

VILLAGE CHAPEL IN THE 2020s

In **February of 2020**, the Session explored the possibility of installing a columbarium with representatives of the Barlow-Bonsall Funeral Home. A columbarium is a structure that has niches (spaces) in which urns containing cremains or human cremated remains are placed. A follow-up survey of the congregation was conducted with 27 responses received, of which four (4) individuals were interested in receiving more information; one person indicated interest in purchasing a niche; and the remaining 24 were either not interested in a columbarium or have already made other burial arrangements.

With the closure of Westminster in **2019**, members of that church were seeking a new church home. Dr. Wright sent a letter inviting them to worship at Village Chapel.

The COVID-19 virus in **2019-2020** provided significant challenges for the Church. In response to the COVID issue, Village Chapel began conducting services online and in the **March 18th** meeting of the Session, a motion was made to postpone in-person worship services until further notice in compliance with recommendations from the CDC for social distancing due to the COVID-19 virus. The following actions were put in place to provide guidelines for Worship Services:

- Services will be offered via Facebook
- Bulletins will be provided via email or mailed according to the member's preference
- Adjustments will be made to the order of service/length as appropriate
- Offering – checks by mail, auto-draft with bank, or e-giving via VC website
- Suspend flowers
- Communion – suspend until congregation can be together again

In addition, the decision was made to postpone educational events such as Sunday School, Bible study, etc. until further notice. Teachers will explore options.

Other decisions made regarding meetings/ministries of the church included:

- Ministry team meetings would continue via email or texting.
- Other committee meetings such as the choir and PW are postponed until further notice.
- Outside groups such as Tai Chi, Bridge, Narcotic Anonymous were postponed “until further notice” due to the need for social distancing.
- Staff will continue their work primarily from home.
- Although the need for cleaning of the church was limited, the decision was made to continue to pay the cleaning ladies as “normal”.

The following decisions were made regarding communication with the congregation:

- Use a temporary phone chain to stay in contact with the congregation to share necessary information.
- Offer to fund errands/pick up groceries or prescriptions for those staying at home.
- Offer to help with technical issues so folks can access worship services.
- Distribute hand sanitizer or soap.

The decision was also made to hold Session meetings electronically or virtually. “The Session may meet by electronic means if all active elders have reasonable notice of the electronic meeting and the ability to discuss, deliberate, and discern the will of God and vote on business items. The quorum for such a meeting will be seven (7) active elders or at least two (2) active elders and one (1) moderator.

In addition, the Session voted to seek assistance through the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) which would provide small business loans to cover qualified payroll costs, rent, utilities, and interest on mortgage and other debt obligations. An application was submitted on **April 15th**.

During the pandemic, with limited in-person meetings and interactions, the Shepherding Program became very important. There was indication that there was great appreciation that someone was checking on individuals. Also, the virtual Sunday School apparently went well with both children’s and adult classes.

On May 9th, the house next door, utilized by the Kanawha Pastoral Care (KPC) program, was broken into with damage in the attic and basement to items designated for Pay It Forward. KPC repaired the doors and rekeyed them. At this time there were also issues with folks loitering in the alley behind the Church and littering of trash.

In mid-**May**, Village Chapel received \$34,000 from the Paycheck Protection Program to be utilized to pay staff expenses for eight weeks. All dollars that are used will be forgiven and any remaining dollars will be converted to a loan at 1% interest.

In **May 2020**, Max Bland was our sole high school graduate—as he graduated from Capital High School.

Extended Arms, an outreach to the homeless in Kanawha City, offered clothing and other items to the homeless on **June 27th** at the vacant lot on 58th street and MacCorkle Avenue. Village Chapel members participated by donating items for distribution.

In **June**, a Comeback Committee was formed to begin to develop plans for reinstituting in-person worship services. Members of this group were Sandy Bowles, Vicki Cunningham, John France, Rick Hanna, Kathy Kruk, Carolyn Perrine, Barb and Jim Smith and Jeff and Rona Smith. Consideration was given as to how to conduct communion, welcome new members, and how to prepare for return to meeting in person when the decision to do so is made. In the **July** Session meeting, the group agreed that virtual worship would be continued until Advent, giving the Comeback Committee adequate time to prepare for in-person meetings and Worship Services. As part of this process, a survey was developed to obtain the congregation's feelings about in-person worship and related concerns that have developed over the Covid-19 experience. As a follow-up, the survey findings were reviewed by the Session in its October meeting. The following recommendations were made:

1. Continue to remain virtual until after the first of the year
2. To not allow groups to start meeting in the Church again until the Church is open and only if the group is willing to follow safety procedures and clean up after its activities
3. Significant discussion occurred as to whether to follow the school calendar when we open, to determine when we meet in person and when to meet virtually.

On **August 2, 2020**, the Session met via Zoom to welcome new members, Roger and Rita Sockman and Ellen Ann Sockman. Roger is the son of Jule Sockman, a charter member of Village Chapel.

For the Presbytery meeting held virtually on **August 15th**, Dr. Wright preached the sermon, Kathy Kruk served as the Elder Commissioner, Dr. Parker was the Curator of the Word and presented a video related to Justice and Social Injustice. Sharon King will serve as a trustee for the Presbytery in 2021.

The Session minutes for **August 19th** indicate issues with Common Grounds as structural damages have developed with the flooring. During the pandemic, the facility was closed for a portion of the time and when it reopened, provided assistance with food only. On **September 1st**, assistance with utilities resumed. At this time, the Southeast Church of the Nazarene expressed interest in becoming a supporting church.

At the **August 19th** Session meeting, Dr. Wright discussed the Presbyterian Week of Action scheduled for **August 24-30**. This endeavor provides public witness that facilitates education, visibility, and action that reinforces the PC (USA) statements and policy that support eradicating racism and acknowledge that God loves all Black lives.

Rally Day on **September 13th** hosted a virtual sandwich preparation for Manna Meal. Members of the Church were asked to provide bread, lunch meat and cheese – enough to make 25+ sandwiches and then on the day to “set up your sandwich assembly so that it could be viewed via zoom as you worked.” Completed sandwiches were then taken to Manna Meal for distribution. A note in The Villager indicated that Manna Meal has been providing meals in Charleston since 1976 and in 2019, served 110,000 meals through donations (50K donated food) and grants. They serve as many as 400 people each day and are open for breakfast and lunch 365 days a year!

On **October 4, 2020**, four Presbyterian churches (Bream, First Charleston, Kanawha United and Village Chapel) celebrated a joint Worship Service on World Communion Sunday. The pastors of the four churches preached briefly, various musicians provided music (including the Curnutte family), and members from all of the churches prayed the Lord’s Prayer in languages of people from all around the world. Communion was celebrated with many different kinds of bread from many cultures.

The Christmas Eve service was held using a “drive-in” format with communion. Families were asked to bring their own elements. The service was held early evening in the parking lot at the CAMC Cancer Center. The Center requested that we pray for their patients and staff in return for use of the parking lot.

As in previous years, Christmas cards created by local artists were sold and the money generated donated to benefit the Mary Ingalls Elementary School art program.

The Session, in their November meeting, recognized that Dr. Parker will be working with new software to facilitate broadcasting of the services virtually. A date for beginning “live” services was identified as **February 14, 2021**, Transfiguration Sunday. The in-person services will also be offered virtually.

In the **January 16, 2021**, meeting, the Session heard a presentation by Dr. Cathy Slemph on COVID-19: Where are We Now, Thinking Forward for the Church and Broader Community. After the presentation and considerable discussion, it was decided unanimously that Village Chapel delay the return to in-person gatherings until Easter or until the infection rate reaches an acceptable level in Kanawha County. Goals identified for 2021 were 1) Growing membership, 2) Childcare for Narcotics Anonymous, 3) Increase health awareness, 4) Increasing involvement with University of Charleston students, 5) Increase diversity, and 6) Increase children in worship.

Discussion via the Session responded to the following questions related to returning to in-person services:

1. What have we learned about our congregation?
 - a. Concerned
 - b. Creative
 - c. Flexible
 - d. Love for our church
 - e. Resilient
 - f. Willingness to adapt
2. What ministries proved to be most important?
 - a. Baptism online
 - b. Fellowship time online
 - c. Food baskets at Christmas rather than poinsettias
 - d. Online services
 - e. Shepherding
3. How did we adapt to the pandemic? What worked well?
 - a. Folks were willing to share their talents with others
 - b. Online Sunday School and Worship Services
 - c. Technology advancement
 - d. Zoom meetings
4. What did people miss, based on 2020?
 - a. Being together during worship, fellowship, gatherings for meals, etc.
 - b. Choir (especially congregation and choir singing hymns)
 - c. Physical contact (hugs, passing the peace, etc.)
5. Based on what learned, on what 3 areas do pastor and Session need to focus energy and attention in 2021?
 - a. Comeback Committee
 - b. Continuation of hybrid services
 - c. Shepherding

Generally speaking, very positive feedback has been received regarding virtual worship. Amy and Don Parker have been very involved in preparing communications for services over the past year.

As a component of dealing with on-line services, it became necessary to revise the church's "front door" – the website. It was quickly determined that the Village Chapel website needed updating. To accomplish this, a gift given earlier by Carolyn Stevens was used to work with a professional to develop a "logo" and redesign the website. As Carolyn

very much enjoyed worship, it was fitting to use her gift for this purpose. “While others have contributed in many ways, Carolyn’s generosity made this effort possible.”

For Ash Wednesday, Amy Parker and Todd Wright agreed to be available at the church to administer ashes. It was decided that these would be applied using a long swab and placed on the hand rather than the forehead.

The **April 4, 2021** Easter Service was the church’s first service back in the sanctuary since discontinued with COVID. A note from Dr. Wright in the **March 26th** Bulletin read: “Easter is almost here—the day when we will finally return to in-person services! It will be a day of great rejoicing! But let’s be clear: we will not slip back into the same place we were in a year ago. We will still be taking COVID precautions. There will still be people who will be worshiping virtually. And our worship and ministry will be molded by the lessons we have learned: things like our ability as a congregation to adapt to challenging circumstances and continue doing good ministry; or the power of technology to bridge gaps as well as our hunger for face-to-face contact per society’s deep brokenness and our role in both bringing healing and working for justice in small yet faithful ways.” Recommendations from the Comeback Committee included: Pews will be wiped with hydrogen peroxide before and after the service; Bibles and hymnals will be removed from the sanctuary; the collection will be taken in the vestibule prior to or after the service; masks must be worn while in the Church; hand sanitizer is to be used upon entry; a plexiglass shield has been placed in front of the pulpit; ushers will escort attendees out immediately after the service; attendees will need to exit promptly and “visit” outside, if desired. For the children in worship, it was agreed that children would remain in the pews with their parents and Todd and/or Amy would go to them. Because of the logistics raised regarding communion, it was determined that this would not be included in the Easter service.

The **April** Session minutes indicated that while in-person services have been reinstituted, the virtual services will be continued indefinitely, primarily because significant investments in equipment, time and training have been made. Also, the hybrid services will continue because they provide opportunity for those who cannot be (or who do not want to be) present physically due to any number of reasons, and an outreach to those who may be curious about the church.

In April, Dr. Wright reported that his original plans for his sabbatical, which was postponed in 2020 due to COVID-10, will not be possible in **2021** due to the continuation of COVID-19. Therefore, instead of delaying the sabbatical yet another year, his plans have been revised. The sabbatical will be from May 16th (last day in the pulpit) to August 16th (first day back in the office). The purpose of a sabbatical is for “personal and professional growth, spiritual renewal, and a revitalization of vision and hope”.

Ministers serving in Todd's absence in the summer of **2021** included:

- Nellie Howard (X2) from Waverly, WV and the daughter of Polly Dodson, charter member
- Chris Bailey, from Huntington and a Chaplain at Marshall University
- Amy Parker, our own Minister of Education and the Arts
- Bill Hairston (X3), Previously the minister at Westminster Church
- Ed Thompson (X2) Has served a number of churches and the Presbytery
- Frank Mansell, III Grew up in the Church and is now a pastor in Raleigh, NC
- Samantha Coggins, Campus Minister at WVU
- Rabbi Victor Urecki, Spiritual Leader of the B'nai Jacob Synagogue
- Ravi Isaiah, Methodist Minister and Chaplain CAMC

In June of **2021**, information from the May Presbytery meeting indicated that all churches are being encouraged to incorporate and have one year to accomplish incorporation. This will help protect officers of the church. The Presbytery will cover the incorporation fees and provide guidance. In September, it was determined that Village Chapel will move forward with incorporation under a "default model". Under this model, the Clerk of Session serves as Secretary of the corporation and the Treasurer appointed by the Session, serves as Treasurer of the corporation. The President of the corporation is elected from those elders serving on the Session. The remainder of the elders on Session are also trustees, but not members of the corporation. (The Church was officially incorporated by January 1, 2022.)

In returning to in-person services, the congregation was required to wear masks. However, in **July of 2021**, the Worship Ministry Team recommended that masks be optional for fully vaccinated individuals. Those not vaccinated would continue to wear masks for their protection, as well as the other members of the congregation. To reduce the possibility of unnecessary exposure, communion during this time was served using a cube of bread and a grape inserted on a toothpick for which the congregation would come forward and pick up off a plate offered by the ministers or an elder.

In summer **2021**, the church had to deal with ransom-ware issues. The ransom request was \$45,000 and was settled at \$6,000; however, some access was given to Church information and another ransom of \$45,000 was requested. Insurance covered a portion of this, and a program was put in place to protect all Church computers from subsequent attacks.

Over the thirteen weeks Dr. Wright was on Sabbatical, he engaged in a wide variety of "Todd's Treks" activities including several weeks hiking portions of the Appalachian Trail in North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Vermont, New Hampshire, etc. He also spent time at Montreat making communion ware, reading, hiking, a week at the Weston Priory- a community of Benedictine monks, a baseball "pilgrimage", and time with his family.

In September a flyer was developed to be displayed at the University of Charleston for those students from out of the area who may be looking for a home church. A similar flier was developed to be posted at the Village Apartments to try to attract individuals to the Church.

In **2021** the Property Ministry Team began creating a notebook to contain information regarding property items such as: Fire extinguisher locations and maintenance, smoke detector location and maintenance, fuse box explanations, furnace, etc.

In **2021**, the Service Ministry Team continued to contribute/support Common Grounds, Red Cross blood drives (5), a coat and blanket drive for which items were taken to the Roark Sullivan Lifeway Center to assist Veterans in the area, Picnic in the Park refreshments, Backpacks for Bookworms for the children at Mary Ingles Elementary, Alzheimer's Walk, Blessing Bags, Pay it Forward, and 30 Veteran's Bags.

As recommended by the Presbytery, Village Chapel became incorporated as of **January 1, 2022**.

The Souper Bowl of Caring has been conducted each year and was held on February **13th** in **2022**. The congregation continues to give "cans or cash" to support their favorite team. Food collected was again, given to Common Grounds.

In **February**, Helen Warren was received into membership and in **March** Peter and Tara Markham and their children, Addison and Paul, joined the Church.

A letter, dated **February 21, 2022**, was drafted to be sent to those individuals not participating in the life of the Church asking that these persons return to active membership or provide information as to their thoughts on their church membership. Asking to be brought up to date on their spiritual journey – are they worshipping elsewhere and need to have their membership transferred or do they want to be placed on the "friends" of Village Chapel roll which would mean they still receive newsletters, are prayed for, and are welcome at communion or other activities.

On **March 5th**, the family of Julian Sockman held a birthday celebration with a drive-by at their home. Jules is the oldest member of the Church, turning 99 on this date! On **March 6th**, all those members of the congregation who were over 90 were recognized.

Barb Smith held a "Balance with Barb" class for anyone seeking to improve their balance with standing and sitting activities to do so. A \$5 per class donation to benefit the church was requested.

As part of the Monday night Lenten Study, the Worship Ministry Team sponsored a new opportunity for a prayer service – a Taizé service at 7:00 p.m. on **March 28th**. The Taizé community is an ecumenical Christian monastery in southern France. The Taizé' community and the Taizé form of worship was founded in 1940 by a monk, Brother Roger Schutz who came into occupied France from his home in Switzerland. At that time the group took in orphaned children and Jews protecting them from the Nazis. The community has become a place for over 100,000 youth to come on pilgrimage each year and the prayer service is a very important part of their experience. The service is characterized by the repetitive singing of simple harmonized tunes with lyrics often from the Psalms or other pieces of scripture. These are interspersed with readings, prayers, and periods of silence. Repetition is an important element because the service is about contemplation and being in touch with God and your spirituality. For example, the repetitive singing of “Jesus, Remember Me” provides a mechanism for the words to enter your very being. The service is a peaceful immersion in song and silence with silence providing time to absorb the meaning of what has been sung, read, and seen. In addition to Carolyn Perrine and Sharon Curnutte, Betty King and Ken Long played for this service.

As in **2021**, members of the congregation were asked to “spend one hour” praying, singing, and meditating on scripture” during the Easter Vigil beginning on Good Friday and continuing for 40 hours until sunrise on Easter morn. Volunteers were asked to commit to doing so on a schedule made available prior to the Vigil.

During the year, Roger Sockman and Rick Hanna tried to generate interest in forming a Praise Band; however, the effort was not successful as only two individuals responded to the invitation to participate.

In the spring of **2021**, the 40-year-old organ was “diagnosed” with electronic parts that needed to not be repaired but replaced – at the cost of \$8,000. The congregation was asked to help raise the necessary funds and a matching offer was received. So, for two months members of the church pledged and provided the funds necessary to repair the organ which has been such a wonderful part of the music program at Village Chapel!

Since **October of 2021**, three youth have been meeting with their mentors to prepare for confirmation. The three young people were Viv Canterbury, Isiah Canterbury and Kelsey Rorrer. The mentors for the group were Patti and Howard Salisbury and Maureen Wright. The confirmands were honored on **May 15th**.

Also, in the summer of **2021**, magnetic car decals featuring the new logo of the church were made available and as a result, the cars of Village Chapel members soon proclaimed the Church of their drivers!

As part of the Worship in the Park service, attendees wrote notes to Presbyterian mission workers in a handful of countries and the pastors of PCUSA churches in Buffalo and Uvalde. Following this, the church received responses from a number of those receiving the notes. One said, Wow! I really felt the presence of the Holy Spirit through this spiritual email! May God bless you, and all the congregation at Village Chapel. Rev. Adolfo Santana, Iglesia Presbiteriana en Caparra Terrace, Puerto Rico

On Saturday, **June 18th**, the first ever Village Apartment picnic, coordinated by the Fellowship Ministry Team, was held. Joey Stonestreet cooked hot dogs; Howard Salisbury, Todd Wright, and Jim Smith transported tables and chairs to and from the courtyard; Joyce Dunlap, a resident of the Apartments served as hostess, and Maureen Wright, Kathy Kruk, Patti Salisbury, Sandy Bowles, Jeanne MacDonald, Heather Barry, Dreama White, Barbara Tabaretti, Vicki Cunningham, and Rita Sockman helped set up and deliver food dishes. A great time was had by all!

On **June 19th** Jack Blank and Noah Lawson were recognized for their high school graduation. In a later edition of The Villager, a Thank You note from Noah acknowledged receiving a care package indicating that “everything will be put to use and eaten!” “I love that the younger kids signed the note and drew a couple of pictures for me!”

In the summer of **2022**, Village Chapel accepted an invitation to participate in “Thriving Congregations” an initiative offered by the Montreat Conference Center and the Black Mountain School and funded by the Lilly Endowment. Each participating church identified a cohort of individuals willing to engage in a two-year commitment of meetings in the home church and travel to Montreat every six months to work toward “thickening relationships within churches and to accomplish what God is calling us to do.” A group of individuals came together to meet regularly at the Church. This group included Todd Wright, Helen Warren, Rita and Roger Sockman, Peter Markham, Barbara Tabaretti, Kathy Kruk, Sandy Bowles, Bob Hiser, Patty Salisbury and Sharon King. Of this group, six volunteered to go to Montreat every six months over the two-year period of the grant. These individuals were Todd Wright, Helen Warren, Rita Sockman, Roger Sockman, Sandy Bowles, and Bob Hiser.

On Rally Day in September, the congregation was asked to contribute drill bits, screws, table saw blades, tape measures, work gloves, etc. for the West Virginia Ministry of Advocacy and Workcamps (WVMAW), a ministry of the Presbytery of West Virginia. “Thank you’s” printed in the November edition of The Villager ranged from “These are great!” to “THESE ARE GREAT!” The contributed supplies were sent to Summersville, Gilbert and Point Pleasant to be used by WVMAM teams helping families needing home repairs and the building of ramps to “release people from the prison of their homes with ramps leading to freedom.”

Those serving as Sunday School teachers for **2022** included:

The Polly Dodson Class – adult current issues and church related topics
Teachers: Barbara Tabaretti and Vicki Cunningham

The Present Word Class – adult Bible study
Teachers: Sheila Danzer, David Dawson, Barb Smith

Elementary/Youth: Letters of Paul
Teachers: Kathy Kruk, Sharon Richardson, Janet Rorrer, Patti Salisbury
Helpers: Kelsey Rorrer, Samantha Rorrer

Over the year, Sunday School classes met in a hybrid or blended format (zoom and in person) while the children/youth class met in person.

Sadly, in **2022**, there were no youth participating in Youth Events, Retreats, or Youth Council and there was no youth elder participating on the Session.

The Session, on **September 21, 2022**, adopted a Safety and Security Policy providing policies and direction for handling issues such as dangerous weather, medical emergencies, and intruders. It also includes the recommendation to “practice” the responses to various scenarios once each year with the first Sunday in April suggested for doing this. The development of a Safety and Security team to be organized by the Session was also included in this document.

On **October 27th** Village Chapel hosted an “Interfaith Relationships and Dialogue – How to Effectively Develop Them and Transform Church, Community, and Staff.” Participants included Ibtesam Sue Barazi, Vice President, Islamic Association of West Virginia; Victor Urecki, Rabbi, B’nai Jacob Synagogue; and Todd Wright, Pastor here at Village Chapel Presbyterian Church. The day’s activities provided guidance, knowledge, and support in discovering how to overcome the barriers of religious differences and build bridges of religious understanding and growth.

The Presbyterian Church USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America each trace their history back to the 16th century and have been in full communion since 1997. So, in **2022**, Village approached Trinity Lutheran Church about having a joint service and Trinity not only agreed but agreed to host it on **October 30th**. Drs. Amy and Todd participated in the service as well as the choir. A lunch followed in the fellowship hall where our congregation has helped serve Trinity’s Table meals over the years! The offering involved using two different colored envelopes and all loose offerings were given to Covenant House. The two churches will plan to continue this celebration in future years.

Also, in **October 2022**, the church celebrated Amy Parker's "significant" birthday and her 20th anniversary of joining the staff at Village Chapel! Amy has been a leader with many creative ideas which she has encouraged the congregation to participate in and during the COVID crisis along with her husband, Don, successfully used new technology to make virtual worship services possible. This successful effort continues to provide worship services for those unable or unwilling to attend in-person services at Village Chapel.

In **2022**, to provide relief for Amy and Don Parker in delivering the streaming of the worship services every Sunday, two members of the congregation, Vicki Cunningham and Rick Hanna, were trained to serve in this capacity.

Advent activities in **2022** included, as in previous years, the gathering at Vicki and Ira's home to fill bags for Veterans, a Longest Night Service conducted Taizé' style, and Christmas Caroling at Hubbard Hospice House. A Christmas Eve Candlelight service with communion was held on Saturday evening at 9:00 with this service available on Christmas morning via Facebook.

An updated descriptive procedure for delivering Traveling Communion was provided for Session members engaged in this service. Four teams with four elders were identified along with the names and addresses of those who might be served with communion.

The Property Ministry Team in **2022** completed an extraordinarily large number of ongoing tasks which included, in addition to the usual tasks of replacing furnace filters, lightbulbs, lawn care, etc., the replacement of flooring in the parlor and kitchen, painted the parlor and kitchen, replaced electrical outlets in a number of sites, replaced lights with LEDs, cleaned out and disposed of unneeded items in the basement and garage, repaired the picket fence, painted the outsides of the garage, storage room and connecting wall, added additional handicapped parking spaces and repainted the parking lines, to name a few. Over the year, Barb and Jim Smith have made themselves available to keep up with numerous housekeeping tasks and outside grounds work. In addition to the Smiths, members of the Property Ministry team included: John France, Rick Hanna, Phil Harich, Alan Johnston, Steve Murray, Sherry Murry, Greg Rader, Roger Sockman, and Todd Wright.

During this year, a Peace Pole, which was obtained from the Presbytery Office in South Charleston when that facility was closed, was relocated to the front area of the church and was dedicated to its new location in a special dedication service.

Over the years, Village Chapel has continued to be very people oriented and a Church committed to community giving and involvement and the year **2023** continued these characteristics in the Church's activities and focus.

On **January 31, 2023**, Vivien Canterbury, a youth member of the Church, placed first in the Health Science category in the Kanawha County Science Fair. Another Village Chapel youth to achieve public notice was Isaiah Canterbury who was selected to portray the Scarecrow in the Children's Theater of Charleston production of the Wizard of Oz.

Saturday, **March 4th** was a very special day in the life of Village Chapel and in particular, the life of Jule Sockman! On this day, the congregation and many special guests were invited by the Sockman family to a birthday celebration from 3:00 to 6:00 with a buffet dinner at 5:00 to celebrate Jule's 100th birthday. A charter member of Village Chapel and the first member of the Church to turn 100 years old, this was a historic century birthday event. As part of the day's activities, the Fellowship Hall was renamed the Julian Sockman Fellowship Hall and the appropriate plaque designating same was permanently installed at the entrance.

On Easter Sunday of **2023**, members of the congregation were encouraged to bring spring flowers from their home for a Flowering of the Cross. Upon arrival, those bringing flowers attached them to the cross which was then carried forward at the beginning of the service and placed in the chancel for all to see and enjoy!

The Session minutes of **March 15th** make mention of a water leak that occurred following the lightning strike at the Church several years ago in the area where Church memorabilia was stored. To preserve these documents at the time of the lightning strike and damage to the Church building, John Bowles removed these boxes and brought them to his home where they have been stored. There are a number of photographs and other printed documents in these materials. Since that time, the photographs have been given to Rita Sockman who has agreed to work with longstanding members of the Church to identify individuals in these photographs and to place them in photograph albums. The remaining materials will be used in the writing of this document and then organized and placed in files for future "historians".

Since **October 2022** Village Chapel has been participating in the Thriving Congregation project and on **March 20-22** the congregation members representing the Thriving Congregation Program went to Montreat for the second face-to-face meeting. The Thriving Congregation team traveling to Montreat included Helen Warren, Todd Wright, Sandy Bowles, Bob Hiser and Roger and Rita Sockman. Other members of the group meeting regularly at the Church are Kathy Kruk, Barbara Tabaretti, Patti Salisbury, Peter Markham, and Sharon King. Activities of the group to date focused on conducting one-on-one meetings with individual members of the congregation asking the interviewee to: 1. Tell us your story; 2. What are you passionate about or concerned about; 3. What are your hopes and dreams for the Church and 4. What should we as a church be doing? In May and June, the group interacted with groups in five listening sessions to generate expanded feedback.

In July, the group met with Tim Conder and Dan Rhodes from the Black Mountain School of Theology here in Charleston. Tim and Dan complimented Village on having a collaborative style, displaying a deep caring for and commitment to the community, and an ability to see present challenges. The Thriving Congregation team will return to Montreat in October.

Minutes of the **March 30th** Worship Ministry Team indicated a review of Amy Parker's Job Description. Her duties as Minister of Education and the Arts included education ministry, technology and streaming, worship ministry, pastoral care, arts ministry and working with the Session.

The April edition of The Villager announced that the church has received an automated external defibrillator (AED) from an anonymous donor, and it has been installed in the alcove leading into the Julian Sockman Fellowship Hall. Patti Salisbury hosted a training session for the use of this device for members of the congregation.

A sad day in the life of the Parish Churches as on Sunday, **May 7th** at 3:00 p.m. the Ruffner Memorial Presbyterian Church located at 1698 Quarrier Street hosted a Closing Worship service and reception. Participants in the service included remaining members and musicians of the Church.

Bluestone Conference Center, in **2023**, experienced issues with a portable water storage tank and the pool filtration unit for its swimming pool. As a result, the facility indicated it needed to raise \$60,000 to deal with these issues. The Session allocated \$1000 from the Skaggs Fund for Bluestone and also asked the congregation to contribute additional funds to assist with the Bluestone need.

A Pews to Chairs Task Force which included Patti Salisbury, Roger Sockman, Patty Skaff, Sharon Curnutte, Sandy Bowles, Amy Parker, and Todd Wright was formed to investigate and make recommendations to remove some of the front rows of pews and replace them with upholstered chairs. This initiative would better accommodate those with wheelchairs, and walkers who want to sit closer to the front of the sanctuary and also to allow arranging chairs in a variety of configurations for small, special services like Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Blue Christmas, and the Taizé services. It was determined that each pew seats 8 individuals and to remove four pews on each side would project the need for 64 chairs (4 pews X 2 X 8). The Task Force visited Bream Presbyterian Church to observe and "try out" chairs to determine "comfort". Material swatches and a sample chair were obtained to evaluate the perspective chair and try to determine color if the decision is made to go to chairs. In August of **2023**, the congregation response regarding the pews to chairs project was positive and the Session moved forward with approving the purchase of chairs to replace four pews in the sanctuary. Anonymous donors pledged \$3000 to pay for the purchase of the chairs and in the final analysis, four rows of pews were removed, donated to another church, and replaced with comfortable chairs.

It was reported that in recent times, homeless folks have been sleeping under cover of the Church to get out of the rain and to be “covered” from those passing by. Dr. Wright reported that when a man stayed on the property, one of the Church neighbors was “nervous”. However, the individual “inhabiting” Church property weeded and swept the area where he stayed and the assumption was that he was not likely to be of concern to the neighborhood!

On Saturday and Sunday, **April 15th** and **16th**, a flyer indicating, “The Church has left the building . . . “proclaimed a weekend of volunteer activities that the congregation could engage in over this time. Activities included six organizations including the Kanawha-Charleston Humane Society for which volunteers could walk dogs or donate dog food, toys, old towels and sheets. The Dream A Way Cat Rescue provided opportunity to donate cat food, litter, carriers and other gently used equipment, and cat toys. The Bream Shower Ministry requested donations of soap and body wash, shampoo and conditioner, lotion, towels, laundry detergent and gently used clothing. The Service Ministry Team prepared lunches which members of the Church could purchase with the proceeds going to a fund for the Regal Apartment residents (a facility which had recently burned). Volunteers could go to the Ronald McDonald House to prepare and serve breakfast on Saturday morning. And lastly, volunteers, under the direction of the Property Ministry Team, could assist with cleaning the Fellowship Hall and attic or helping with a spring clean-up of the lawn and mulching. All in all, a busy weekend!

The **2023** Worship in the Park was held at Coonskin Park on **June 4th**. A special addition to the service was the baptism of Kaia and Crosley Blank, the daughter and son of T’Aja and Kyle Blank and grandchildren of Kathy Kruk. Their mother, T’Aja, was also baptized and joined Village Chapel by profession of faith.

In **June 2023**, the Session received information regarding the installation of solar panels and what refurbishing would have to be done to the roof prior to going to solar power. The estimate for the roof work came in at \$39,444. This work must be done prior to going to solar power. In a meeting of the Session on **June 28th**, it was recommended that Dr. Wright apply to the Louis and Sandra Berkman Foundation, Presbytery Foundation, and other resources to obtain funding to go forward with “going solar”. As a result of this recommendation, four grant applications were submitted seeking funding to cover the cost of the solar units. The Presbytery approved a grant for \$10,000. The signing of a contract to move forward with adding solar panels was announced in the **November 15th** Session meeting. The Church worked with a group called Sollar Holler, a West Virginia non-profit group that has installed solar at the Presbyterian churches in Spencer and Glenville and is working to do the same at Bream here in Charleston. Their analysis indicated that 64 panels on the roofs of our Education Building and Fellowship Hall would supply 101% of the Church’s electrical needs, providing Village Chapel an estimated savings of more than \$141,000 over the next 25 years.

A Village Arts Camp was held on **June 19-21, 2023**, in the evening and was based on the theme, “Jesus Calls Disciples”. Activities included Net Print T’s, Fisher of Folks bracelets, Improv Storytelling, Following Jesus Mural, Quilling Cross, Yoga, and snacks! A fun time had by all!!

Another activity that members of the Church have engaged in are prayer walks in which groups walk through a specific area or neighborhood praying for those residing in the area. In **July**, a group walked over to and prayed for staff and patients at the CAMC Cancer Center. In **September** a group walked through the neighborhood adjacent to the Church.

Village Chapel is now hosting another community group - the Vandalia Rotary Club—meeting in the Fellowship Hall on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month.

In **2023**, it was determined that the HV/AC system in the Education Building needed to be replaced. The quote for doing this was \$12,500.

In **August**, thirty-three backpacks were donated and distributed to Mary Ingles Elementary School. The congregation was asked to fill the backpacks with notebooks, folders, pencils, colored pencils, erasers, glue, loose leaf paper, rulers, hand sanitizer, tissues, simple snacks, etc. This project has been carried out by Village Chapel for a number of years.

World Communion was celebrated on **October 1st** with a focus on “world” and two international students from the University of Charleston were invited to participate in the service reading scriptures in their own languages.

Ecumenical services this fall were very successful, including a Joint Reformation Service with Trinity Lutheran as a follow-up to last years’ service with Trinity on **October 29th**. The service included communion with representatives of both churches presiding at the table. Following the service, the congregation moved to the Fellowship Hall for a tasty luncheon.

On **November 19th** at 7:00 p.m. a joint Thanksgiving Service hosted by Village Chapel was held with St. Agnes and Morris Memorial United Methodist churches. The offering was taken to support Common Grounds and their ongoing ministry to the hungry.

Following the **October** Thriving Congregation meeting, the group met to discuss options identified in the one-on-one sessions as well as the group sessions and narrowed the list generated to thirteen options. The group will need to continue to reduce the number of options and to finally identify viable foci for the Church to pursue.

On Saturday, **November 11, 2023**, the annual Pay-It-Forward was held. Members of the congregation were asked to bring housewares, blankets, sheets, towels, toys, seasonal decorations, coats, jackets, and sweaters. Anyone coming to this event could take anything with no charge – only that they too “pay-it-forward” and do good things for others.

The annual Christmas poinsettias in **2023** were provided by an anonymous donor and in lieu of taking up donations for the purchase of these flowers, an offering was taken in memory of loved ones and this offering was donated to Common Grounds.

On Wednesday, **December 20th**, at 7:00 p.m., Village Chapel gathered in the sanctuary for a Taizé’ style Longest Night Service. There was opportunity for prayer, singing, and silence, giving those in attendance an opportunity to reflect on what participants were grieving and what gives hope! Betty King and Ken Long were present to join in the music. The new chairs were in place, offering opportunity for the congregation to sit in a comfortable circle.

The year **2023** ended with a Christmas Carol Sing on **December 31st**. The congregation was encouraged to come sing “best-loved” carols and wear a favorite Christmas sweater, tie, or socks!

On **January 14th** Sharon Curnutte, Don Parker, Jim Smith, and Barb Smith were recognized in The Villager as “Heroes of the Day”. Sharon for providing music “when the snowstorm meant Caroline (Perrine) was stuck at her home on a hill. Sharon played the piano with only her left hand since her right arm was in a brace after shoulder surgery less than two weeks before. Don stepped up to play guitar on the hymns with “little notice.” In addition, the Smiths were busy filling in as “Jim spent the Sunday School hour clearing the sidewalks around the church as the snow fell, and Barbara staffed the sound mixer so Don would be free to help with music.”

In the Session meeting minutes of **January 19, 2024**, an update on the progress of improvements to the roof over the various areas of the Church was provided. It was noted that water leakage from under and around the steeple has fallen on pews in the sanctuary. The cost to remove the steeple, repair the wood roof, and replace the shingles would cost \$59,000. A new steeple constructed of Pollywood fiberglass would cost \$10,000. Part of the repair costs have already been made by donations. After much discussion regarding how to pay for the repairs, it was decided that an “Envelope Campaign” would be the best method to include all of the Church membership in donating funds. This would entail placing 200 envelopes on the walls of the Fellowship Hall with numbers ranging from 1 to 200 – the number on the envelope indicating the amount one would be willing to pay toward the total amount needed. This effort was scheduled for February **25 to March 17th**.

Sarah Gottleib shared information about a community project called “Guns to Gardens” in which individuals can donate their unwanted gun(s) to a group called Raw Tools and have them chopped up, melted, and repurposed into garden tools. To raise funds to support this effort, the Session recommended that the congregation be involved through a special offering – the resulting funds going to support this effort to combat gun violence. This event was held at St. Marks Methodist Church and 27 guns were surrendered.

While communion dates totaled twelve over the year, the Church continues to deliver “Traveling Communion” to those who are not able to attend church services four times per year. For 2024 the sacraments were taken to those homebound on the following dates:

February 18, 2024
May 19, 2024
August 4, 2024
December 1, 2024

Typically, two individuals serve communion to an individual using a prepared script which includes scripture, the invitation, prayer, words of institution, and distribution.

The Souper Bowl of Caring founded by the Senior High Fellowship of Spring Valley Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina in 1990 and initiated at Village Chapel in 1995, was celebrated again in **February 2024** – now 29 years in the running!! Nationally, this effort has raised nearly \$200 million dollars with donations going to local food charities. The congregation here at Village continues to bring “cans or cash” and these are donated locally to Common Grounds.

In the February **2024** Session Minutes, the Personnel Ministry Team reported that Carolyn Perrine, the Village Chapel organist for 47 years, will retire at the end of June. Upon her retirement on June 30th, Carolyn was named “Organist Emeritus” and a reception was held in her honor. Efforts have been made to try to find a replacement with no success to date. A task force will be formed to explore options. In the meantime, Sharon Curnutte will serve as both choir director and pianist/organist.

In **February**, it was announced that the now empty house adjacent to the Church may be a good site for Common Grounds and Todd Wright has spoken with the President of that organization regarding this possibility. If this should come to pass, the use of this facility would be an in-kind donation, with Common Grounds only paying for utilities used over and above the basic rate. If this is to occur, the neighbors in the Church block will need to be made aware. In addition, a ramp will need to be added to the front of the house to facilitate moving in and out of the facility. (The building of the ramp was accomplished in **November** by a crew made up of Village and St. Agnes workers and a \$3000 mission grant from the Presbytery of West Virginia.)

The Thriving Congregations team attended a working meeting at Montreat on **March 13-15** with the goal of narrowing the thirteen suggestions made for possible focus down to one area of interest and to develop a specific plan to achieve whatever is identified. At this time, the areas receiving the most interest included: schools, music, outreach/fellowship, and an older adult ministry. The Session recommended focusing on schools (tutoring), music (choir and group concerts), outreach (feed the hungry), and membership (internal member activities, recruiting new members). The Session suggested four possible areas to consider: 1. A community garden, 2. Game nights, 3. Speakers on current topics, and 4. Reviving the Village Vittles program to provide soup and food to shut-ins. As a result of the March meeting, the Thriving Congregation Team was able to narrow the possible areas from thirteen to two: 1. Partnering with local school(s), and 2. Developing an older adult ministry. Two research teams will be formed to determine how Village might partner with existing organizations.

As the 75th anniversary of Village Chapel will occur in **March of 2025**, the following individuals were suggested to serve on the 75th Anniversary Planning Team: Shannon Bland, Sandy Bowles, Susan Caldwell, Pat Jacobs, Kathy Kruk, Harriet Nottingham, Patti Salisbury, Rita Sockman, and Sarah Stebbins.

An Ashes-to-Go held at the YMCA was attended by only ten individuals. However, the Ash Wednesday service at the Church went well.

In **March**, 56 individuals attended Jule Sockman's 101st birthday celebration featuring cake and goodies. Later, on Memorial Day, Jule was honored as a serviceman, a World War II veteran as he was a member of the U. S. Army's 2nd Infantry Division. He served as the WWII Parade Marshall for the Herbert J. Thomas Memorial Armed Forces Day Parade in South Charleston. Also, in the fall of **2023**, Sandy Bowles did a one-on-one interview with Jule which was videotaped for the 75th Anniversary of the Church. In this video, Jule describes what brought him to Charleston (he was originally from Moundsville, WV), and what Charleston was like when he came here. He described Kanawha City, the Church and its founding and the people of the early Church.

In response to a challenge from Maureen Wright, the Transitional General Presbyter, the congregation via the Session, was asked to identify ways the church building serves as a resource and what burdens does it present? The positives/ways it adds to the community include: Worship, Sunday school, blood drives, bridge group, quilters, narcotics anonymous, fellowship, Pay-it-Forward, arts camp, book club, confirmation class, Bible study, Tai Chi, and outside meetings related to the Presbytery. Burdens presented include upkeep of the grounds and facilities which present a great deal of hard work on the part of the Property Ministry Team and cost of maintenance and necessary repairs.

The **May** Session minutes provided the following updates: A service weekend held in April resulted in providing services for the Bream SHOP (Showers + Healthcare Outreach Program) and the Kanawha-Charleston Animal Shelter. Fifty lunches were made and all but nine were sold. The money earned and leftover lunches were donated to Common Grounds. An opportunity to make special cards under the direction of Rita Sockman provided a fun activity. The opportunity to engage in Church chores was a popular option and involved members of all ages.

On **May 26th** the Fellowship Ministry Team conducted a Fellowship Hour and Family Game Day after the worship service with 20 attending the Fellowship activity and 12 participating in the games that followed.

In **June**, Dr. Wright was able to take the opportunity to go to Spain to hike the Camino. This had been planned for his previous sabbatical but due to COVID, it was cancelled. However, in **2024**, the Columbia Theological Seminary announced “Preachers on Pilgrimage” and Todd applied, his application was accepted and he joined 15 other pastors hiking from San Sabastian in the Basque region to Bilbao along the Northern route, and then after a bus ride, from Vialba to Santiago do Compostela. During his absence, the Martin Sheen movie, “The Way” was made available to the congregation to better appreciate this accomplishment.

Over the year, Church rolls were reviewed and those individuals not actively participating in the life of Village Chapel were transferred to the “inactive roll”. Twenty-five individuals were so moved.

*In August of **2024**, the installation of 69 solar panels on the Education Building and Fellowship Hall roofs was completed and the AEP, (local electrical power company) inspected the set-up. flipped the switch, and Village Chapel officially became solar powered!*

*Another special event occurred in **August**. Emily Wright, daughter of Maureen and Todd Wright, and her fiancé, Matt, were married by Dr. Wright in Boston.*

To update the Thriving Congregations project, the focus was narrowed to two areas – working with local elementary schools, and Chamberlain Elementary in particular, and developing a program for the older members of the Church. In regards to the school project, under the leadership of Rita Sockman, backpacks were collected, and members of the Church have become involved with the children and staff at Chamberlain. The congregation also provided an “Undie Sunday” for needy children at the school. In response to the need to identify approaches to developing an older adult ministry, Sandy Bowles conducted and tabulated a survey to determine the needs and desires of the older members of the Church to serve as a guideline for moving forward with this group and Peter Markham was appointed to serve in the leadership role for this group. The survey findings are included in Appendix J.

Community outreach activities in **2024** in addition to the backpacks for Chamberlain Elementary School, and the Guns to Gardens event included a blood drive organized by Heather Barry in partnership with the Red Cross on **October 9th** which resulted in the collection of 30 units of blood. A laundromat project was held in the fall for those residing at the Village Apartments – “Suds of Love” for which 9 loads of laundry were washed and dried and a very successful Pay-it-Forward was held on **November 2nd**.

As a result of an automobile accident, the Blessing Box (the sidewalk library) and one of the dogwood trees on the 39th street side of the church were damaged/destroyed. The tree was removed and as Dr. Wright indicated, “It had given its life to save damage to the Church” and was badly damaged. The Blessing Box has been restored.

On **November 18th** a class, “Balance with Barb”, was started to provide gentle exercises and tips for keeping your body balanced and flexible. The class was led by Barbara Smith and attended primarily by the older members interested in “staying upright”.

A joint Thanksgiving service hosted by Morris Memorial Methodist Church was held on Sunday, **November 24th** along with St. Agnes Catholic Church and Village Chapel. A reception followed the service.

Over **2024**, twelve individuals joined or rejoined the church. In April, Matt and Raechel Chambers from the First Presbyterian Church in Ashland, KY; Bob and Patty Pogue from Stone Presbyterian Church in Wheeling, WV; and Cindy Sloan from the Elk Hills Presbyterian Church. In September, Meg Green transferred her membership from the Bible Center in Charleston and Vicki and Mike Frisk, previous Village members who moved to Florida several years ago, rejoined Village Chapel. The Frisks have participated in church services and meetings via virtual services and meetings. In December, Bobby Lee Rhom Knight joined Village Chapel by baptism and profession of faith and Tina Renee Bairefoot joined by reaffirmation of faith. Four of these individuals (Matt Chambers, Raechel Chambers, Vicki Frisk, and Mike Frisk) were featured in a New Member Spotlight in the **November** issue of The Villager.

In **2024**, the church lost three long-standing members – Kathryn Ann Hickman McCrary; Sherry S. Russell and David Allen Dawson.

Kathryn, in addition to being a member of Village Chapel, was a dedicated Christian Educator with both Village Chapel and Ruffner Memorial churches. She eventually became the Associate Presbyter for Education, Presbytery of West Virginia. In addition to other honors received, her many contributions to the Presbyterian Church were recognized when she was given a Life Achievement Award from the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators and a Life Membership by the Presbyterian Women at Village Chapel.

David Dawson was also a long-time member of the church serving as a Sunday School teacher and member of the choir. “Dave spent many hours researching and preparing for Sunday School lessons over the years – it was one of his greatest passions.

In December, when the Christmas decorations were removed from storage, a box of Chrismon decorations made by two previous ladies of the church, Evelyn McClure and Mildred Wrenn were discovered. The word “Chrismon” comes from the words “Christ” and “monogram” meaning symbols of Christ. Traditionally, the symbols are white and gold—the white representing the “Purity of the Lord” and the gold “His Nobility”. It was a real joy to see these placed on a tree in the narthex where everyone could enjoy them!

VILLAGE CHAPEL’S 75th ANNIVERSARY! **1950 - 2025**

At the beginning of its Anniversary Year, **2025**, the church statistical report indicated the total active members as 171. Of this number, 104 were women and 67 were men. One hundred percent were listed as white. The age ranges listed were:

17 and under	1	.01%
18 – 25	5	.03%
26 – 40	42	.25%
41 – 55	12	.07%
56 – 70	47	.27%
Over 70	<u>64</u>	<u>.37%</u>
	171	100%

The year **2025** brought a number of happy and unhappy occurrences.

On Sunday, **February 2nd** at 3:00 p.m. a memorial service was held for Nancy Beane Wallace, mother of Amy Wallace Parker and a member of the Church. Nancy was a wonderful musician and piano player, often playing duets with Sharon Curnutte, which in recent times even included videos of her playing from her home.

On a happy note, the Church, under the leadership of Barbara Tabaretti, Kathy Kruk, Debbie Sockman, and Vicki Cunningham held a bridal shower and brunch in honor of Ellan Ann Sockman as she looks to her marriage in the spring of 2025.

As an outcome of the Thriving Congregations project, a Men’s Dinner Group was organized by Roger Sockman. This group involves men of the Church coming together once a month to go out to local restaurants for food and fellowship. This activity has gradually increased in attendance, and the group is enjoying sampling a variety of Charleston restaurants.