

Wesley Chapel's Episcopal Church Consecrated As Saint Paul's

By JOHN C. COTEY

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The Wesley Chapel Episcopal Church has been around in some form or fashion since 2017, when four worshippers gathered at the St. Aslem's Episcopal Chapel Center at the University of South Florida, followed by occasional meetings in conference rooms of various car dealerships in the area.

Led by Adrienne Hymes, a missionary for church extension in the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida, the meetings grew slowly. The church finally leased space a year later in a professional office park, and then moved to another space, and on Jan. 24, celebrated its first Patronal Feast Day and was officially consecrated as St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Wesley Chapel.

On Jan. 28, an official ribbon cutting was held, and the church, the only Episcopal church in Wesley Chapel, re-introduced itself to the community.

"Here we are, Wesley Chapel," said Hymes, now the Reverend Mother and Vicar of the church.

The consecration of the church by Bishop Dabney Smith, of the Episcopal Diocese of SW Florida, marked a big and important moment.

"There are different stages, so today was one of those things where we said yes, we wanted to plant a church and now we have the roots in the ground," Rev. Hymes said. "It's taken three years, but we've been working to get things going."

Hymes, a Virginia native who recently moved to Wesley Chapel, said she never lost faith, even when the meetings only had a handful of people show up. In fact, the original four members are no longer involved with this particular church but, little by little, Hymes said she used her marketing and public relations background, as well as an energetic and electric personality, to attract more people to St. Paul's.

The church first leased space in the Redfern Professional Center behind the Shops of Mystic Oak off Bruce B. Downs Blvd. in Wesley Chapel in February 2018,



Reverend Mother Adrienne Hymes talks to visitors at the St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Wesley Chapel ribbon cutting on Jan. 28. (Photo: Charmaine George)

and Hymes was ordained as an Episcopal priest a few months later. In November, the first mass was held with 22 attendees. Other than spikes on Easter and Christmas, Sunday services attracted between 20-25 members.

In mid-2019, the church moved a short three-minute walk away and converted a personal fitness center in the Renaissance Professional Park into its current location. More than 70 people showed up for the first Holy Eucharist at the new location and masses regularly attracted 50 or so members, until Covid hit. "Pre-Covid, we were really growing," Rev. Hymes said. "It was really amazing."

After almost a year of doing virtual services, the church now limits 25 at mass, and also has recently unveiled its new Fellowship Hall – converting the dance theater right next door. The hall is used for socially distant post-mass coffee gatherings and bible study, as well as meetings.

The newer, larger location is more convenient for Episcopalians looking for a place to worship. The nearest Episcopal Church is Grace Episcopal in Tampa Palms, nearly 10 miles away.

The next goal is to build a traditional

church. Hymes relishes the mission, and seems like the ideal person to lead the charge to such lofty goals.

"Episcopal churches don't live in buildings like this, Rev. Hymes said, "so the vision is now that we have leadership in place and we are growing, we need to talk about getting land, and then we will build our church." She added that they will take about six months to breathe, and then form a committee to start looking for land.

Hymes joked that they don't teach integrated marketing at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, where she finished in 2014, but it's just one of many skills she has to help expand the footprint of St. Paul's, and one of the reasons she was chosen for the task.

"My happy place is creation and innovation," Hymes said. "So, this is something I really enjoy."

St. Paul's holds mass weekly, on Sundays at 10 a.m. For more information, visit SaintPaulsEpiscopalChurch.org or call (813) 803-7489.

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