

proceeded by the dedication of a new cross. This cross was created out of raw steel and copper recycled from the original church steeple that had to be removed in 2024 due to leakage around the steeple. The new cross was created by metalworkers, Matt and Tessie Wallace, and gifted to the church by Charlie and Sarah Stebbins. Following the dedication and welcome to special guests, special presentations of hand drawn pictures of the church were made to Todd Wright (15 years), Amy Parker (23 years) and Sharon Curnutte (50 years).

The service continued with the call to worship and singing of the hymn, “Come Sing, O Church, in Joy”, followed by the prayer of confession, assurance of pardon, and sharing of the peace. Special music by the choir was the singing of “Speak, O Lord” which was followed by the Time with Children.

The guest minister for the service was the Reverend Frank Mansell, III, the son of our previous pastor, Frank Mansell, Jr. and his wife, Joan. Frank is the pastor at Western Boulevard Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. Frank’s sermon was titled, “Remember and Go” and he shared with the congregation that at age 53, nearly 80 percent of his life has been connected to Village Chapel. Since coming here at age 11, he indicated that the Church here has made an “indelible mark” on his life. He described himself, as a youngster, as a “church orphan” with his mother singing in the choir and his father the minister. It was clear that he feels a very strong connection to “this church, these people, and this place!” He also stressed the importance of not only celebrating the past, but looking forward to the future, to discover what God is calling us to do. “God is with you always in Jesus Christ, so now go tell others of that good news.” Communion was served using the original silver communion set.

Following the service, Janet Rorrer took a group picture of the seated congregation, just as those taken in past anniversaries. A luncheon was served by Café Appalachia and following this, Dr. Wright shared communications from various groups. Maureen Wright brought greetings from the Presbytery of West Virginia.

All in all, it was a wonderful ten-week celebration of 75 years of Village Chapel Presbyterian Church, and the Church can now look forward to its next anniversary – its Centennial!!

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND CONCERNS

In looking to the celebration of Village Chapel’s 75th Anniversary and the conclusion of this history, the author, in looking back over this document, notes some of the concerns or issues that have occurred over these seventy-five years and the notable strengths of Village Chapel.

The issues/concerns in comparison with the strengths are few, but significant. The Church's experience with purchasing properties in the neighborhood and attempting to generate money by renting these resulted in unsuccessful and frustrating experiences. Since COVID and the installation of virtual services, attendance at worship services has decreased significantly. The upside of continuing virtual services is that they are available to those unable to come to church in-person; however, they also provide reason to watch from home for those who might otherwise attend in person. Unfortunately, no longer available, but in the past, the youth program at Village was a tremendous asset not only to the Church but to the community. The Church provided significant impact on the youth growing up in the Church as validated by the four speakers involved in the 75th Anniversary Celebration. Today's Church activities reflect little involvement of the youth of the Church family. And this leads to the greatest concern – the decrease in numbers of young families and young people with a concomitant increase in the “greying congregation” particularly since COVID. This raises the serious question, “How long can Village Chapel continue to function/thrive as it loses active membership through the gradual demise of the aging congregation?”

On the positive side, Village Chapel Presbyterian Church has many strengths! In reading the artifacts of the Church's history, the most striking thing is that it is a caring and giving Church and this is consistently reiterated across its seventy-five-year history. When one considers the number of gifts Village Chapel has donated to community agencies over and over throughout its history, it is amazing! The number of “special” giving opportunities that have been provided for not only organizations, but to assist individuals and families reflects upon the inherent caring and concern for the members of the congregation, the Church, the greater Church, and the community. If one were to do a “search” for agencies like Common Grounds, Manna Meal, Sojourners, Bluestone, Covenant House, and the list goes on, these are mentioned almost annually.

Closer to the Church, Village Chapel Presbyterian Church, whenever it has needed additions, renovations, repairs, whether a building addition or lightbulbs, the congregation has stepped up to provide the funding whether through special fund-raising opportunities, increased giving, anonymous donors, or other means, there is little or no evidence of the necessary funding being unavailable. The provision of a furnace for a member, cleaning out a member's home to make it more livable, providing funds for scholarships or books for students, the institution of “Pay-it-Forward” to make necessities for the underprivileged at no cost other than asking partakers to “do something good for others” provides further evidence of a “giving church”. Community giving and continued community outreach at Village Chapel are amazing!

It is a concerned Church as evidenced by the institution and continuation of the Prayer List, the Shepherd's Program to keep in contact with the membership, particularly in times of distress. The support of bereaved families with providing food and fellowship for funeral services. For providing food for the homebound through the “Soup” program and traveling communion for those unable to attend worship and communion services provide ongoing evidence of a concerned entity.

Over its history, Village Chapel has been blessed with good leadership. The six pastors have been caring, flexible, supportive, and have encouraged the Church's involvement, community outreach and the internal needs of the Church. Most have been involved not only in Village Chapel activities, but in the Presbytery and in ecumenical activities of area churches. Over the years the continuation of ecumenical services not only among the four "parish" Presbyterian churches, but services with other denominations have been well received. They have engaged in creative planning, particularly with involvement with the arts and the recent activities with the Thriving Congregation initiative.

Music has been a strength of Village Chapel with long-standing and talented leadership. When children were active, the inclusion of children in musical programming was well done. The involvement of area musicians in special services has been a very positive addition to the regular choir and instrumental programming. Members of the congregation have said "they come to Village to enjoy the music"!

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the preparation of this document, the gathering of "snippets" of the history of the Village Chapel Presbyterian Church from a multitude of sources has been a very interesting and personally rewarding experience. I have relied on those individuals who have noted the history of the Church in their minutes, notes, letters, personal interactions, etc. to gather the information and record it sequentially. Of course, there are a lot of "snippets" missing for a variety of reasons; however, the content and appendixes reflect a great deal of the Church's seventy-five years. It is my hope that this "collection" will serve to be of some value to those who are interested in planning for change in the Church or of the continued evolution of Village Chapel. And, when the time comes for the celebration of its Centennial, that this document and the filed supportive documents will provide a foundation for writing the 100th Anniversary History!!