plymouth Ringers, Bell Chorum, Plymouth Brass, Summit Strings, OrchaBand, and Youth Orchestra. The music ministry provides worship leadership for our five weekly services, our monthly Compline, and numerous weddings, funerals, memorial services, community events, and Holy days. First-Plymouth's music ministry also continues to share the mission of First-Plymouth Church in the broader community. In March 2017, our Schola Cantorum and Cantorei were honored to offer music in worship at the National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association, held in Minneapolis. Further outreach around the world is possible through our YouTube channel. Recordings of our hymns and anthems from worship have received more than a half million views to date, providing inspiration to congregations and choirs around the world. We are grateful to John Casey who volunteers to be the curator of our YouTube outreach. The Plymouth Choir recently released a second volume of hymns on CD-- *Hymns from First Plymouth*. Though it has been a year of transition, we are grateful for the arrival of Associate Minister of Music Ariel Merivil who has accepted the call to a new ministry among us. His presence and spirit will shape us and feed us as we continue to grow and to evolve. We rejoice for the beautiful contributions of our interim staff who carried the baton with renewed enthusiasm, commitment, and joy in anticipation of Ariel's appointment. It is a blessing to be part of this special time. I am thankful for all the joy that we have welcomed in 2017 and I look forward to the many ways our music ministry will increase the love of God and neighbor in 2018.

**MINISTER OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**  
**Rev. Kathryn Campbell**

The point of our journey on earth is to become more and more conscious - of self, of others, of the Holy. It is people who are doing this important work of reflection who come for spiritual direction. I simply listen as a person talks about his or her life and soul. I may gently ask a question to help clarify thoughts. Together we may note times in the person's life that have been especially graced.

Jeanne Johnson, also a trained Spiritual Director, does the same in her own unique way. We each meet with a number of women and men from the church and from the community to share time of *listening together for the direction of the Spirit*. Some come regularly, some come at a time of particular need.

(See also: [www.firstplymouth.org/spiritual-direction](http://www.firstplymouth.org/spiritual-direction).)

I also make regular hospital calls as part of the Pastoral Care Team, and take part in leading worship. I continue to be amazed that, after 25 years, I am still at First-Plymouth, taking part in its ministry. Thanks be to God!

**VISITATION MINISTRY**  
**Rev. Jim Miller and Jeanne Johnson**

Rev. Jim Miller, retired Methodist minister brings years of experience visiting shut-ins to our congregation. Lay pastor, Jeanne Johnson brings many years of membership at FP to reconnecting with those who can no longer get to church.

We continue the ministry of hospital calls and meeting periodically with members, friends and family of First-Plymouth who are unable to get to church either during a recovery from an accident or illness or long term. We both enjoy finding the mutual connections and hearing the life stories of those we visit. We offer prayers and sometimes communion with these folks to let them know they are not forgotten and are still cared for by our church.

We work with the diaconate to coordinate their twice-yearly visits to shut ins. Both of us help with weekly communion and serve as occasional liturgists during worship.

As seek to grow the visitation ministry, we count on you to help us know when you, or someone you love is in need of a visit. Confidentiality laws sometimes prevent us from knowing when people are hospitalized or where they have been moved for rehabilitation.

## **DIMENSIONS EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM**

**Michelle Zimmer, Program Director and Nancy Rosenow, Executive Director**

Dimensions strives to serve families from all socio-economic groups and religious backgrounds, as well as children with special needs, helping all to accept and appreciate differences and develop a life-long love for learning. Again this year, over 400 children ages 6 weeks through 1st grade have taken part in our school year and summer programs. Children, staff, and families have engaged, discovered, learned and grown together.

Through our Sponsor-a-Child program we serve low-income families with high quality childcare allowing parents to work or continue their own education. We are committed to serving as many families as possible, regardless of their financial situation therefore we have two giving campaigns a year and three fundraising events. We offer flexible scheduling and extended hours making childcare more affordable for families.

With the increased awareness in our community around the lack of quality early education programs for children, we are working together with Prosper Lincoln and the Lincoln Community Foundation to increase our ability to provide even more opportunities for low income families. The First-Plymouth Outreach Board has been supporting these efforts for many years and we hope that with the increased awareness, we can all work together to close the gap on the number of children needing our support.

Our commitment to quality, with staffing and programming gives us the opportunity to be a leader in the Early Education field. We mentor future teachers from surrounding colleges and invite area child care providers to our professional development trainings. We also provide tours for individuals and groups striving to enhance the quality of their schools and education programs.

Nature Explore, a collaborative program of Dimensions and Arbor Day Foundations shares its mission to connect people with nature throughout the country and internationally. The Nature Explore program brings opportunities and notoriety to our Education Programs and First-Plymouth Church.

Dimensions continues to staff the Welcome Desk by the church's west doors, answering the church phones and receiving all visitors from 8:00-5:30 Monday-Friday. Our staff enjoys connecting with the church community in this way.

Finally, a sincere thank you to all of the staff and members of First-Plymouth Church, as well as the teachers, administrative staff, families and community organizations for the help, support and commitment to our programs.

## **BOARD OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH**

### **Troy Stentz, Chair**

The Board of Christian Outreach puts First-Plymouth's mission "to increase the love of God and neighbor" into action through the generous financial gifts of our congregation and the time and talents of our board's members. Our energies are directed at six core areas: food, education, health, adult and youth outreach, and international support. In 2017 we leveraged our budget as well as the hard work of our 22 board members and many others from our congregation to serve the needs of our local community and the wider world.

The Board of Christian Outreach's efforts to address food insecurity took many forms this year. Our members donated ingredients and prepared and served a meal for 140 individuals at the Gathering Place in March. We put on food drives in the spring and fall and collected over 2,800 pounds of non-perishable food and personal hygiene items as well as nearly \$5,000 in monetary gifts during the year. A big shout out goes to Drew Duncan and Abendmusik. Their community sing event on November 26<sup>th</sup> capped off our fall food drive with a free-will donation in support of the Food Bank of Lincoln that made our collection barrels overflow! Our First-Plymouth Meals on Wheels team grew to 45 individuals and families, and in 2017 these volunteers delivered over 2,500 hot meals to folks in the neighborhoods surrounding our church.

Domestic and international missions continue to be a passion of our board. We held Fish, Fries and Bingo events on two consecutive Friday nights during Lent to raise funds for travel expenses for our mission team leaders and for home building materials. To date our congregation has sponsored and helped build 28 homes in Xepatan, Guatemala! We also helped support two mission trips to the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Our international mission also includes efforts to welcome and support the many new immigrant and refugee families that now call Lincoln home. In 2017 we continued our commitment to provide financial support for a sustainable clean water project in Zambia, Africa, championed by a member of our own congregation.

Members of our board helped organize and participate in various service opportunities in our community this year including two Habitat for Humanity build days, preparing and serving meals at The Lighthouse for their back to school event and the annual Thanksgiving meal for the kids and their families, and a game booth at the Halloween block party held at First-Plymouth. Our spring and holiday season Giving Tree events reminded us of the generosity of our church as we gathered over 400 gifts this year for charities including Clinic with a Heart, Center for Legal Immigration Assistance, Interfaith Housing Coalition, Released & Restored, York Women's Correctional Facility nursery, CEDARS Community Learning Centers, Congolese families at First-Plymouth, and the Diaconate fund. We were also pleased to be able to provide substantial financial support in 2017 to the Community Action Program's new Head Start program as well as tuition assistance for low-income families with children enrolled at Dimensions.

We give thanks to the members of First-Plymouth that, through their financial pledges and prayerful support, allow us the opportunity to share God's love with so many.

## **BOARD FOR WOMEN'S MINISTRIES**

### **Mary Metzger, Chair**

The Board for Women's Ministry reaches out to women within First-Plymouth Church, in our Lincoln community, and beyond. The following activities of the Board for Women's Ministry represent our mission and accomplishments in 2017.

- Fund Raising: \$2100.00 raised at the Soup Supper in February for scholarships. Our speaker was Patty Pansing Brooks on human trafficking. We also sold pink knitted hats, like the ones worn for the women's marches and made \$60.00. \$810.00 was raised at the Salad Supper in June also for scholarships. Deb McGinn, teacher at Lincoln High School, spoke on Slam Poetry. We made approximately \$150 at the "Dance Through the Decades" event in August; also for scholarships.
- Retreats: In April, Jen Davidson and Phyllis Owen, led a retreat at the church entitled "Beloved Community" with 26 in attendance. In September, Patty Forsberg led a morning retreat at the Pioneer's Park Nature Center also with 26 in attendance.
- The Scholarships recipients were announced at the Salad Supper in June. Four scholarships were awarded; two to women returning to college to improve their education, a new one to a young lady who is the first in her family to get a college education, and the new annual scholarship begun this year in honor of Rev. Nancy Erickson. All four scholarships were for \$1000 each.
- Outreach Activities: Personal care items were donated for women at Pine Ridge and also homeless and WIC women. Care bags were taken to the Gathering Place and Matt Talbott Kitchen. \$425.00 was given the Community Action for books for a Head Start preschool. \$175.00 was awarded to Sophia Delaney (a member of First-Plymouth) for Camp Summergold and \$500 to the camp for their scholarship fund to use at their discretion. \$200 was given to the Slam Poetry program at Lincoln High School.
- Loaves and Fishes committee reached out to First-Plymouth volunteers to provide meals to a family that attends First-Plymouth East from January to August. A young man also received meals in August and September.

As 2017 comes to a close the Board for Women's Ministry is busy planning for 2018. Two events I'll list is the the Soup Supper, set for February 18 with Pat Leach as our speaker and a fun and new fundraiser is planned in April with Premiere Design Jewelry.

As we prepare to say goodbye to members going off the board and say hello to the new ones; I want to say it's been a privilege and definitely a blessing to serve on the Board for Women's Ministry and I look forward to seeing and hearing how God is moving in this very important ministry led by amazing women for women!

**DIACONATE BOARD**  
**Bruce Rudeen, Chair**

Jen Davidson began as Liaison Minister for Deacons, Ushers and Greeters. A meeting was held on September 9, at Church for the purpose of bringing Deacons, Ushers and Greeters together to support the spiritual and worship life of the congregation. There will be training ahead on hearing devices, worshippers with mental health concerns, the defibrillator and the new handbook. Coordinators were announced for Ushers, Judy Vitamvus; Rides to Church, Eric Hunt; Special Services, Bill Etmund; Communion, Marilyn Larson; Greeters 9:00am Barb Johnson, 10:30 Bruce Rudeen. Concerns for the security and safety in the Church will be addressed in the future.

Great appreciation was given to all who help with serving the Ministers and Congregation at First Plymouth Church.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**Stephanie Dinger, Chair**

The First Plymouth Board of Trustees had another busy year in the oversight and management of finances and assets. Celebrating the milestone of 150 years in 2016 made me feel like it would be hard to top in 2017. However, we continue raise the bar and this year has left me in awe of the talent and generosity of the First Plymouth community! What an exciting year we had in 2017.

The Building Joy First campaign, our facility renovation and improvement project, was completed in 2017. The \$7 million project came in under budget - a big thank you to Lowell Berg, Lynn Jones and Wynn Mehlhaff for their leadership.

The Board's Endowment Funds Committee met multiple times to review First Plymouth's investments funds. The team worked with the trustee board, Lincoln Community Foundation, and Buckingham Strategic Wealth to make a change in allocations to provide additional growth for the long-term use of these funds.

The Jim Keck Honorary Fund, which was created in 2016, has provided support to numerous members of the Church family who have experienced financial hardships. A subcommittee was created to review and approve the requests.

A First Plymouth Development Council was created to provide leadership for the annual pledge campaign. This year's campaign "Love More" kicked off in November with the goal of \$1.8m in pledges. The council also developed a sub-campaign called "First Love," which focused on getting 100 first-time pledges. The campaign leveraged a matching pledge to these new pledges, doubling the support to First Plymouth. Members now have multiple ways they can give; auto pay, online with PayPal, text, mail, stock transfers, endowments, and estate planning.

In 2017, First Plymouth added more new members than any other single year in history. 212 people joined through November. First Plymouth ministries, programming and outreach continue to expand. With this also comes increased expenses with a 2018 budget goal of \$2.5m. The Development Council along with many other individuals are working hard to ensure these programs will continue with the congregation's monetary support.

First Plymouth's media equipment was updated which allows for live streaming and HD quality picture. This investment was paid for with funds from Tammy Alvis' unrestricted bequest. In addition to the equipment update, Tom DiPerna was hired as Director of Media and Technology, which has elevated our video production and social media content to a whole new level.

The Board adopted a proposed budget covering Church operations and programs, and recommends it for approval by the membership at the annual meeting. The Board of Trustees looks forward to what lies ahead in 2018 and doing their part to increase the love of God and neighbor.

**CHURCH COUNCIL**  
**Jim Lauerman, Moderator**

This past year we've done a good job, in your humble moderator's opinion, of living up to our mission to increase the love of God and neighbor. Thanks to all of you and our church leadership team.

Here are a few examples of our efforts to fulfill our mission:

We've reached out to our community and our congregation with more programs and more services. All perfect delivery systems of our mission.

We've updated our TV ministry into a high definition system that allows us to live stream some of our special programs and worship services. More neighbors and more members can participate in our services.

FP Kids rolled out this year. Sunday attendance is up. Wednesday Night Live includes a new worship opportunity for all ages, plus fun activities and classes for kids, youth and adults. This has been a huge success with hundreds of members and neighbors attending.

This recent annual pledge/donation campaign has a new twist.

*First Love* is an innovative effort to get 100 new, first time pledgers or donors. As I write this, we're already listing 86 first-time pledges.

First-Plymouth wouldn't survive and thrive as we do without everyone's financial support. Thank you.

Thanks to the senior leadership team of First-Plymouth. Not only are they extraordinarily talented, hardworking (frequently overloaded) and passionate individuals, they also always keep us moving forward and asking, "what's next?" First-Plymouth Church is a success because we have leadership focusing us on the 'now' as well as on the future.

Thanks to all of you who volunteer, donate, participate and support First-Plymouth Church.

You are appreciated.

**MUSIC AND FINE ARTS BOARD**  
**Joan Michelsen, Chair**

Accomplishments for 2017:

Search and Welcome of Ariel Merivil - The Music Ministry for First-Plymouth shares their musical faith in numerous diverse ensembles. Our search committee documented the support provided and determined the talents we were hoping to add to our staff. We joyously celebrate the addition of Ariel Merivil, Associate Minister of Music to our Music Staff. To complete the process of evaluating requirements and talents, we also named Drew Duncan as our Music & Fine Arts Coordinator. We look forward to the talents these extraordinary musicians will bring to First-Plymouth.

Music & Fine Arts fundraising – Our Board designed and had commissioned this year's holiday ornament which is a representation of the stone mosaic Jerusalem Cross on the floor of the narthex. We held a concession stand to provide food to the attendees of the Nebraska Choral Festival held at First-Plymouth.

Support and Outreach – One of our board's primary functions is to provide support to our ensembles throughout the year to show our appreciation for their participation in the music life of the church. We hosted a Music Appreciation dinner for all our ensembles to thank them for their time and talents, and continues to find ways to show our appreciation for the numerous First-Plymouth ensembles. Music & Fine Arts participated in the Halloween Trunk or Treat event with a fun afternoon of a Pumpkin themed table. This December the Board spent their time organizing and decorating the halls, sanctuary, common areas and chapel for the Christmas holiday season.

Visual Arts - The second primary function of this board is the support of our visual arts. We are pleased to report that we are expanding this area through our work with the Paraments and the artwork in Mayflower.

- Paraments - A project was started this year to inventory our Paraments and build a storage and care strategy to prolong the life of these visual expressions of faith which represent each church season. We began a fundraising strategy to be able to add Paraments into our inventory to support additional seasons.
- During the upcoming year, the Board will be taking over the artwork for Mayflower. We have been working on a strategy to feature artists of all ages.

Our board continues to support the Music and Fine Arts of First-Plymouth in their mission of Singing Faith + Sharing Music + Building Community and Glorifying God.

**ABENDMUSIK: LINCOLN**  
**James Keim, Chair**

The 2017 year has been an important transition period for Abendmusik: Lincoln. Drew joined Abendmusik as interim executive director in the summer of 2016. His interim status was part of an experimental restructuring of the First-Plymouth Music Program. From the outset, Drew demonstrated an engaging combination of creativity, optimism, work ethic, and dedication that made it clear that being “interim” would be temporary. Drew's tireless efforts during the interim season helped Abendmusik to broaden its reach and to expand its expected potential. Drew officially became Executive Director on July 1, 2017.

February is always an eventful month for Abendmusik and in 2017 that was no exception. The Nordic Choir from Luther College opened 2017 with a performance on February 3rd attended by more than 500 people and included a performance by the Lincoln East choir. The Children's Choir Festival on February 11th, a event featuring children in the 3rd through 5th grades, drew more than 120 people. And more than 130 people dined and 160 attended the My Funny Valentine concert on February 14th. On April 30th, Abendmusik's Season Finale - GLORIA! featured Poulenc's GLORIA and Puccini's MESSA DI GLORIA performed by the Abendmusik Choir, the Concordia University A Cappella Choir, and the Abendmusik Orchestra all led by Tom Trenney.

A typical Abendmusik season features eight events. However, the 2017-2018 season created a unique opportunity as Abendmusik celebrates its 45th season, the Plymouth Brass celebrates its 40th season, and First Plymouth's Lied Organ reaches its the 20th anniversary. Drew and artistic director Tom Trenney put together a mammoth season of 12 events, including four with free admission. The new season's first pitch was thrown out on August 10th by Tom at Abendmusik's first Saltdog's baseball fundraiser. Drew sang the national anthem and 148 Abendmusik friends and supporters joined Tom and Drew for an evening of baseball and fun.

“Unclouded Day,” a performance by sounding light led by Tom Trenney, opened Abendmusik's anniversary season on Oct. 1st. The 20th Anniversary of the Lied Organ was celebrated with a Nov. 5th performance by Daryl Robinson, winner of the American Guild of Organists' most prestigious national competition. In Robinson's first trip to Lincoln, he performed the Nebraska premiere of a mass for two organs and choir by French composer Yves Castagnet.

On Nov. 26. Abendmusik struck a new chord with a food drive and fundraiser for the Food Bank of Lincoln. The “Messiah” community singalong brought the community together to perform Handel's masterpiece and raised \$3,300 (the equivalent of 10,000 meals that the Food Bank of Lincoln can serve in our local community). On Dec. 10th and 17th. The Plymouth Choir, Plymouth Ringers, and Abendmusik Orchestra came together in a free concert to share “The Savior of the Nations, Come,” an Abendmusik Christmas with music and tales from around the world. The Christmas concerts were attended by 500 people and the free will offering raised 80% of last year's ticket sales. To close 2017, former Abendmusik directors Jack Levick and Jeremy Bankson returned to Lincoln on Dec. 31st to help the brass ensemble celebrate its 40th anniversary and ring in the New Year with “Last Blast!”

This next year, Abendmusik is packing the most into the shortest month. On Feb. 3rd. More than 150 children from the Lincoln area will gather to sing in Sing Around Nebraska, a free concert under the direction of guest conductor Emily Ellsworth. On Feb. 9th, Abendmusik artistic director Tom Trenney will lead the "My Funny Valentine" fundraiser, singing love songs from the

**ABENDMUSIK: LINCOLN**  
**Cont'd**

Great American Songbook. On Feb. 11th, British vocal ensemble Voces8 will perform a repertory from Renaissance polyphony to contemporary commissions and arrangements. On Feb. 20th, guest clinician William Weinert from New York's Eastman School of Music will lead the Youth Masterworks Festival Concert featuring four of Nebraska high school choirs and two Lincoln high school orchestras in a free concert of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Coronation Mass" and George Frideric Handel's "Coronation Anthems." Finally, on February 25th, Abendmusik will feature its 45th Anniversary signature event "Considering Matthew Shepard" in cooperation with the Lied Center for Performing Arts. Craig Hella Johnson will lead his Grammy-award-winning choir, Conspirare, in the Nebraska premiere of Johnson's 100-minute oratorio exploring the life, death and legacy of Shepard, the gay University of Wyoming student found beaten to death in October 1998.

On March 9th, grammy-winning conductor and composer Rene Clausen will lead the Concordia Choir, the 72-voice choir from Moorhead, Minnesota. And on March 30th, Abendmusik will close its season with "Pieta." The Nebraska Wesleyan University and Plymouth Choirs will come together in a free concert to perform John Muehleisen's piece about the sorrow and pain of mothers who lose their sons.

It has been a fantastic year to recognize those like Jack Levick and Jeremy Bankson who helped lead Abendmusik to its 45th year. At the same time, we want to thank Tom Trenney, Drew Duncan, the members of the Abendmusik board of directors, the staff and leadership of First-Plymouth Church, and the patrons, advertisers and sponsors who are all part of a bright and ambitious future for Abendmusik. Thank you for being part of the Abendmusik family.

**Clerk's Report**

January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017

Members enrolled as of December 31, 2016: 3,764

Members enrolled as of December 31, 2017: 3,851

**Removed:**

By Death: 29

Transfer/Inactive: 100

**Received:**

Confirmation class: 36 (included in New Members)

New Members: 222

**Baptisms: 57****Weddings: 29****Deaths:**

Ann Tolly	01/11/2017	Maxine Sorensen	05/17/2017
Frances Smith	01/22/2017	Silas Haifley	05/19/2017
Tina Novak	01/31/2017	Dorothy Wilson	05/25/2017
Samuel Baird	02/01/2017	Floriene VanLaningham	06/24/2017
Helen Chastain	02/25/2017	Nancy Porter	07/18/2017
William Smith	03/04/2017	Loyd Fischer	08/29/2017
Joe Heineman	03/15/2017	Samuel Van Pelt	09/11/2017
Virginia Opocensky	03/15/2017	Eunice Zimmerman	10/01/2017
Mary Copple	03/20/2017	Barbara Day	10/05/2017
Paul Muff	03/22/2017	Stan Matzke	11/02/2017
Marie Fischer	03/30/2017	Don Doescher	11/05/2017
Edwin Gettman	04/18/2017	Lucia Ann Hertzler	11/20/2017
Mary Swearingen	04/25/2017	Joann Forbes	12/19/2017
Dale Schuerman	05/04/2017		
Robert Brunsman	05/08/2017		
Sharon Brodhagen	05/09/2017		