

Plymouth Church, UCC

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Plymouth Church, UCC also Connects to:

- First Presbyterian Church of Milwaukee
- First Congregational Church of Milwaukee
- Free Congregational Church of Milwaukee
- National Association of Congregational Christian Churches
- United Church of Christ
- Congregation Shir Hadash

Historical Overview

Plymouth Church is an associated church of the United Church of Christ in Milwaukee, WI. The congregation and physical building itself have moved around Milwaukee for many years, occupying five distinct locations around the city since the 1830s. Throughout its many locations and tenures with various pastors, Plymouth Church has found itself closely linked with causes of combatting social injustice and creating a welcoming community over the years. The church's origins begin in the early 1840s, when settlers from Chicago moved to Milwaukee in the hopes of starting a Congregationalist church there. In 1841, the First Congregational Church of Milwaukee separated from the Milwaukee Presbyterian Church. By the mid 1840s, the issue of slavery versus abolitionism was a pressing issue among the congregation. A faction of the church in favor of slavery separated from the congregation, leaving the Free Congregational Church the faction supporting abolitionism. By 1850, it had formally changed its name to Plymouth Church and played a major role in establishing the Milwaukee branch of the YMCA in 1857. In the period after the civil war, the church dabbled in combining Social Darwinist theory with Christian theology. In 1882, the church's pastor led a coalition of over 150 Milwaukeeans to sign a petition to ban the sale of alcohol and tickets to music performances and dances on Sundays. He and the church were soundly ridiculed by the local press and "blue laws" were not passed in Milwaukee, but the campaign highlighted the progressive social stance of the church at the time. By the early 20th century, Plymouth Church was active in promoting the social welfare and spiritual well being of Milwaukee's citizens and beyond. During World War One, the church's pastor took a

temporary post in Mississippi to become an Army Chaplain, while other members led Bible study classes to sailors in training at the Great Lakes Naval Base outside of Chicago. The Great Depression severely affected the church's finances but did not cause it to fold or adjust its outreach programs. After WWII, the church entered discussions to merge with an association of Evangelical and Reformed Churches, including the United Church of Christ in 1956. Plymouth repeatedly voted not to combine with these organizations, but eventually acquiesced in 1963 and joined the UCC. Meanwhile, the church became more socially conscious. In 1950, the pastor joined a council that advocated for the People's Republic of China to be admitted in the United Nations, and in 1967 the church started an interracial high school tutoring program during the Civil Rights Movement. After the conclusion of the Vietnam War, the church started a program to aid Cambodian refugees in resettling in America. In 1979, Plymouth Church welcomed its first female co-pastor. Throughout the 1980s, members of the church were active in the nuclear disarmament movement, including the pastor, who actually left his post in 1984 to focus his energies on such matters. In more recent years, Plymouth Church was one of the first in Milwaukee to officiate same-sex marriages and has been active in promoting immigrants' rights. Plymouth Church remains a very socially conscious congregation and keeps social justice at the forefront of its theology and outreach programs.

Timeline

May 20, 1841—Samuel and Cordelia Brown, two recent settlers from Chicago, move to Milwaukee and establish the First Congregational Church of Milwaukee.

February 1847—The congregation becomes embroiled in the debate of slavery vs. abolitionism. A portion of the congregation secedes, leaving the Free Congregational Church of Milwaukee as the one in favor of abolitionism.

August 20, 1850—The congregation votes to change its name to Plymouth Church and moves its physical location to the corner of Wells and Oneida (now Milwaukee Street)

June 1, 1882—Pastor Henry Terbell Rose leads a petition signed by over 150 Milwaukeeans to demand that City Hall enact legislation to ban the sale of alcohol and tickets to musical

performances and dances on Sundays. The petition is soundly rejected and ridiculed by many in the city, especially the German majority.

December 19, 1889—Plymouth Church constructs a new building at the corner of Wells and Van Buren Streets. This revolutionary new building was the talk of the town with its auditorium-style seating, which could accommodate over 1,200 people. After the church moved out in 1912, it was sold to a Freemason Lodge. It remains a Masonic Lodge at the time of this publication.

August 7, 1913—The cornerstone is laid for the new location of Plymouth Church at the corner of Hampshire and Hackett, near the UWM campus. The church has remained and continues to worship in this location to this day.

March 25, 1979—Mary Ann Neevel joins Plymouth Church as its first female co-pastor. Her and Rev. Paul Flucke agree to share pastoral responsibilities so as not to give the appearance that one was superior to the other, hence the co-pastor title. She became the full pastor upon Rev. Flucke's retirement in 1984 and retired in 2005.

Circa 1983—Many members of Plymouth Church attend a protest march in Washington, D.C., against the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. This would be one of the many social issues that Plymouth's members would take an active part in. Even Pastor Paul Flucke was passionate about the nuclear nonproliferation movement, going as far as to resign his post in 1984 in order to devote his time and resources to disarmament movements along the West Coast.

April 29, 2018—Plymouth Church remains active in combatting social and political injustice. The congregation, on an individual and organizational level, have been active in causes related to immigration, racial discrimination, and homosexual rights, to name a few.

Annotated Bibliography

Flucke, Paul. Plymouth: A Church and its World. Published by Plymouth Church, Milwaukee: 1984.

This church history, published by the acting pastor at the time, is an invaluable record of the history of Plymouth Church from its founding to the time of its publication. It is extensively researched and includes many photographs of the various church buildings, pastors, and images of church members in prayer or doing community outreach. At times, it tends to focus on biographies of the church's pastors and how they responded to various social movements of their eras. It is a book written by and for Plymouth Church, but it remains useful to those interested in local religious congregational history.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department. "Plymouth Church, United Church of Christ Records."

There is a significant amount of archival material located in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's archives department. The collection contains 42 cubic feet of material: 47 boxes, 1 oversize folder, 1 microfilm reel, 7 film reels, 1 videocassette, 7 audio reels, 80 audio cassettes, and 22 safety film negatives. For the purposes of this project, we looked through boxes only.

