

I really appreciate the opportunity to speak here at Council, thank you. While I know many of you, I don't know all of you, so my name is John Lord, I've been a member of Plymouth for 22 years and have served for many years with the Deacons and the Mission and Service Board. I can be a bit of a church nerd at times, and I unfortunately do enjoy talking about church polity and governance. We all have our faults. To me the bylaws define and codify the rules between the congregation, the ministerial staff, and the elected lay leaders, and are basically the contract that everyone agrees to. Contracts can be so frustrating to review, and bylaw requires almost the same level of concentration as reviewing legal contracts or reading each required Terms of Service that are included before every new app you download on your phone. Painful.

Understanding the proposed bylaws changes has not been an easy journey for me, and my apologies for struggling at times to explain my concerns, but I think they can be articulated in the following four statements.

- 1) I strongly believe that quickly pushing through any By-law changes over the summer will be seen as overly hasty. Even if Council has nothing to hide, it just looks like bad. Once people return and understand the changes that were approved in their absence, it will only perpetuate frustrations. I can't think of a single positive outcome for approving bylaw changes when people don't understand why and how they will impact the church.
- 2) I'm worried that removing the voting rights of the Boards will actually result in an increased separation of the Council from the congregation at large. If the purpose is to strengthen the Council, I don't think it should be done by weakening the Boards. Let's look at ways we can strengthen each other. I would love to have a discussion on how the Boards could be improved, as we could easily create some policy recommendations to move forward with.
- 3) I feel that changing the numbers of elected Board members will weaken the congregation. If you picture Plymouth as a pyramid: the congregation is the base and at the top is the Council and the moderator. In the middle are the Boards. If you remove the number of people who can participate on the Boards, you actually undermine the strength of the Council. The more people that understand Plymouth's governance, the stronger the members of Council can be. If we have people that are willing to volunteer, I support them. Do you think this change make the work more efficient? Who is going to do the work?
- 4) Last, I'm concerned with the ramifications of removing the Boards from the By-Laws and moving them to the Policy Book, as I feel each of the Boards are critical to the life of this church. However, we could review the Bylaws of other churches and see if they have the same boards. Maybe some can some be reinterpreted, or maybe we want to add others? Board of Spiritual Growth and Adult Education? Board of Christian Social Action? Board of Benevolences? These are all Boards at Plymouth in Des Moines. This could easily be a congregational discussion.

Once you make a change to weaken the importance of the Boards, it is going to be very difficult to strengthen their importance if it doesn't work. We have concluded that the premise behind all of Bylaw changes is the incorrect assumption that the only way to strengthen the Council is to weaken the Boards

Instead of bringing updated Bylaws directly to the congregation to be approved, I recommend the following steps instead:

- 1) Make available a survey in June and July to the whole congregation and invite them into a visioning discussion on what Plymouth 2029 is going to look like. Place a QR code in a few bulletins, the Rock and maybe add in a short minute for mission (or even a statement at the start of the service). 2029 will be Plymouth's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and this discussion could include our mission, facilities, and of course church governance.
- 2) Schedule 2 or 3 listening sessions in September and October to discuss the results and summary report of the survey. If there are concerns about the church governance model, ask for suggestions from members of the congregation on ways they think it could be improved.
- 3) If there is interest in fixing or changing the governance model, in October, review these proposed bylaws, and adjust as necessary.
- 4) In November have council approved the suspension of the current by-laws (if necessary) so that the new nominating committee can start creating a slate of the required nominees.
- 5) At the 2024 February Annual Meeting, either approve the new bylaws and have them start with the new boards or continue to suspend the current bylaws as we live into the new changes. The congregation will have voiced their opinion by this time.

The purpose of these 5 steps is to bring the congregation along on this journey. Craft the story of Plymouth's evolution. While it unfortunately means we have a long way to go before any changes are approved, we will have provided enough time to listen, discuss and dream together. Please don't spend the next 60 minutes discussing the proposed bylaws section by section. Instead envision what questions should be included on the survey so we can learn what Plymouth 2029 will look like.

Thank you.