

Saint Paul's Episcopal continues its faith journey

By B.C. Manion

bcmalion@lakerlutznews.com

In the beginning, it had no walls and no members — but there was a vision, to create an Episcopal church community within Wesley Chapel.

The congregation began gathering in car dealership conference rooms, then moved to larger locations.

Now, it operates at 3836 Flatiron Loop, Suite 101, in a stand-alone building in a professional business park in Wesley Chapel.

The church also has an official name: St. Paul's Episcopal — to replace its original placeholder name of Wesley Chapel Episcopal Church.

The congregation celebrated its first patronal feast day on Jan. 24 with a special visit from the Bishop Dabney T. Smith, the current and fifth bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida.

At the service, the bishop confirmed five adults, commissioned the church's first governing board and blessed an icon of St. Paul.

The church also had a dedication ceremony and ribbon-cutting on Jan. 28.

In addition to Bishop Smith, Pasco County Commissioner Mike Moore and North Tampa Bay Chamber CEO Hope Kennedy offered remarks.

Initially, the church was operating only in a portion of the building, but it has expanded and is using the remaining space in the building for a parish hall, for fellowship and teaching.

The long-term vision is to secure land and build a traditional church building, said the Rev. Adrienne Hymes, who was the original church planter and is now the church vicar.

While the church is in a new building, it is rooted in an ancient tradition, Hymes said, in a recent interview with The Laker/Lutz News.

The fledgling church has come a long way, in four years.

"To be able to stand behind an altar and actually see people in the seats, safely distanced, is awe-inspiring for me, every Sunday," Hymes said.

The people who have gravitated to the church so far are already Episcopalians who were looking for a church closer to home, Hymes said.

"The closest Episcopal church is 11.5 miles from here, down Bruce B. Downs Boulevard. A lot of people had been going there, but we're now in their backyard," she said.

Having a church close to home allows



COURTESY OF ANDY TAYLOR/PASCO COUNTY

These officials recently took part in a dedication ceremony at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, in Wesley Chapel. From left: Mike Moore, of the Pasco County Commission; Bishop Dabney T. Smith, of the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida; Hope Kennedy, president and CEO of the North Tampa Bay Chamber of Commerce; and the Rev. Adrienne Hymes, church vicar.

greater participation by church members, Hymes said.

"Distance definitely determines the depth of discipleship. People who really want to serve and do things beyond Sunday, they can now do that," Hymes said.

Since the church is new to the area, people might wonder what to expect, she said.

She noted: The exterior of the building is contemporary, but the liturgy is traditional.

And that, she said, evokes a familiar feeling for Episcopalians.

"It feels like their church, even though we don't have the marble floors or the stained glass windows. With the liturgy, there's no denying where you are and what to do," Hymes said.

"I think that really does appeal to the Episcopalians who are showing up.

"They are starving for that ancient liturgy," she said.

She takes care to preserve the sanctuary as a sacred space.

"There is a reverence here. They have a space that feels like church, that has a quiet in it, a sanctity to it," Hymes said.

When people arrive before a service, to spend some time in personal prayer, she wants to be sure that they have a space where that can happen — without interruption by others.

"The space is small, and the sanctuary is used for the sanctuary work," she said.

Ultimately, St. Paul's Episcopal will want to operate in a more traditional church building — but that will take some time, Hymes said.

"We're grateful for a space for us to kind

of nest, and build and grow and call more people to the ministry, but the vision has always been to find land here in Wesley Chapel — which we know is going to be a challenge," Hymes said.

The church leader said she realizes that not everyone enjoys the uncertainty that comes from planting a church in a new place — or being a member of a church that is not fully established, but Hymes embraces the challenges, and is pleased that others have joined her in this leap of faith.

Anyone interested in knowing more about the church, or watching a livestream service can visit the website at SaintPaulsEpiscopalChurch.org.

Those seeking additional information can call 813-803-7489, or email office@saintpaulsepiscopalchurch.org.

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PUBLISHER & OWNER: DIANE KORTUS, dkortus@lakerlutznews.com

EDITORIAL B.C. MANION, Editor bcmalion@lakerlutznews.com KEVIN WEISS, Staff Writer kweiss@lakerlutznews.com MARY RATHMAN, Editorial Assistant mrathman@lakerlutznews.com	SALES & MARKETING TERRI WILLIAMSON, Sr. Acct. Mgr. twilliamson@lakerlutznews.com CAROLYN BENNETT, Customer Service cbennett@lakerlutznews.com KELLI CARMACK, Marketing Asst. kcarmack@lakerlutznews.com KATIE FERNANDEZ, Sales Asst. kfernandez@lakerlutznews.com	DESIGN MATTHEW MISTRETTA, Art Director mmistretta@lakerlutznews.com STEFANIE BURLINGAME, Graphic Designer sburlingame@lakerlutznews.com ACCOUNTING MARY EBERHARD meberhard@lakerlutznews.com
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LOCATION: 3632 Land O' Lakes Blvd. Suite 102 • Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
MAIL: P.O. Box 479 • Lutz, FL 33548
PHONE/FAX: ph: 813.909.2800 • fax: 813.909.2802
IT SUPPORT: STEVE MISTRETTA

WEBSITE: www.lakerlutznews.com
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/lakerlutznews
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