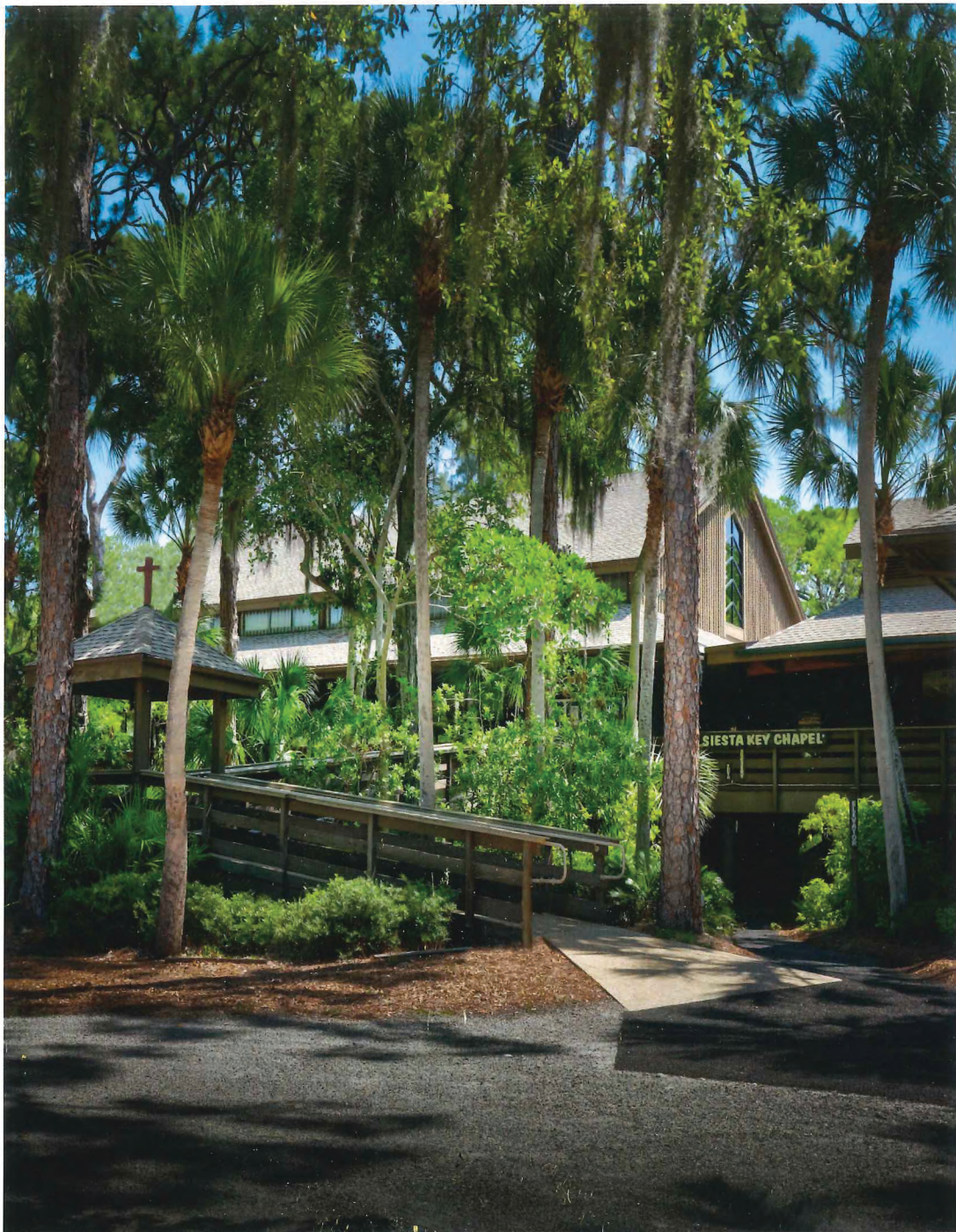


# *Siesta Key Chapel*



*God's Tree House*  
*The First 50 Years*  
*1970-2020*

## *Introduction*

This is not an original history.

Rather it is a blend of the many historical narratives that have been written about the church over the years by many different people. Our goal was to prepare as complete a history as possible by relying on earlier writings, including books, booklets, newspapers, church reports papers, and scrapbooks most of which were found in the Siesta Key archives and written by people in the church. One major source for this version of the history of Siesta Key Chapel is a book entitled *A History of Siesta Key Chapel -1970-1975*, by Dr. Kenneth Weihe. This book was published in 1975 to commemorate the founding and dedication of Siesta Key Chapel. These pages tell of a venture in faith. Here we find the early ups-and-downs of Siesta Key Chapel (Presbyterian) faithfully set forth. Occasionally the wording of an account was changed to maintain the flow of the narrative, but our goal has been to present the story of Siesta Key Chapel as accurately and faithfully as those who gave their all to make it happen.

### The Golden Jubilee Committee:

Cheryl Miller, Chair\*

Francie Hall\*

Judy Barnhart\*

Joan Heina\*

Joyce Meier\*

Liz Smith\*

Book Committee \*

Pete Barnhart

Lin Hall

Jack Kallis

Dick Ulrich

Frank Miller\*

As we celebrate Siesta Key Chapel's Golden Jubilee anniversary

***We Remember the past,***

***Rejoice in the present,***

***And Envision the future***

*NOTE: As you progress through this work, you will see that Siesta Key Chapel would appear to have three "birth" dates. In fact, it did. November 8, 1970, marks the date of the first worship service held by a 'Christian Fellowship' to become known as Siesta Key Chapel. On December 13, 1973, this gathering of believers was incorporated by the State of Florida as **Siesta Key Chapel**. On March 30, 1975, Easter Sunday, the building known as "God's Tree House" was dedicated to the Glory of God.*

## ***“Beginning... without form or void”***

### **The Reverend Dr. James Blackwood:**

**1970-1985**

Siesta Key is a little island shaped like a stone-age club in the Gulf of Mexico lying closely parallel to mainland Sarasota. By the late 1960's Florida Presbyteries noted the remarkable development of Siesta Key. They found that approximately 400 enrolled Presbyterians lived on the Key. They knew that not only the membership of Pine Shores, the nearest Presbyterian Church, was steadily growing to perhaps full capacity, but so too was the Church of the Palms farther out Bee Ridge Road. So in September of 1970 Dr. James R. Blackwood received a joint call from the two branches of the Presbyterian Church, the United Presbyterian Church (North) and the Presbyterian Church of the U.S. (South), which were moving toward unification, to become the organizing pastor of one of the first "union" congregations. When he received this joint call, "Jim" was presented a blue stole bearing the symbols of the two denominations embroidered on it. It must have been a moment of pleasant anticipation to be called as the organizing pastor of a sea-bordered tropical chapel-church whose newness was total and whose personality was yet to be created. At the beginning the lack was practically total, as Dr. Blackwood said, yet it was big with promise.

Dr. Blackwood found a charming manse, at 317 Givens Street for his family: wife Louise and his three children- Paul, Philip and Carolyn (Lyn), and the adventure began.

Beginning...

'Without form and void'

That's how it was

In the beginning.

Then something happened.

God spoke.

An earth took shape.

It's sort of like that

beginning a new church.

In one word: Chaos.

There's no building,  
of course, not one brick,

No stained glass,

No steeple or bell,

No officers or teachers,

No Sunday School.

In fact: no congregation.

But something is beginning  
To stir on Siesta Key.  
An organizing pastor  
Is on the job.  
Ninety churches are  
Sponsoring this new one.  
There is a place to meet  
For the present.  
And there is a dream,  
A hope, a prayer.



On November 8, 1970, Siesta Key Chapel began worshipping at the Out-Of-Door-School (ODS). This impromptu sanctuary spoke to the first worshipers of a chapel in the woods. This was not unlike the Canterbury Christians of old, who are said to have begun their church life likewise in a hut of willow branches in the woods near the sea. There was something elemental in it for worshipers, both in spirit and in the ultimate simplicity of the ODS building. Three years would pass before a permanent location and groundwork for a new building could be achieved.

On the back of one of the early bulletins Dr. Blackwood said:

*"This is a Christian fellowship starting out fresh, trying to learn how to be a church in a changing world. We hope to be a church with a compassionate heart, an open mind, an adventurous, creative spirit; a church that helps us know ourselves by looking beyond ourselves, seeing the world's need for Christ and our own — accepting the individual and caring for him; challenging, strengthening, encouraging, above all, enjoying one another; a church that clearly interprets God's Word for our time, confessing as the earliest Christians did, 'Jesus Christ is Lord!' And by the test of what we habitually say and do, giving others reason to believe that thus is so." (sic)*

Dr. Blackwood wrote for the *Siesta Key Pelican Press* in November 1972

"By necessity, Siesta Key Chapel has practiced simplicity in its early life. By choice, the people and their organizing pastor hope to keep this simplicity, warmth, and friendliness as the chapel grows. Jack Wells, chairman of the Steering Committee, observed, 'We have a church that does the old basic things, but with a fresh approach. The object is not to strain after novelty or dazzling effect, but rather to see to it that the great voices of the past do not die out and that the new ones keep coming on.'

"Nancy Johnson, who teaches art at Riverview High School, has made a series of Pulpit Hangings that reflect both traditional and contemporary symbols of faith. They were made to cover the lectern on Sunday mornings. Her design for one of the bulletins shows a single gull over the blue green Gulf, symbol of the natural beauty God has given us on Siesta Key, with its 'sense of the horizon.'

Michael Finch, a boy not yet in his teens, hands out bulletins for the service of worship. There are no ushers with plastic carnations in their lapels. There is no prelude or postlude, either, on the simple theory that as a new church people need to talk with one another and find it easier to do so if they aren't competing with Bach." Dr. Weihe said, "Dr. Blackwood's sermons, given conversationally and without a drop of unctiousness or egotism or pompous scholarship, have been similarly keen and bright with ranges of perception."



***In the beginning*** a group of 51 dedicated congregants met on Sunday mornings at Out-of-Door-School to worship, fellowship and dedicate all they have - their time, talents and treasure - to build Siesta Key Chapel (Presbyterian). These original congregants became the core group of the eventual 154 charter members. In early 1971 a planning committee from the founding Presbyteries and Frank Folsom Smith, architect, identified and purchased a parcel of land on the northern end of the Key suitable for building a church. After attempts to rezone and build on the property, attempts often thwarted by neighbors concerned about 'traffic and noise', the 'city fathers' denied their petition to build. Dr. Weihe's history recounted that, "Naturally the snuffing out of the great hope that intense efforts and various official approvals had built up caused a sickness of heart on the part of many church people, who hardly knew now where to turn nor how to begin again with good prospect of success."

But, "nevertheless, as often happens in such things, the adversity but temporarily obscured a blessing at its heart." Almost immediately, in October of 1971, Mr. J. Burke Rich, the owner of the Out of Door School offered to sell a three-acre tract for the development of a church. The steering committee was successful in negotiating a purchase agreement for the 3 acres plus an adjoining 1/3 acre, contingent upon the neighbor, Out of Door School, signing a waiver that they were not interested in purchasing the property and that the necessary zoning could be obtained. This property included a small, unoccupied house that would one day play into the life of the church.

Again set-backs ranging from zoning issues to finances, the present property was finally purchased in 1972 and Frank Folsom Smith, James Durden, and James Holliday (father of present and charter member Craig Holliday) were commissioned as architects for the hoped and-much-prayed-for new Chapel. So, also, began a 50 year friendship with ODS, one day to become Out of Door Academy (ODA). "Our aim", said Frank Folsom Smith, "was to preserve the natural beauty of the site, set-up the first unit that would be worshipful, though rustic, and simple but not 'cheap', to plan the space for multiple uses, to have interior arrangements that would be flexible, and to key the whole structure for growth according to a master plan." Originally the property had been described by Dr. Weihe as "like some semi-neglected, wild park with a typically exotic variety of trees growing willy-nilly about; they were not exactly dense, but filled the 'park' with dusky coolness." In April 1973 the chapel adopted its master plan calling for "development of its own inner, or educative, lifestyle and its outer, or community servant, lifestyle." Siesta Key Chapel would strive for that quality of relationship which accepts the fact that, as part of the holy people of God, we are related to one another and to the community of which we are a part. We wish to serve Christ as a neighborhood church that offers a balanced program. Formal organization of the original congregation and the incorporation of Siesta Key Chapel into a church, which has connected the two branches of Presbyterianism, took place on May 27, 1973. It was the second union church in the nation to be organized.

### ***Groundbreaking***



November 25, 1973... they came from the North, South, East, and West with gilded spade in hand and offered a unison congregational prayer to God the Father, "Let your plan control whatever place we make. Accept our thanks as we dedicate this place." Then the entire congregation threaded its way from the Out-of-Door School to the location of the future chapel with young Michael Finch and Neil Gordon holding high red beribboned gilt shovels.

And so it was that the minister, Dr. Blackwood, in white flowing robe conducted a ceremony recognizing the special contributions of various groups during this momentous groundbreaking of Siesta Key Chapel.

The foundation of the building had been laid out and marked with surveyor's pegs indicating the four corners of the building site. Representative groups, who were the genesis of Siesta Key Chapel, gathered at those four corners. Members of the Building Committee led by George Morton, Women of the Church led by Joyce Morton, Vice President, the Youth led by Morton's son, Stuart, and executives of the sponsoring ecclesiastical districts...all lifted the first shovels of "sacred ground." Excitement rippled through the crowd as one by one each person stepped forward into the center from his/her corner to spear another spadeful of dirt as the groundbreaking continued. It began with the SOUTHWEST group (the architects, the ministers from the various churches in the Presbytery district, Wendell Kent whose equipment cleared the site and the choir director). Then from the SOUTHEAST group came the Clerk of Session, the church treasurer, the building fund treasurer and the church secretary. From the NORTHWEST was the Chairman of Buildings and Grounds, and Elizabeth Chandler who was President of Women of the Church. Finally the NORTHEAST corner produced the chair of the steering Committee, the church historian, the Chair of Christian Education and Mary Streeter for whose mother the first memorial gifts were given.

Toward the close of the ceremony Dr. Blackwood invited his wife, Louise, who had served as the church pianist and who had attended many groundbreakings to take hold of the be-ribboned shovel and for her first time to be "part of the action" of the groundbreaking. It is fitting that Fred Munro, the first headmaster of the Out-of-Door School, who had helped this dream come true by offering the chapel a place to hold services in his school turned the first bit of earth along with a four year old boy, Chris Bracket, who was the first to be baptized at Siesta Key Chapel. These "firsts" of this momentous groundbreaking ceremony were only the beginning of the burgeoning of spiritual life that would give light to all who entered the doors of Siesta Key Chapel for the next fifty years and beyond.





"To this spot, with God's good will, worshipers will return for untold years to come. But first, a myriad of action builders will appear with measurer, hammer, drill and saw to give the newest temple a local habitation and a name."

- Kenneth Weihe

Through the summer of 1973 services conducted by Pastor Blackwood were held at the Out-of-Door School. The summer attendance held gratifyingly to an average of 75 worshipers when so many were customarily away. Then on the evening before Christmas a special celebration took place. Crafts and games were provided for young people, singing and readings for others. At the second meeting of the congregation held on January 13, 1974, Dr. Blackwood used the occasion to present a comprehensively detailed review of the "State of the Chapel" for 1973. It included these words: "In 1973, when Siesta Key Chapel organized as a union Church, we made this promise: We covenant in the presence of the Lord and with one another, and bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all His ways, as He reveals Himself in His Word of Truth and in the worship and witness of His Church". Dr. Blackwood, organizing pastor, was called by the congregation to serve as Continuing Pastor on February 10, 1974.

*The first wedding in the Chapel came before the building was completed. No glass windows enclosed the space; therefore there was no air conditioning. Stacks of lumber lay at odd angles. Dr. Blackwood wrote that he was up front, robed in white, sweeping sawdust and wood scraps into neat piles. "One day the pulpit would stand on that spot." He continued, "Guests arrived as I swept up the last pile. We all stood (no chairs) for a reverent, brief and happy wedding ceremony. Dr. Blackwood also added that Gerald Ford sent a beautiful bowl made of Steuben glass as a gift to the newlyweds. (The wedding was performed in July when Daisy Turner married Lyle Garlock).*

### ***And it came to pass***

After several years of growing pains, frustrations, and boundless hope the first service of worship in the new Sanctuary came to pass on Maundy Thursday, March 27, 1975. At the first communion served in the new Chapel, Pastor Blackwood spoke on the "First Supper," what we often call The Last Supper. He pointed out it actually was the first...first of countless other observances in response to Jesus' "Do this in remembrance of me." Ours, too, was the First Supper in the new structure, remembering Him.



## ***A Culmination and a Beginning...The Easter Service:***

Easter Sunday, March 30, 1975! There couldn't be a more glorious conjunction of good fortunes than this culminating hour in the history of God's Tree House. It was the day of the Risen Lord and the day of the first Sunday service in the beautiful, completed tabernacle called now, and beyond now, Siesta Key Chapel. The Siesta Key Pelican Press reported that in Dr. Blackwood's dedication of the sanctuary he said, in part, "On our first Sunday in a new building we face the unknown future joyfully. Paul, the Apostle, declares that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord--'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers... ."

Quoting from an article in the *Siesta Key Pelican Press* by member Alvchild W. De Long

"About 250 attended the service which began at 10:00 a.m. In his welcome, Dr. Blackwood stated that the church celebrates a new creation—a church with the open doors of fellowship of faith as it celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Before the sermon Dr. Blackwood read a list of individuals who were present at the first service held on November 8, 1970 in the Out-of-Door School auditorium. Two thirds of the 51 people whose names were read were present and rose in turn at the minister's request. He presented them as a testimony to the continuity of dedication to the new church. Noted in particular were three families coming from the Pineshores Presbyterian Church and living on Siesta Key, who began to work with him, namely James and Scottie Holliday, Elizabeth Johnson and her daughter Nancy, Frank Folsom Smith and his wife Ann.

Dr. Blackwood said, "It was the highest culminative moment in the history of Siesta Key Chapel (Presbyterian). We think again of the Bible's meaningful phrase 'And it came to pass.' The already celebrated, newly finished sanctuary stood ready for formal dedication. As one of the hymns invoked, "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty" and as one of the speakers said, "What you have done here on Siesta Key and in Sarasota is to release hope for now and for the future." The first stage of God's Tree House was complete with 154 charter members. This event planted the 'cornerstone' of what was to continue to grow as Siesta Key Chapel.

In describing this new worship center, Dr. Weihe stated, in part, "Treading on cushiony pine needles and sand, you approach the building and circle round the many mounded clumps of palms and oaks on the way, some draped thinly with Spanish moss. There, rising before you is the golden-paneled front of the church, a high triangle with a tall, vertical window in the center whose panes are set in frames slanting obliquely. You see a sturdy veranda with a slanting roof encircling the entire structure and shading the eight-foot walkway around the great auditorium which is large enough to seat over three hundred persons. The other, northern end of the church, is like the front, with a similar window." He goes on to say, "Looking towards the front you see a box-like staircase at the left, and at the right a huge ramp sloping gently up to the veranda after it turns at a right angle. On a base at this point is a 'king post' surmounting a gazebo-like shelter or belvedere."



Three weeks after Easter Sunday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, worship concluded by Dr. Blackwood, asking the children sitting on the front row, who belonged to a recent communicant group, to precede the congregation to the walkway and assemble around the shelter. They remained there or stood beneath the surrounding trees to participate in a dedicatory service. Again, Pastor Blackwood using the topic "When God's love goes with us" described the interesting 'King-post Cross' atop the entry shelter as the ramp approaches the sanctuary. This cross had been salvaged from the sea by a friend of Randy Wells, son of Jack and Fran Wells

It laid in the corner of a salvage shop until Randy suggested it be given to Siesta Key Chapel. And so it was. Pastor 'Jim' said, "Literally, the Cross had been sunk in the depths and was raised again — the ultimate symbol of death and resurrection, the uplifted Cross of the uplifted Christ. We used it as one of the very few symbols in a Chapel based on simplicity of design and use. That Cross, for those whose eyes of faith could see it, was the first symbol one saw in entering the Chapel, and the last in leaving. The Cross is towering still 'o'er the wrecks of time'."

Dr. Blackwood dedicated the cross in loving memory of a young man he had known who died in Viet Nam, Captain John H. Hays. The entry belvedere was given by his mother, Mrs. Joe K. Hays of Winter Haven, Fla. where Dr. Blackwood had served before coming to Siesta Key Chapel.

During February and March of 1975, many gifts and memorials were given by charter members and friends of the chapel. A few among the many were a Baptismal Font (a Melo Amphora shell), the pulpit, the pulpit Bible, and the pulpit platform. The communion table was given by the Weiss Family. The communion trays were hand crafted by the Reverend Andrew W. Blackwood, Jr., Dr. Blackwood's brother. Ceramic chalices and communion plates were handcrafted by Christine Beason. And the communion tablecloth was woven by Joan Heina.

The overhead perforated metal lighting was handcrafted by members of the chapel. These gifts, as well as many more, including chairs, were donated by members and friends of the Chapel. (A member's bad back and Jim's preference for "flexible" seating determined the decision to have chairs rather than pews in the sanctuary.)



In December of that year the Chrisma (plural for Chrismon) Tree was introduced. The *Siesta Key Pelican* described it by saying, "The Chrismon Tree, a new and eye-catching Christmas tree especially fitting in a place of worship, is making its appearance in the Siesta Key Chapel on December 9, 1975. It is an evergreen hung with effulgent gold and white copies of monograms and symbols relating to the birth and life of Christ and the early church. The Women of the Church have been making the symbols this fall (60+) with Mrs. James R. Blackwood (and Joan Heina) in charge. The name Chrismon comes from shortening, 'Christ's monogram', Mrs. Blackwood explained."

Of note is a portrait of Dr. Blackwood which was painted by artist Robert Toombs, well known for his excellence in portraiture. The large work was presented as a gift to Dr. Blackwood at some time after he performed Mr. Toombs' wedding. The portrait hung in Jim's office for several years at the Chapel until he retired. Upon moving into a retirement community, Dr. Blackwood's children decided to donate the portrait to the Chapel. It now hangs prominently in Fellowship Hall. (Photo from dedication on 3/18/07).



The chapel was one of four designs that won the 1976 Merci Award granted by the Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Several pictures of the Chapel's exterior, interior, and some structural details were arranged in a composite and hung for a time at the Ringling Museum. The awards jury commented "Siesta Key Chapel reflects a very simple structure for worship and community, set in a natural environment with obvious concern for both the setting and the simplicity of the worship service, a building which excellently achieves its function and plays its role well. The building is good theology. That is why we call it God's Tree House."



### ***The Flower begins to blossom***

Soon an Adult Day Care was opened in the little cottage on the chapel's grounds—the unused house left vacant when the property was purchased. In 1977 Siesta Key Chapel opened Sarasota's first adult day care, but it lasted only seven (7) weeks when it was absorbed by the Senior Friendship House. Also that year thousands attended the first combined (Siesta Key Chapel and Pine Shores) Easter Sunrise service on the beach. Manatee College began holding classes at the chapel and the SKY club was introduced (Siesta Key Youth). With a moveable pulpit and chairs, Dr. Blackwood began holding, "Sermons in the Round." The "Clothes Closet" project was started by the Women of the Church; they made and mended clothing for disadvantaged children.



Our chapel rolled along in its first unit, a created structure of pine and rough-sawn cedar, one in harmony with its surroundings, allowing the people to enjoy the beauty of God's handiwork in their worship and fellowship. In the next five (5) years a number of gifts helped to complete the original plans. A kitchenette, a permanent roof overhead, a concrete slab at ground level, and a Rodgers electronic organ were added

Then came the surprise gift. In 1978, an anonymous donor of \$20,000 allowed us to enclose the lower level of the Chapel making a bleak space into an attractive setting for Christian Education and many other activities for the young, the old and the in between. This anonymous gift also paid for the heating and air conditioning. The dedication of this new area took place on September 3, 1978. In completing the original architectural plan we took our "second big step" forward.

In 1979 the session called a special committee to look into present and future needs of the Chapel. First, the committee decided that it would be sensible to make a Long-Range Site Development Plan so that if it became possible to add new buildings they would fit into a well-articulated whole. What's more, there was strong feeling that the natural beauty of our land must be preserved. Bulldozers had done enough damage on Siesta Key. Therefore new buildings should be designed on an open campus plan - smaller structures tucked away among the trees and linked by plank walks and decking. There should be landscaping, too, that respected the natural growth around us and cultivated the "rustic" rather than the "manicured" look.

As a result of this long-range planning, session asked the congregation to take part in a "third big step" to move forward. They knew that many needs would arise in time, but three took priority at this moment:

- pastor's study
- church office
- children's nursery

At that time all three of these needs were housed in the little brown cottage on the chapel grounds. The rooms were cramped and inadequate for a growing church. They had started with hand-me-downs; so their equipment was either antiquated or nonexistent. The nursery was overflowing and there was no place for counseling or for the pastor's books and personal files or, for that matter, a church secretary. They knew that the church is its people, not its buildings. To fulfill its particular mission, Siesta Key Chapel needed usable space for worship, learning, fellowship, and administration, with all of them tied together in Christian service.

### ***Five years of Growth, Change and Fulfillment***

November, 1980, saw the groundbreaking for this new addition. James B. Holliday, one of the original architects and a member of the Chapel, drew plans that preserved the setting. And in 1981 the office and nursery building were dedicated.

Upon completion of this new building Patricia (Ping) Terrill, author of the Keynotes, our monthly newsletter, penned the following article in her unusual allegorical style.

### Think on These Things

*"Now in those days did the dwellers on the sands of Siesta build unto themselves a temple in the trees in which to worship, but in the near distance stood a shabby edifice, scarce three cubits by five cubits, and there did the Pastor of the sand-dwellers study and console and write pearls of wisdom for his flock. In the small tent were but two chairs, each of exceeding hardness. Thus those who came to seek counsel did relate only the direst of their troubles and vexations, for they were sore pressed. And of handmaidens who would come unbidden to the shabby tent, to engrave the Pastor's epistles on the black box with its white key board and answer a utensil (sic) of the persistent bell (telephone), they were few in number—for the chair was hard and the papyrus and tablets stacked high did surround the utensils, and there was no room for their elbows. Now the Pastor of the sand-dwellers was learned and did have many scrolls and tablets, which towered one upon the other on the poor table, blotting even the light from the windows of the tent. Did the Pastor seek to withdraw from the leaning towers a particular volume, which would support his thesis with well-chosen words? Verily, the tower would crumble, as a house built on sand. Even so, the Pastor composed veritable masterpieces of sermons, remarkable for their wisdom and blessed for their brevity. Now the dwellers on the sand were ashamed when they gazed on the shabby tents, and Arthur of the Breretons did call the people together, and spoke thus: 'We need shekels, many shekels.' And Charles of the Brennans did call together the Committee of Planners. And Harry Brackett did provide a scroll to seek the help of many hands.*

*Then did James Holliday of the A.I.A.'s design a wondrous small tent, which would be a fitting adjunct to the temple of worship and seeming a part of Nature's landscape. Workers of Forrest construction toiled mightily to erect the structure of cedar wood, exact to the hundredth of a cubit and finished on the appointed day.*

*Then it came to pass, in the fifth month of the year 1981, after all the furnishings were in place, the double doors of the new tent, which was henceforth to be called the Pastor's Study and Church Office, were opened to welcome all who entered there. There was ample room for elbows, hand maidens, utensils, great comfort, spacious cupboards, space for the Pastor to counsel and to write his pearls of wisdom. And the dwellers on the sand saw that it was good and gathered together to dedicate the structure and give thanks to God."*

In 1982 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA was formed; and Siesta Key Chapel became a part of that organization. Finally, in 1983, more than 100 years after the Civil War, the union of the Presbyterian Churches, North and South, happened. Dr. Blackwood and Al Hodgson, a member of Siesta Key Chapel, attended this momentous meeting. The vote was 32 for and 20 against.

Dr. Blackwood's report to the congregation in 1983 described the momentous footprint Siesta Key Chapel had made in our community. He recounted that the Chapel had supported three candidates for the ministry: Tom Beason, Terry Sloan, and Rick Palmer. He also said:

*"Siesta Key Chapel has helped to get several new ministries under way: the first hospital chaplaincy in Sarasota with the Rev. Robert Yolton; the first Youth Culture Ministry with the Rev. Tom Beason; the first drug rehabilitation center, at Storefront, with the Rev. Terry Sloan; the first day care-center for the elderly, which met in the Cottage on the Chapel grounds; the first ecumenical campus ministry at Manatee Junior College — unique in the nation—and again at New College, the University of South Florida, and the Ringling School of Art & Design; most recently, the first service bringing together the three churches on Siesta Key—St. Boniface (Episcopal), St. Michael's (Catholic), and Siesta Key Chapel (Presbyterian)."*

During the next few years prayer benches for the Chapel needlepointed by Fran Wells and Barbara Reese were presented for use in the Chapel. Our mission-minded fellowship opened its facility for use by Alcoholics Anonymous (a relationship, along with other Al-Anon groups, that continues in 2020). Additionally, support was provided for Hospice and Caritas food ministry.

Then, too, in its first decade, the Chapel bought a manse at 317 Givens Street. It also constructed, one at a time, a main building, a facility for Christian Education, a much-needed Study/Office and a Church Hour Nursery. Total indebtedness for land and buildings (not counting the manse or equipment and furnishings for the buildings just named) had been reduced from more than \$350,000 to \$20,000, and was expected to be fully paid by 1984. At the beginning of our second decade we had great assets. The greatest assets of the Chapel, however, were the intelligent, compassionate, and loving people.

The year 1984 was a banner one for the Chapel as we paid off our entire indebtedness: land, buildings, manse, everything. But as the Annual Report of 1984 said, "Our greatest need at present is to attract and keep young families with children."

### ***A Sad Day***

On October 31, 1985, the reverend Doctor James Blackwood retired!

The following letter is his words to his congregation:

February 19, 1985

"For fifteen years, Louise and I have given ourselves, unreservedly, to this corner of God's Kingdom. There's no place we'd rather be ...and no people we'd rather serve in Christ's name... than here.

Something inside of me whispers that it's time to go. Not that I want to. Yet I once heard Branch Rickey, the brilliant manager of baseball, remark: 'I know one thing. It is better to trade a ball player one year too early than one year too late.' Veteran athletes complain, 'The knees go first.' My knees can still bend to pray. In other signals, however, I feel the gentle prodding of the Holy Spirit: 'Face up to it, old-timer, you'd better hang up the cleats.'

So I have asked the Session to concur with me in setting an "irrevocable" date for my retirement: 31 October 1985. My last service at the chapel will be World Communion on Sunday, October 6...a shade more than seven months from now. The Session has agreed to my request. It seems wise to give this much advance notice, rather than simply melt away in the humid months of July and August. We'll have a chance for good-byes with those who will soon be leaving for a long summer elsewhere; and the Session will have ample time to set its course for the months beyond October. We are profoundly grateful for your kindness. We love you and want you to know it. You may have heard that we plan to build a home on the mainland in Sarasota. We will always be your friends; but one thing must be clear from the start: I will no longer be Pastor of Siesta Key Chapel.

Our prayer for the Chapel is that you will "hold fast" to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And for you, individually, our prayer is a very old one: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you his peace.

Thanks be to God,  
The Blackwoods

### ***An interlude***

Upon Dr. Blackwood's retirement, Dr. Kirk Allen (and wife, Coralee) from Montreat, NC, was called as Siesta Key Chapel's interim minister. During the interim ministry of Dr. Allen, from November 1985 through April 30, 1986, he recommended Siesta Key Chapel form a Men's Group which met monthly on the first Thursday of the month. No meetings were to be held in the summer months. The purpose of the group was Christian Fellowship. On May 1, 1986, the Reverend Dr. William Grosvnor arrived and served as Interim Pastor through July 14, 1986. The Reverend Dr. Carl Howie succeeded him and served through September 30, 1986. By all accounts all three performed their duties as interim pastor with aplomb. The flock remained committed to one another and to the Gospel while supporting the ministry and mission of the church.





## The Chapel Moves Onward and Outward

1986—1994

The Reverend Dr. H. Ray Woody

Dr. H. Ray Woody was installed as the second Pastor of Siesta Key Chapel on October 26, 1986. The Siesta Key Pelican Press that week wrote " Joyful enthusiasm and energy, keen sense of humor, a listening ear, and a tremendous faith that emphasizes the positive--are the gifts Dr. Woody brings to Siesta Key Chapel." He and his wife Pat had previously served churches in Stone Mountain, Georgia and Maitland, Florida.

The following thoughts by Dr. Woody are restatements of portions of a larger piece, written by Dr. Blackwood and members of the first congregation. They included sections on housekeeping and organization, and were guidelines for the new chapel. Their restatement seemed appropriate in the early months of our second pastorate.

### *Channel Markings*

*"Boaters on Big Pass welcome the markings that keep them in the channel. The Chapel has something like those channel markings to guide us in our work together. Over a span of time Siesta Key Chapel has established policies to help us get where we want to go. While not all of them are of equal importance, each has entered into making us what we are today. We trust that clear channel markings will continue to guide us."*

The following are the channel markers to which Dr. Woody referred:

### **WORSHIP**

- *To center the whole of the Chapel's life in the worship of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
- *To "keep it simple." A beautiful simplicity marked the early Christian Church during the Reformation especially in Switzerland and Scotland and in the Presbyterian Church of the American Colonies and in its later westward movement.*
- *To seek a high level of congregational participation in worship.*
- *To enjoy a broad range of choral music - classical, traditional, folk, contemporary - and should stress reverence rather than performance.*
- *To celebrate the Lord's Supper, in varied forms, at least quarterly.*

- *To have sermons of different kinds in a teaching ministry that applies ancient biblical truths to the present era and to our everyday lives.*
- *To create and maintain a fellowship of prayer.*

## **BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS**

- *To cherish the natural beauty of the place and, as nearly as possible, to keep it as it was in the beginning.*
- *To plant mostly oaks, pines, and cedars and to refrain from planting anything different from what we already have on the grounds.*
- *To trim some of the palms, but to let the brown fronds hang between the chapel and Ocean Boulevard, to act as a visual screen and as a sound baffle against road noises.*
- *To use the driveway marked ENTER for entering, and the driveway marked EXIT for exiting.*
- *To add to our chapel buildings only what harmonizes with the present structures.*

*In all these things, we thank God for the joy of  
Worship in a place where it's easy to believe that  
He created this world and called it good.*

## **The rest of the story**



It all began when member Joan Brennan was trying to devise a fitting cover for a SKC Pictorial Directory. She thought perhaps she could use the drawing of the Chapel (which graced the Sunday Bulletin and was drawn by nationally famous artist Thorton Utz when the Chapel was new). The trouble was that the drawing goes width-wise and the directory was to be length-wise; so she called Mr. Utz and was graciously invited to bring the whole works to his studio to “see what I can do.” What he could do turned out to be a beautiful new painting of the Chapel—a gift that represents the artist’s “dedication to the beauty of God’s world and his church.” It was our great pleasure to dedicate his painting during the service on May 18, 1986.

Dr. Woody's Report for 1988: "Rejoice in the Lord Always" Philippians 4:4

"In the following message you will see how the Lord has used your PRESENCE, SUPPORT AND GIFTS during the past year and learn of some goals for 1988.

Because you pledged and gave, we:

- Provided worship for our members and hundreds of visitors to the Sarasota area.
- Enjoyed an outstanding program of music.
- Organized our first blood drive, successfully.
- Gave adults and youth a fine Church School program.
- Participated in the community Vacation Bible School and Thanksgiving service.
- Have an active Presbyterian Women's Organization.
- Sewed children's clothing for the needy.
- Rolled bandages for White Cross.
- Heard outstanding speakers at the Men's Club.
- Ate, sang and laughed at the annual picnic.
- Started a second worship service (8:15 a.m.) for the 'season.'
- Were blessed by the gifts of a new organ and sound system."

It should be noted that in this time period the choir area in the rear of the sanctuary was enlarged and carpeted (for sound moderation). Also, because of a burgeoning congregation 'in season,' the balcony was enlarged to provide additional seating. With Dr. Woody's encouragement, the Women of the Church provided some support for the Jordan Prison Ministry and for the Community Clothes Closet's Mission Church.

Of additional significance in 1988 were George Youngdale's words in the Annual Report. "The Siesta Key Chapel Endowment Fund has been created (established in 1985 by a \$4,000 grant from Session) to provide for extra-ordinary expenses relating to the church's physical plant and for other long-term financial needs of the church." A board of directors was established to manage these assets.

### ***Fulfill the Dream - 1991***

At the Annual Meeting in 1984 the congregation 'had a dream.' They foresaw "continued growth to 400-500 members, double services of worship, increased benevolent giving, new facilities for a church school and fellowship activities, and increased assistance in New Church Development." Dr. Woody reminded his church of this dream in a message in April, 1991. A week earlier a letter went to the congregation from Burr Hupp, Building Campaign chairman. In part, this letter stated, "When the architect planned our sanctuary, he also prepared a site plan that included buildings for administration, education, and fellowship. The office (administration) was built soon after the sanctuary.

The others, however, until now have been only on our 'wish list.' With these structures we can meet the needs and undertake programs that in our present facilities are impossible. We can have Sunday school classes for children of all ages, programs for high-school young people, adult education, and many kinds of fellowship activities. We can be a true 'family' church." On April 14th, "Commitment Sunday," a campaign was launched to raise \$500,000 to fulfill the dream.

### ***If You Build It - 1993*** (Fourth Big Step, or was it 'Fore'-th Big Step?)

Now the Siesta Key Chapel congregation and the Christian Education Committee proudly invited friends and neighbors to tour the beautiful new Sunday School and fellowship facilities. An open house was held on Sunday, August 30, 1993. This particular field of dreams had been years in the planning and building. The people rejoiced with the addition of four Sunday School rooms, restrooms, and a Fellowship Hall including a beautiful kitchen (complete with warming ovens and ice machines that members had seen when visiting other churches), a stage area for teaching and performance and a special large area for Christian Fellowship. Dedication of these facilities took place on November 1, 1993. One interesting aside, Reverend David Cozad was a guest speaker for Men's Fellowship in this space about two (2) years before he was called to be the Chapel's third minister.

Achieving this dream was facilitated by some unique methods. In addition to the standard stewardship and capital campaign it became well known that Dr. Woody would often employ new fundraising techniques. As he was an avid golfer and lived in a golfing community, he would often invite potential donors from the ranks of the gentlemen in the Chapel to join him in a friendly round of golf. One can only assume that his powers of persuasion surpassed his golfing prowess as the funds were quickly raised to complete this project.

More than 20 years after its founding, Siesta Key Chapel continued to retain many non-traditional characteristics. The setting was wooded. Parking was among the trees and pretty much random. The perimeter was largely sliding glass doors affording "natural" observation. The floor remained uncarpeted wood reminiscent of the carpenter shop. The robeless choir sang their hearts out from risers at the back of the sanctuary. Originally they couldn't afford robes and now they rather liked the originality of street clothes.

## *Significant addenda*



A Memorial Garden was designed by the architect Charles F. Brennan, a member of our congregation, and built during 1994.

The Reverend Margaret Towner, who had recently retired after 17 years as co-pastor of Kettle Moraine Parish in Wisconsin, was welcomed to Siesta Key Chapel. In 1956 she was the first woman ordained as a Teaching Elder of the Word and Sacrament in the United Presbyterian Church.



In 1994 Dr. Woody retired. A reception for Ray and Pat was held on November 27, 1994, his last Sunday as minister of Siesta Key Chapel.

## ***Another interlude***

On December 11, 1994, Dr. Ralph Hoffman arrived as Interim Pastor to lead us into the next chapter in the life of Siesta Key Chapel. A gregarious man, he is remembered for taking groups of congregants on 'day trips' around the area. One particularly memorable trip was to Port Manatee. The day was unseasonably cold, and as we toured in open air trolleys, Hudson Bay blankets would have been most welcome!

Some of the most important events of the next year: The Reverend Dr. Arnold Poole retired as minister of Pine Shores Presbyterian Church (1961-1980) and he and his wife, Ida Gordon, decided to make Siesta Key Chapel their home church. When they came a breath of the Holy Spirit came with them. He introduced our School of Christian Living, which continues today, and Ida Gordon became a teacher. She also became involved in our Presbyterian Women. At first she led classes for our circle Bible-study leaders; and then, for many years, she memorized and presented a Christmas story at our Christmas Tea.



**Continuing in Faith, Worship and Mission**  
**Reverend David Bruce Cozad**  
**1995-2002**

The most important event of 1995 was the call of Reverend David Bruce Cozad as pastor. The pastoral search committee, after long and prayerful consideration of nearly 100 candidates, recommended Pastor Cozad. David's family included his wife, Dana, daughter, Elizabeth, and son, Matthew. Originally Rev. Cozad served as a Minister of Education at First Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee and was then called to his home church, First Presbyterian, Ocala, as associate pastor. He came to the Chapel from Eckerd College after serving in several positions there.

Siesta Key Chapel was continuing to grow in size with a reported membership of 550. We had a Session of 15 ruling elders who, with the pastor, led us in ministry, seeking member suggestions and support. Like the first 51 charter members, the members of the Chapel affirmed their debt of gratitude to those who conceived, dedicated time, energy, resources and prayer in creating this congregation and this special house of worship. One Sunday in worship Pastor Cozad stated, "We salute the 36 Charter Members who continue to worship and serve in the chapel."

Through the years the members of Siesta Key Chapel had been diligent in supporting the mission of the church. From the earliest days members were committed to mission activity and, for many years, continued to lead the Presbytery in the percent of total budget designated for benevolence.

The music program continued to flourish under the leadership of Ron Koopman who became its director in April, 1990. The hand bell choir expanded from three octaves to five octaves, thus completing the range. The choir also expanded from 30 members in 1989 to 47 in 1995. For special Sundays a four-to-eight piece orchestra complemented the choir. The youth choir was directed by Dee Anderson.

At this time The Chapel Players, a group of talented members led by Dee Anderson, became rather well known in our area. In 1997 they presented 14 performances which were enjoyed by over 4,500 people. Whether from a stage in Fellowship Hall or the Sanctuary or for a regional assembly of Peace River Presbytery, their professional performances were very much appreciated.

During 1997 our music director, Ron Koopman, passed away. On February 2, 1997, Lynelle M Williams and Cynthia Roberts-Green joined the staff of the chapel as director of music and organist respectively. It was Ron Koopmans dream to have a new organ at the chapel; so a plan was put in place to purchase a new organ with Legacy Funds and memorial funds contributed by members and friends. Then, after it was purchased, the new organ was moved to a newly renovated and enlarged balcony. The choir then moved to the balcony thus creating more seating on the main floor of the sanctuary. A dedication of the organ and choir loft was held on November 16, 1997, with a musical program which followed a pot luck dinner in the Fellowship Hall.

Other notable events that year were the beginning of Adult Sunday School classes and the addition of Pat Abdallah who began work in the church office assisting the church secretary, Mary Ann DeLorenzo. It was in this year that we hired our first Youth Director, Chris James. The first youth-conducted service was held in February and the first contemporary service, conducted by Chris, was held in September. Both services were very well received. Even though we had these changes at the Chapel in 1997, many things remained the same. We continued to participate in Caritas Sunday, the School of Christian Living, church school classes, fellowship dinners, monthly Men's Club and Chapel Players. The combination of the new and the continuing activities at the Chapel provided us a sturdy and promising hold on the future.

Siesta Key Chapel celebrated 25 years of progress and faithful service in October of 1998. Sarasota County sent the Chapel a proclamation to celebrate. Although Siesta Key Chapel began as a worshipping community at Out of Door School in 1970, it was not formally chartered and incorporated until 1973. In the fall of 1998 we celebrated two events— Recognition Day and the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Charter.

Sarasota County Commissioner Jack O'Neil was thanked by Col. A.C. Fox and the Siesta Key Chapel Session for his professional assistance and his participation in the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the Siesta Key Chapel on October 25<sup>th</sup>. The following is the letter of thanks sent to the Commissioner.

"The Chapel has been your neighbor for all the years you have resided on the island. In retrospect, it would appear we have been good neighbors and have earned your respect, as such. Your presentation and reading of the Sarasota County proclamation honoring our Chapel's quarter century birth anniversary was the high point of our special day. Every member present was intently focused on your well-chosen words as well as gratified by your selection of accomplishments justifying this laudatory recognition by the Sarasota County Board of Commissioners.

Since I was delegated authority to coordinate our original request for the proclamation, it is further requested you extend to all the members of the commission our gratitude for their generous recognition of our island congregations' achievements. As an enduring growing congregation we will continue serving and caring for one another in Christian love, fellowship, and service, both on this lovely island and in greater Sarasota Community."

Sincerely,  
A.C. "Arch" Fox



## ***The Ladies Celebrate***

### **"The Nuts, Bolts, and Cogs in the Wheels"**

On October 7, 1973, WOC (Women of the Church, now PW-Presbyterian Women), was formed with Elizabeth Chandler as founder and President, later termed Moderator. She served from 1973-1976. The Women of the Church organized 30 ladies into 3 circles - morning, afternoon and evening. When suggested they mix up circles the next year there was resistance as each group wanted to maintain their same members. Over the years they formed an annual "sacrificial" Lenten Luncheon, a Thanksgiving dinner and a cookie exchange. The ladies also initiated a mission outreach program—assembling kits for underserved children, helping Cuban refugee children, and supporting Meals on Wheels and Hospice.



Additional notable activities of Presbyterian Women included

- Louise Blackwood formed a Prayer Group which continued under Lee and Jack Mallard, and then Arch and Flo Fox. It continues today.
- Planted and weeded gardens that beautify church grounds.
- Formed a sewing circle which met in what is now the choir loft and used an old door on "sawhorse" legs for a table to cut out fabric.
- Conducted retreats at Cedarkirk Camp. During 1996-1998 Presbyterian Women's meetings were held in the newly decorated lounge under the sanctuary.
- Enjoyed a "Mad Hatter Tea" under Vice Moderator Bernice Weiss's direction.
- Organized the PHAB (Phone Answering Brigade). It began functioning in November, 1998. Originally daily, it now serves with a volunteer on hand every Sunday and Wednesday morning to answer the phone in the office. Bernice Weiss also started this program.
- Provided memorial-service receptions at the death of a member of the Chapel (this is perhaps the greatest outreach the ladies continue to provide).

In 1999, as Sista Key Chapel pivoted into a new 25 years, some new trends seemed to emerge. Our Worship Committee had tried new ideas for the order of worship and the Music Director had introduced some modern hymns. We continued to grow in fellowship and were attracting a growing number of young people as evidenced by our growing Sunday School. While we had lost some older members to death or moving away (1999 membership was 463 active and 81 affiliate), new resident members had kept pace. Of particular joy was the influx of children through the efforts of Chris James, our youth director. The center isle of the sanctuary was often filled with up to 60 children to hear the "Words with Young Worshipers." We even had a youth choir.

Men's Fellowship, which had been meeting in various restaurants for lunch, changed their format and began holding luncheon gatherings in our own Fellowship Hall. The Prayer Group, under the leadership of Col. Arch Fox, became so important and popular that a Men's Prayer Breakfast was held once a month.

### ***A new millennium***

Our church history recounts that, "The first year of the new millennium was one of hope for Siesta Key Chapel." It began a period of two and a half years of needed fixes, hopeful changes, and a foretelling of things to come.

It was discovered early on by the Buildings and Grounds committee that several areas around our facility had experienced severe termite damage. A lengthy program of repair, prevention, and preservation was begun. In addition, several HVAC units needed to be replaced. "God's Good Gardeners," a new volunteer group, was formed that year to weed, clean, trim, plant, water, and improve the grounds on designated Saturdays.

For the past few years Siesta Key Chapel had partnered with Young Life. This is an organization that has used practices proven to engage high-school and middle-school young people. For the past 60 years Young Life has trained leaders to go where the "kids" are: on school campuses, at high school sporting events, and at the movies and malls. The leaders model trust, respect, and responsibility to their young friends and do it within the context of a teenagers' world. Young life is known around the world as the organization that knows how to have fun. Young Life provides healthy, happy, energetic Christian activities for young people. During this period of time the Chapel housed the office of Young Life in our facility. However we did not 'sponsor' them as they are a national inter-faith organization. Their funding is from community-wide/national fundraising. We essentially 'shared' Chris and Brooke James between our youth programs. (After the tragic events of 9/11/2001, local philanthropy was greatly reduced and funds were no longer available to sustain Young Life in the Sarasota area.) Although Chris volunteered up to 40 hours a week to the program, he soon had to resign and seek other more stable employment. Sad as this was, we were blessed to have Daphne and Joe Bzenas continue with our youth program as volunteers. Eventually, Daphne was employed by the Chapel as Coordinator of Family and Youth Ministries.

In February of 2000 the program speaker for the February Presbyterian Women's General meeting was Rev. Dr. Kathleen Wiggins, Pastor of Wintergarden Presbyterian Church. She spoke on "Meditation of the Psalms." She was greatly admired. A foretelling, for sure.

On the last day of 2000 Lynelle Williams, our Music Director, resigned. In 2001 Cynthia Roberts Greene assumed the joint position of Music Director/ Organist.

In 2001 Rev. Dr. Arnold Poole and Reverend Margaret Towner, both retired Presbyterian ministers, became parish associates. These are non-paying positions that were approved by the Presbytery. Later Margaret Towner was awarded a stipend to help with costs she encountered while performing pastoral duties.

In appreciation for the service of the military veterans in our fellowship, an American flag and the flag of the PC(USA) were purchased and proudly are displayed in the front of our sanctuary.

Of note in 2002 was the fact that there were two active men's groups at the Chapel. The Men's Prayer Breakfast was led by Chuck Weiss and John Jacobson. They met once a month for conversation, fellowship, reflection and meditation. They said, "It is a great way to start the day — a light breakfast (usually hot bagels, juice and coffee) in a relaxed and fulfilling manner." The second group, Men's Luncheon Group, was headed by Jeff Torborg, Roger Bryson and Harry 'Tick' Morgan. They would usually meet in a local restaurant for lunch and a program speaker. Frequently Jeff Torborg told baseball anecdotes or Jim Oldshue gave his thoughts on Science and Religion. This was interesting as Jeff had been a professional baseball player and manager, while Jim had been a nuclear scientist at Los Alamos, NM, during WWII. He always told the men just how 'radioactive' he was since then.

The Board of Deacons was established in 2002 in order to better implement congregational care. Since some of the Ruling Elders' duties were to be taken over by the deacons, the number of elders was reduced to 12 and some responsibilities reassigned.

In April 2001 Reverend Cozad was given a six-week Sabbatical (April to June) so that he could complete his doctoral thesis. As part of this plan, Rev. Cozad agreed to remain at Siesta Key Chapel for no less than one year upon his return. On June 17, 2002, Reverend Dr. David Cozad informed Session he had accepted a call to First Presbyterian Church, Aiken, SC.

### ***And now for another brief interlude***

A search committee to find an interim pastor was formed, and Dr. Martin (Marty) Hager was installed as interim pastor. The Reverend Hager began his pastorate with us on Sunday, October 20, 2002. He and his wife, Lois, were welcomed and honored at a reception service on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Marty, with his keen interest in music, his own musical talent, his appreciation for both liturgy and the significant role music adds to worship, introduced a new order of worship. This worship service included more spoken and musical participation by members of the congregation. Soon a search committee for a new pastor was formed and went right to work, meeting weekly. The Chapel went "on line." This was a great help for the pastoral nominating committee as all their information exchange with the General Assembly in Louisville could be done by computer.

A Word from Reverend Marty Hager (Up North-2002)

"After serving four congregations an average of ten years each, I assumed the challenge of becoming your interim pastor a couple of days after retiring from First Presbyterian Church of Dunedin, Florida. I found, in the past, that pastors coming to a new congregation have the eyes of a newcomer for about three months maximum. Then they become like old married partners, blind to the faults of the congregation, invested in the consoling and reassuring of the status quo. So a fellow on his way to interviewing a congregation for a possible call sees clearly the chuck holes in the church parking lot that threaten the suspension of his Honda that day. He will argue with the best of property committee members only two months after he is called, that it really doesn't need immediate attention. I know this to be true. But I just don't understand why.

"So, at first I caught myself saying, 'This is the way we did it up north.' Then I found that while some things can be transplanted, most things could not. Congregations differ one from another. Anyway most change that is worth-while takes place over years, a result of careful sowing and nurture. In addition, the more I got to know the people of Siesta Key, the more I grew to admire them and even love them. What a sea of talent there is here! What great people! What great staff!

"Then I was reminded, quite abruptly, quite rudely, I thought, that a pulpit nominating committee was formed and that they are moving toward calling **a-gasp-new pastor**. 'Well', I said, 'if that is the way it's going to be (huff, huff) then what is a short-term fellow supposed to do?' "

Marty went on to say he hoped to leave a strong administrative structure with elders and deacons clear about their work, a bright financial picture, an effective way of greeting new worshipers, and signs that Siesta Key Chapel didn't 'slump' during this interim time. At the announcement that a new installed pastor had been called, Marty and Lois Hager left at the end of April, 2003, and our 4<sup>th</sup> chapter began.

***“Great Rejoicing”***  
***(remember the foretelling?)***  
**Reverend Dr. Kathleen L.H. Wiggins**  
**2003-2018**



On June 10, 2003, Siesta Key Chapel welcomed the Reverend Dr. Kathleen (Kathi) Wiggins, who hails originally from Youngstown, Ohio, the second child in a family of seven children. Baptized at John Knox Presbyterian Church, she did not believe in and love the Lord. But later a defining moment came as she sat riveted through a message on Isaiah 6:8 and internally responded to the call, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" by thinking "Here I am Lord, send me!" Kathi holds a Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) from San Francisco Theological Seminary. She served as Associate Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Westfield, New Jersey, and Associate Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Bound Brook, New Jersey. Kathi comes directly to Siesta Key Chapel from Wintergarden Presbyterian Church in Murdock, Florida, just south of us near Port Charlotte, where she was a solo pastor and head of staff.

Finally that autumn, after a long wait, the event of the season took place. An invitation for the service of installation was announced. It was a beautiful October afternoon as the crowd made its way into the sanctuary for Kathi's service of installation. The seats were filled to near capacity. There were many visitors from throughout Peace River Presbytery but the largest group of almost one hundred (100) came from the Reverend Chuck Wiggins' (Kathi's husband's) church, Trinity Presbyterian in Venice. After the service the group made their way to Fellowship Hall where the Fellowship Committee had prepared a delicious meal. As the people filled their plates many would comment about the service or the food, but the most interesting comments came from the Trinity Presbyterian visitors when they would whisper, "Siesta Key Chapel is so lucky to get Pastor Kathi"; and we certainly were.

As a new season at the Chapel began, Pastor Kathi wrote the following thank you to the congregation and explained her plan for the year ahead:

"Great is thy Faithfulness. Oh God our Father  
Morning by morning new mercies we see."

"God's mercies are new every morning, and can be seen in the gracious welcome you have extended to me as your new pastor. This promises to be an exciting year as 'old' and 'new' join hands and blend into the "new thing" God is doing at Siesta Key Chapel.

"The past two months have been crammed with the thrill of dreaming and planning for new programs and ministries. You may have noticed a new look to the newsletter. New programs have begun, like Wednesday mornings' **Fellowship on the Beach** and Sunday mornings' 9:00 **Joyful Noise (a more contemporary worship)**. On August 31 we welcomed a new member of the staff, Alex Perez, our Senior High Youth Minister. Alex joined Daphne Bzenas, Coordinator of Youth Ministries, in developing programming and activities for a growing youth ministry at the Chapel.

"Yet, amidst all the change and 'newness' we continue to celebrate and enjoy all that has made the Chapel the dynamic, Christ-honoring place it is. Please consider this your special invitation to 'jump in with both feet and invest yourself in what the Lord is doing at the Chapel.'

Grace and peace to you, Pastor Kathi. "

## ***Bits and pieces***

- “Winner Dinners” were introduced in October of 2003. They were small dinner parties held throughout the year in various members' homes. Host and hostesses volunteered their homes and the names of members interested in attending were assigned to a group. The first set of dinner parties continued for three months and then began again in January with a new set of hosts and hostesses and participants. In 2006 the program was re-named "Greet and Eat." Members met in Fellowship Hall for a potluck dinner. Small groups of six to eight members would be formed at this event and they decided on activities which interested them. These activities might include in-home dinners, dinner at local restaurants, theater performances, day trips, or any activity which allowed members to get to know one another better.
- On February 26, 2004 Siesta Key Chapel had the honor and privilege of hosting the winter meeting of the Peace River Presbytery. While our Presbyterian Women served lunch, our Men's Fellowship directed parking around our campus. Others pitched in to guide our visitors to their activities. It was a chance for us to witness the inner-working of our denomination.
- Rev. Dr. James R. Blackwood, 86, our founding pastor, died May 14, 2004. A memorial service was held at Siesta Key Chapel conducted by the Reverend David Cozad.
- Vacation Bible School was reinstated at Siesta Key Chapel, was led by Elizabeth Brooksbank. It was quite successful for several years.
- A video screen, built by Frank Miller, was installed at the front of the sanctuary. It was designed to 'blend into the woodwork' so as to not be seen except when in use during worship services or School-of-Christian-Living events.
- We enjoyed “Soup-er Bowl of Caring” on Super Bowl Sunday 2005 by donating cans of soup and/or dollars to the hungry. Following worship we enjoyed fellowship and a soup luncheon.
- The Men’s Prayer Breakfast was revitalized in 2006 and became Men’s Fellowship.
- In February of 2005 the Chapel Art Series was formed under the leadership of Cynthia Roberts-Greene, Director of Music. On at least five occasions during the winter season professional musical groups were invited to perform for members and the public.
- A new position, "church hostess," originated by Sue Bodkins, was introduced. 'Feeling our way' we served juice, coffee and cookies after worship service. And so a special time of fellowship was created; it survives and thrives to this day. (In 1970 a young boy who loved cookies would bring them on Sunday morning, and church ladies would bring gallons of coffee brought from their homes.)
- Carol Sandrock and Joyce Meier led the Chapel’s “Friday and Friends Book Club.” Their refreshments would reflect the location and culture of the book being reviewed. They would also frequently show up in the dress of the period reflected in the book.
- Angela Dinwoodie joined the staff as Financial Secretary (part-time) to fill a glaring need. It was noted in the annual report that year that she 'adds a sparkle' to this ministry.
- Scott Penxa accepted the duties as our custodian.
- Dick Ulrich, elder of Buildings and Grounds, reported that a pair of piliated woodpeckers are determined to take up residence in the walls of the Chapel. After making repairs twice, Dick reported 'the birds are winning'. An online search revealed that plastic owls, placed where the woodpeckers were doing damage, would solve the problem. And, indeed, it did.



It should be noted that 2005 was a year of great loss—and gain. On February 8th John Jacobsen graduated to life eternal. John, a past president of Hope College in Holland, Michigan, was a gifted Christian educator, Clerk of Session, and friend to all at the Chapel.



Two weeks later, Rev. Dr. Arnold Poole joined him, suddenly, at the side of their Savior, in what was a one-two punch for Siesta Key Chapel. Dr. Poole was instrumental in the inter-denominational negotiations that led to the founding of Siesta Key Chapel. Dr. Poole founded our School of Christian Living, frequently teaching and preaching at the Chapel. These two men had an enormous impact on the life of the Chapel while they were with us.



A notable event in 2005 was the arrival of the Rev. Julian Alexander and his wife Betty. Although Julian had a career with Sun Oil Company as a senior research manager, he attended Princeton Seminary from 1948-52. His first call to the ministry was in eastern Pennsylvania. He and Betty grew the church from 26 members to a peak of 531 adults and 400 children. They retired and moved into Bay Village in 1998. They joined Siesta Key Chapel in 2005 because he said, "My wife and I enjoyed the Gospel being proclaimed by a very nice Presbyterian minister, Rev. Dr. Kathi Wiggins." Julian was a frequent liturgist for Pastor Kathi on Sunday mornings, retiring (again) in June of 2018. He said his favorite memory was "preaching on my 100th birthday at Siesta Key Chapel."



In 2006 thoughts began to circulate concerning a better utilization of existing space at Siesta Key Chapel. The thoughts were translated into plans and architectural drawings. Fund raising began on February 5, 2007. The basic project parameters were:

1. There would be no major change or expansion of the sanctuary.
2. The final plan was to move the location of the office, nursery, youth and children's rooms, choir rehearsal room, and to expand the fellowship deck. Also in the plan was the purchase of some additional chairs.

As fund-raising and building progressed, the vision expanded. The music room was moved from under the sanctuary to the former Pastor's office and study; classrooms on the lower level were made into a Pastor's office and study. New children's classrooms were reconfigured from the music room, previously located below the sanctuary. As part of the fellowship deck expansion a kitchen, restrooms and an elevator were also added. The entire project was paid for by 'borrowing from ourselves' as Elton White explained. Funds came from reserves and were quickly replenished by a generous congregation.

Dedication of the renovation work took place on December 14, 2008, the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Siesta Key Chapel, when Elton White explained what the word ***Dedicate*** meant. The word goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and means to 'devote to the worship of God. Specifically to set apart, as a church, to sacred uses with solemn rites, and open to public use.' *(Webster's dictionary)*

Front and center for the Dedication was the project's architectural and construction team (Smith Architects and Delta Southern), flanked by the two men who guided it through— Elton White and Walt Olson. "We did it. YOU did it! God is good! And the folks at the Chapel are living proof. Thank you!" exclaimed Elton.

Thank you also to Ann Gamble-Blechta for the beautiful new landscaping and Frank Miller for our already beloved Welcome Table.

As talented craftsmen and church leaders worked to improve our chapel, another talent of a different sort rose to new heights in our midst. On February 24, 2008, in observance of All Souls Day at the Church of the Redeemer in downtown Sarasota, our music director Cynthia Roberts-Greene debuted locally the world premiere of her "Memorial Requiem." She composed this original score for organ, orchestra and choir in memory of her brother (who died in Viet Nam) and in honor of all those who died in all wars. Cynthia conducted the excellent choir and instrumentalists. The results were stunning.

Another musical event which continues to take place at the Chapel is the Taize service. Taize is a service of meditation, silence and prayer. This service has become a very important part of the Chapel's worship and is frequently conducted in candlelight and usually on Good Friday. The music is a series of Taize chants which, unlike Gregorian Chants, are a much more accessible style of singing, using repetition.

The year 2007 witnessed a number of changes within the Chapel's staff. Youth and Family Minister, Daphne Bzenas, resigned her position to start a career in teaching at the public high school. Fortunately she continued to volunteer her musical talents with the Praise Team called "Vision" at *Live @ the Chapel*. These contemporary worship services were held Saturday evenings in the Sanctuary. While their talent was excellent, the message faithful, and the energy level high, this worship format didn't 'catch-on' or attract a significant following. It was decided our congregation and neighborhood were not yet ready to transition to this more informal worship. Sadly, the effort was retired in 2008. Elizabeth Brooksbank, who has directed Vacation Bible School, was hired as Interim Director of Children's Ministries.

In the Annual Report of 2007 Pastor Kathi said, "Thanks to the prayers, persistence and hard work of the Deacons, the Chapel welcomed its first parish nurse. Carole Burkhart comes to us with a wealth of knowledge in the medical field linked with her love and passion for Christ and Christian ministry." Carole's position has grown to include pastoral care and wellness seminars for the congregation. She also is an active, valued member of Presbyterian Women.

### ***The Great Recession of 2008-2009 also presented opportunities***

Pastor Kathi reported, "In the midst of a global recession our congregation has faced some difficult challenges with grace and a renewed sense of our high calling in Christ Jesus. In the coming year I hope that even more members will find themselves compelled to join the effort."

She also reported a strong youth ministry due in large part to the participation of a core group of parents. The kids were active and committed to activities such as *Thirty Hours of Famine*, *Challenge to Change*, *A Senior High Mission Trip* to West Virginia, and mission trips to the *Beth-el Farmworkers'* annual fair. They also held a *Youth Pancake Breakfast* fund raiser to allow them to participate in an overnight in Tampa to attend "*Acquire the Fire*" at the *Sun Dome*.

"Mentoring pastoral interns is a privilege and a gift from the Chapel to the greater church," Pastor Kathi said. During this period our first full-year intern, John Scott, grew and matured in his ministry, and he now serves Wintergarden Presbyterian Church in Port Charlotte, finishing his seminary studies.

And the S-K-Y (*Siesta Key Youth*, started by Dr. Blackwood) continued to grow in the loving embrace of the congregation.



Sometime during 2008 the historic paraments, that had been used by Dr. James Blackwood during the early years of the Chapel, were located in storage. Pastor Kathi received many questions about these works of art. The paraments were made by Nancy Johnson at the request of Dr. Blackwood to temporarily cover the lectern at the Out-of-Door School. They were begun in 1971 and completed in 1974. Nancy graduated from the University of Florida, taught art at Riverview High School, and was the daughter of Charter member Elizabeth Johnson. Eight of the paraments (we have two for Easter) represent the Festivals of the Liturgical or Church Year; and two represent happenings outside of the Liturgical Year. A complete historical record of these paraments can be found in the addendum to this work.



Adult Christian Education (ACE) continued to attract participants by presenting studies and discussion of topics and books such as *Behind the Wardrobe*, *The Shack*, and *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*. In the summer months Lin Hall presented a study/discussion on *If You Want to Walk on Water, Get Out of the Boat*. The Rev. Issa Saliba arrived and soon began teaching ACE as well as in the School of Christian Living. Issa, born in old Jerusalem and speaking the languages of the Bible lands, has been a wonderful resource. (In 2016, Issa and Eleanore Saliba led a group of Chapel members on a life-changing trip through the Holy Lands.)

#### Other 2009 notables:

- Pastor Kathi continued her “Express Lunch and Bible Study” on Wednesday’s at noon.
- Eleven (11) young people completed their confirmation class in November.
- In May a reception was held to thank Elizabeth Brooksbank, Interim Director of Children's Ministries. As summer approached, the church decided to transition the children's programs to an all-volunteer staffed nursery and Sunday School.
- Membership Chair, Linda McDonald, reported that 30 new members joined the Chapel this year.

In an edition of the Chapel newsletter 'Keynotes' from 2009, Pastor Kathi Wiggins shared:

"Dear Friends,

Think back with me to a time before cell phones and vanilla lattes. Think way back before the advent of satellite dishes or color TV. Think all the way back to what you remember (or what you heard!) about 1933.

"Then, like now, the world could be scary. 1933 included the darkest of days of the great depression, the rise of Nazi power and the terrible ascent of fascist oppression. In America racial segregation was real and taken for granted. It was deeply ingrained even within the minds of many professing Christians.

"In the midst of such darkness and evil, Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr, pastor of Shady Side Presbyterian Church decided to do more than just talk. He began to organize a church-wide witness to the Gospel message that, in Christ, believers of all races and cultures are one. He called it World Wide Communion Sunday and scheduled it for the first Sunday of October, beginning in 1936. The name has changed since 1936 but not the message! World Communion Sunday is still a very important part of Siesta Key Chapel."

Pastor Kathi

### ***Keep on, Keep'n on***

As the Great Recession's impact on the economy wore on, Pastor Kathi noted that "2010 was an extremely difficult year for many of our members." That said, Kathi (as she was lovingly referred to) was a champion in the field of pastoral counseling. Her faithful, heartfelt advice and empathetic listening skills carried many of us through the darkness into the Light.

As for the many programs at the Chapel, maintaining the status quo from 2008 throughout 2009 was seen as a victory. Exceeding the status quo showed that we are people of faith and action. Exceed we did.

The young men and women of the church were undaunted by the events around them. They served as liturgists in worship with great aplomb, even sharing their special musical talents from time to time. As many in our community found themselves in need, our young friends stepped up to be part of the solution—again. Their 'Challenge to Change' mission trip took them for a week serving in downtown Tampa's *Metropolitan Ministries* and the *Beth-el Farmworkers' Ministry* in Wimauma, Fl. This was also the year that *Young Life* returned to the Sarasota community, due in large part to the prayers, vision, and generosity of several Chapel members.

As members looked around and embraced the realities of this recession, they were reminded by our Mission Outreach that our friends at the *Institution Univers, Quanamithe, Haiti* truly understood 'recession.' Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, suffered a devastating earthquake in its capital, Port a' Prince, in January, 2010. As a result, thousands of residents fled to the countryside, some fleeing to our mission partner in Quanamithe. The March 'Keynotes' reported, "The stories of heroism, heartbreaking needs and sorrow continue even as the Chapel's Mission Outreach committee awaits word on the timing of its next trip." Then it came. From June 26 through July 4 Pastor Kathi and Mission Outreach chairperson, Nickie Ashcraft, traveled to Haiti to help. They said, "We will be the guests in a very poor, culturally different third- world country. Our mission is not to change or even fix, but to establish relationships, assist children with English, learn more than we teach, and share the love of God." The story here is that when people are hurting, whether at home or abroad, the Fellowship of Believers known as Siesta Key Chapel is ready to lift them up.

November 8, 2010, marked the 40th anniversary of the first worship service of this church held at Out of Door School. It was noted that 11 Charter members were in attendance at that worship service. They were: Joan Heina, Craig Holliday, Scottie Holliday, Wendel Kent, Virginia (Ginny) Martin, Margaret Moody, Frank Folsom Smith (original architect), Pat Chandler Smith, Phyllis Ulrich, Jack Wells, and Esther Yolton. Several stood at the pulpit that day to share their memories of that 'birth'day.



## ***Stepping up—Stepping out***

As the second decade of the 21st century rolled along, the recession of the past was only visible in the rear-view mirror. The stewardship committee reported that pledges were being fulfilled or exceeded. In 2011 they reported that 50% of pledges were actually increased. When income exceeded the budget, the money was made available for increased missions' activity. We continued our mission trip to Haiti even though some church partners declined to participate. Trips to Beth-el increased as did our commitment of time and resources. Local missions continued to be supported as well as the addition of a program called *Hope for Kids--in a Backpack*, which provided food from the All Faiths Food Bank for underprivileged children during the summer. Christian Education continued to thrive with new programs and small group ministries. Although a new Interim Children's Director moved on after a short time, qualified and committed volunteers from within the congregation stepped up to assist. Francie Hall stepped up from the congregation, along with Pastoral Intern Kelly Roman, to begin a new program. It was called *One Room Sunday School*. Of note in 2011 was the stepping down of Col. Arch Fox as head of the Chapel prayer group known as *Standing in the need of Prayer*. Arch had led this faithful group of prayer warriors for 32 years.

Cynthia Robert-Greene continued to provide worshipful music from the choir loft. The fact that so few voices can sound so 'big' is a testament to Cynthia's talent as a director/organist and the superb acoustics of the Chapel sanctuary. The anonymous gift of a Yamaha 7'6" disclavier grand piano was welcomed. It was given so the Chapel Arts Series and the whole music program could thrive and improve.

2011 marked the first year that Siesta Key Chapel stepped into the world of 'technology.' With the help of Cliff Menezes, web master, Pastor Kathi's sermons were made available online on the Chapel's *Website*. At this point it was audio only—but it was a portent of things to come.

## ***What was old, is new again***

In 2011, inspired by a poem called ***Bridge Builder***, Frank Miller suggested that the Chapel needed an endowment fund to provide a vehicle for members to make Siesta Key Chapel part of their legacy. This fund was approved and thus established "to provide for the needs of the Chapel beyond the scope of our annual operating budget. It is a way to make a difference in its life now and for years to come."

For reasons unknown, the founding Directors of this newly established fund were unaware that an endowment fund had been established previously in 1985. As no designated funds were identified at this time, it can be fairly assumed that they were consumed in the building of facilities or operations over the years.

Interestingly, generous charter members of the Chapel, the Hintzpeter family, established a trust in those early years to be distributed to the "endowment fund at Siesta Key Chapel" upon the passing of certain family members in later generations. We were surprised to learn of these details in 2018, when we were notified that our endowment fund would be the recipient of over \$ 1 million from the Hintzpeter trust. Truly our original Bridge Builder!

## **THE BRIDGE BUILDER**

An old man, going a lone highway,  
Came at the evening cold and gray,  
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,  
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.  
The old man crossed in the twilight dim-  
That sullen stream had no fears for him;  
But he turned, when he reached the other side,  
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near,  
"You are wasting strength in building here.  
Your journey will end with the ending day;  
You never again must pass this way.  
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide,  
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head.  
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,  
"There followeth after me today  
A youth whose feet must pass this way.  
This chasm that has been naught to me  
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.  
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;  
Good friend, I am building the bridge for *him*."

**– WILL ALLEN DROMGOOLE**

### ***Memorable, yet unremarkable***

What? From 2012 through 2015 we built on our strengths, broadened our reach and deepened our faith. During this period there were no big momentous events; yet mission efforts continued to grow in our community as we supported agencies who deal with 'the least among us' such as Salvation Army, All Faiths Food Bank, Harvest House and Beth-el Farmworkers' Ministry. In 2014 we were, regrettably, forced to end our trips to Haiti because of a mosquito-borne virus called Chikungunya that was sweeping through the Caribbean and Haiti. Some of our members contracted a mild, yet very unpleasant, case of the virus on their last visit. In 2013 our Evangelism committee was renamed and re-tasked. It is now called the Community Outreach committee. Its primary goal is to make the Chapel more visible and known in our local community, with the goal of increasing our membership. In 2013, we were blessed with a pastoral intern from our own 'back yard.'

Susie Wills, from First Presbyterian, Sarasota, joined our staff. She brought boundless energy and new perspectives to our ministry. She said, "Siesta Key Chapel is a living demonstration that tradition and informality are not only compatible but the ideal expression of praise to God." In addition, we purchased new hymnals, held a Mission Fair with all our mission agencies in attendance, and held new member dinners in the home of gracious hosts and members, Nick and Linda Pearce.

Our foray into the world of technology continued as video cameras were installed allowing the video recording of worship services and other special events. DVDs of the worship service were made available to shut-ins and "snow-birds" in the summer. Anything but *Unremarkable*.

## **ANTICIPATION**

As Pastor Kathi said in her annual report, "2016 was a year of outstanding generosity, Godly zeal and grace at the Chapel" and "We 'treasure' our life together at *God's Treehouse*. We cherish the memories, the legacy, the friendships and support, the worship and beauty we find here." It seemed as though the year was spent 'getting ready' for something big. The facilities were being refurbished with fresh paint, new roofing, new air conditioning units, new signage, and more. The kitchen in Fellowship Hall was completely remodeled and reorganized. The choir loft was expanded and strengthened in anticipation of things to come. By the fall of 2016 it was - - - -

***"C-E-L-E-B-R-A-T-I-O-N time, come on"***



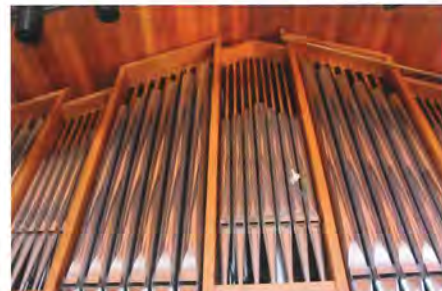
On Sunday, October 16, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the ordination of the Reverend Margaret Towner. "Marg" is a treasure of knowledge, voice and counsel. In addition to her ever-present voice in the choir, she would often fill the pulpit or offer programs for the Presbyterian Women. In honor of this event, Cynthia Roberts-Greene composed music for the celebration entitled *Peace I Leave With You*.



On January 2, 2017, the sanctuary was filled to capacity to celebrate Rev. Julian Alexander's 100th Birthday. He preached a very good sermon that day and everyone followed him to Fellowship Hall after worship for a lively birthday party with all the 'fixings.' Julian's favorite humorous anecdote is, "We who live in Florida are not snowbirds but, rather, FROGS because," he laughs, "we come here to Croak!"



***Yes, Cynthia, dreams really do come true***



In January, Cynthia celebrated her 20th year of leading the music program at the Chapel. It had always been her dream to see a pipe organ installed in the choir loft. Well, on March 19, 2017, a beautiful new, hand-crafted, Schantz pipe organ was dedicated to God's glory and use by Cynthia. This magnificent instrument was approved a year earlier, crafted in Ohio at the Schantz factory, disassembled, trucked to Siesta Key, and reassembled in our choir loft. A group of dedicated, faithful worshipers stepped up and made sure this 'dream' came in debt-free. It is indeed a gift that keeps on giving with the talent of our master organist, Cynthia Roberts-Greene.

In May, 2017, we dedicated another special addition to our facility in the form of a walking/meditation path. The brain-child of Judy Sandt and Pamela Warren, it is a gravel and shell pathway, approximately 1/4-mile-long, that meanders through the flora and fauna surrounding God's Tree House. It is often frequented by bald eagles and crowned night herons. At the dedication a Mission Statement was read. "Surrounded by beauty, we respond in humility and gratitude for this unique property. As stewards of God's land, we create a path that maintains the complementary natural relationship between plants, space and structures, a place of presence where our souls are drawn."



Just in time for Christmas, the Holliday Group, led by member Craig Holliday, completed a new Fellowship Pavilion. This structure, in the true style and form of the original 'treehouse', covers our open fellowship deck area. It provides shade from the heat and cover from the rain, allowing for a more useable environment. The Fellowship committee, chaired by Connie Watson, also added a special light reminiscent of those in the sanctuary. A large screen television was also added. This will allow the space to be used for overflow holiday crowds

As 2017 is a year of celebration and gratitude, it must also include the ten years we have enjoyed the Pastoral Internship program. We have learned from them, and they from us. It has all been accomplished under the guidance and mentorship of Pastor Kathi. The following is a list of Interns/Residents that was published in the Annual Report.



### **The Mrs. Sherrill H. Griffin Internship Program**

Siesta Key Chapel's Pastoral Internship program was made possible by gifts given in honor of **Mrs. Sherrill H. Griffin**. The program has truly been "a gift that keeps giving" to our Interns/Residents as well as to the church. We are grateful.

2007	<b>Eileen Borduin Vanderzwaan</b> , PTS ( <i>summer Intern</i> )
2008-2009	<b>John A. Scott</b> , SFTS ( <i>one year Intern</i> )
2010	<b>Katie Conlan Lee</b> , PTS ( <i>summer Intern</i> )
2011	<b>Thomas "T.J." Colfield</b> , PTS ( <i>summer Intern</i> )
2011-2012	<b>Kelly Roman</b> , PTS ( <i>one year Intern</i> )
2013-2014	<b>Susie Wills</b> , UTS ( <i>one year Intern</i> ) followed by 3-months as Pastoral Supply during the Pastor's Sabbatical
2014-2015	<b>Rev. Katie Lee</b> , PTS returned for a full year as Pastoral Resident. Katie was ordained in 2012 by Salem Presbytery (PCUSA), N.C.
2015-2016	<b>Rev. Dr. Sylvia Millar</b> , BTS ( <i>one year Resident</i> ). Sylvia was ordained in 2009 by the American Presbyterian Church, an independent non-profit ministry located in Florida.
2016-2017	<b>Adam Ogg</b> , PTS ( <i>one year Intern</i> )

PTS = Princeton Theological Seminary (PCUSA)

UTS = Union Theological Seminary (PCUSA)

SFTS = San Francisco Theological Seminary (PCUSA)

BTS = Biblical Theological Seminary

### ***Oh, no!***

The euphoria of the last few years ended abruptly in January, 2018. At the first Session meeting of the new year Rev. Dr. Kathleen Wiggins announced her retirement from active ministry to take place on June 30, 2018. In that month's newsletter she said, "Although there is an understandable degree of sadness involved, this is also an opportunity to put our faith into action. We are confident that the One who began a good work in us at the Chapel is with us and will see us through this transition."

The next few months were busy and bittersweet. With the help of a Peace River Presbytery representative, session set about appointing an Interim Pastoral Nominating Committee (IPNC) to commence a search. While they did their work the rest of the church went about what they have always done: committee work, local mission trips, prayer groups, Bible study, fellowship dinners and, well, just believing God was in charge, and loving one another. We continued to grow in our faith and understanding with events like a full Passover Seder celebration and an adult reconfirmation class.

The evening of Friday, the 13th of April (seriously), was set aside for a wonderful retirement dinner to honor Pastor Kathi. Seemingly early, the date was set at the insistence of our 'snowbirds' who were about to fly north and did not want to miss the opportunity to express their love and gratitude to our spiritual leader and friend of the last 15 years. The catered meal was of the highest quality — none better to be found in the city. Time for hugs and tears was ample.

Kathi said later, "It truly took my breath away. The afterglow will be with me for years to come, along with my deep appreciation for each and every one."



## *The "thrill and the terror of change"*

Those were some of Kathi's final words as she faced walking into the shadows of a restful, well-earned retirement. 'Parting is such sweet sorrow. . .' but 'the sun will come out tomorrow' also comes to mind. And so another Interlude begins.

That 'sunshine' came in August in the person of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Cook, Interim Pastor. After nearly 40 years in the ministry, including two long-term pastorates in Michigan, he had retired. While spending some time on Marco Island in the winter of 2018, out of curiosity, he checked a website about interim pastorates. He noticed Siesta Key Chapel. Tom asked his wife Martha what she thought and she said, "Go for it." Turns out her parents, George and Nancy Johnson, had been long time, much loved members of the Chapel. Tom applied and the rest, as they say, is history.

Once acclimated to the flow of summer life at the Chapel, Tom went to work on those things that interim pastors do. After perusing our 'manuals', he set about helping session update policies, employee handbooks and the like.

His most important task was to have a congregational study committee formed. They were tasked with surveying the congregation and from that process, called Appreciative Inquiry, discern the 'DNA' of the church—who we think we are as a church. That task accomplished, he asked the church nominating committee to appoint a Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC), who would then develop a Ministry Information Form. This MIF is actually our 'job posting.' A representative from the Presbytery came alongside the PNC; and Tom's role in that process was complete.

But Pastor Tom was not finished, to be clear. While the role as Interim Pastor is temporary and he might be disinclined to build lasting relationships, he took the route of binding together with us. After all, he is 'genetically' linked with us through his wife, Martha, and her parents, the Johnsons. All manner of new activity was employed to keep us active in our faith and fellowship. We had Trivia nights; and we took underprivileged children from Harvest House to a Baltimore Orioles spring training game.

The ladies held their 5th Annual High Tea which featured Ellen Stamps as speaker. In her earlier years Ellen was the nurse and traveling companion of Corrie Ten Boom, the celebrated and revered survivor of the Nazi death camps. Corrie wrote about her experiences and faith in "*The Hiding Place*." Ellen's husband, Dr. Robert Stamps, joined us for the month of January, 2019, as Theologian in Residence, a new program for the Chapel. Dr. Stamps, a renowned scholar, has studied in universities throughout the U.S, England and Scotland. 'Dr. Bob' taught adult Sunday School classes as well as in our School of Christian Living.



The Stamps were followed in January, 2020, by Joyce MacKichan Walker as Theologian in Residence. An author of study guides, she had a celebrated career as a Christian educator at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton.

Pastor Tom also re-introduced us to the traditions of Kirkin' O' the Tartans. With bagpipes playing traditional Scottish/Presbyterian hymns, a surprising number of Chapel members with clan heritage went forward for the Blessing of the Tartans.

With transition, change is inevitable. Several years before Pastor Kathi arrived, Patricia 'Pat' Abdullah came on staff as a temporary secretary, soon to be Administrator. A year after Kathi's departure and after 20 years at the Chapel, Pat decided it was time to retire. At Pat's retirement party it was said of her, "She supported and assisted the congregation, and has been dedicated to making Siesta Key Chapel a place of hospitality."

### ***PNC and a Pandemic***

In early 2020 the Pastor Nominating Committee was diligently at work reviewing Personal Information Forms (PIF), interviewing candidates by video conferencing, and listening to all manner of sermons, when chaos rained down upon the world in the form of Covid-19 virus, a highly contagious, deadly, flu-like virus. 'Stay at home' orders were issued, businesses were closed, travel highly restricted, and on-site congregant worship services were cancelled for at least three months.

The pastoral search was severely hampered by travel restrictions and the inability to have in-person meetings with candidates.

Pastor Tom, several months earlier, anticipating a successful pastoral search had advised session of his intent to 'retire' again and move back to Michigan after worship on May 3rd. He and Martha, who had remained in northern Michigan to care for her mother, had been apart for 21 months at that point and were confident a new pastor would be in place. The decision was firm, plans were made, and so it was that a 'Bridge Interim Pastor', the Rev. Lyn Olson, who had recently retired from Venice Presbyterian Church, was hired to lead us forward until the virus abated and the PNC completed its work.

The silver lining in this dark time is the fact that, through technology, we could still 'meet' in worship. Sermons, scripture reading, prayers, and special music were all put in the form of a worship service and video recorded. This recording was then uploaded to technology platforms like YouTube, Face book, and our Website. In the comfort of their homes, members could enjoy worship, even take part in Holy Communion. While the close personal interaction was missing, the knowledge that the Holy Spirit was present amongst us, no matter the circumstance, was helpful.

## **HERO'S ABOUND**

No recounting of Siesta Key Chapel history would be complete or accurate without a huge thank you to the 'invisible' people—actually the ubiquitous people who are everywhere but often 'unsung.'

Certainly the Siesta Key Chapel Choir tops this list as the 'unsung singers' go unrecognized and under-appreciated due in large part to their physical location on the rear balcony in the sanctuary. Occasionally it was suggested they move 'down front' so we could see them, but the response has always been, "no thanks, we like our little enclave up there." The truth is that the sound from those few voices in the upper rear of the sanctuary seems to be amplified and enriched by the wonderful acoustics created by the materials and design of 'God's Treehouse.'

The Deacons, established by Rev. Cozad in 2002 at the suggestion of George Youngdale, work tirelessly and quietly to assist the congregation in all manner of congregational care. They are a valuable adjunct to pastoral care, providing transportation, home visits, home communion, fellowship and food when needed.

Parish Nurse, Carole Burkhart, RN, is a most pleasant and valuable part of the Chapel's ministry. She is of great assistance to the pastor and the deacons. Her medical skills, life-style classes, and deep faith are all packaged in a most effervescent personality.

The ushers continue to greet and assist worshipers at each service. Often unnoticed, their absence would leave us wondering what to do and where to go. Equally important to our life at the Chapel are the custodians, administrators, and Phabs (phone answering brigade). Thank you.

Of course there are also the Presbyterian Women. They knit; they sew; they quilt; they cook; they study; and they serve in so many other ways. Of critical importance to this work, without which there would not be a history, is the fact they have always served as the church historians. They accumulate and file all manner of fact and memorabilia, organizing it into a valuable trove of information.

History would seem to infer a legacy, a trail of sorts. Our remaining trailblazers, the Charter and early members that continue to bring leadership, vision and faithfulness to Siesta Key Chapel are the true heroes. When asked; 'Why did you come to the Chapel and what keeps you coming back?', charter member Craig Holliday said the Chapel "has and will always be my 'home' church. I grew up here and learned about God in these beautiful surroundings created by my father." Pat Woody, wife of Rev. Dr. Ray Woody, said she was moved by "the vision of the membership, the sense of God's leading, work to be done, people to love, classes to teach and an extraordinary music program." Rev. Marg Towner finds that the natural setting and simplicity of the worship space are compelling.

When asked, "What's your favorite memory of the Chapel" or "What's your vision for our future?", charter member Joan Heina recalls her wedding to Fred Heina conducted by Rev. Cozad. Charter member Craig Holliday also remembers his and Lisa's wedding in the Chapel and 'seeing a vision of my deceased father right before the service showing me his approval.' Joan Heina shared a vision held by many that, "I hope Siesta Key Chapel will continue as a church in the tree tops with a congregation of friendly people all caring about the needs of each other and the needs of the community." Pat Woody envisions "an oasis of Christ's calm in the middle of a noisy, busy world, a strong fortress of the Holy Spirit. . . ." A vision shared by all.

## ***Late Breaking . . . Good News!***



As this book was about to go to the publisher, it was learned that the Pastoral Nominating Committee had good news to share. Through the use of the aforementioned technology and with some easing of travel restrictions, the committee was able to complete its task of calling our new pastor. The Reverend Dr. Ruth Herron Smalt will join us on September 1, 2020 as the fifth called pastor of Siesta Key Chapel. Most recently Pastor Ruth has joyfully served God's people on the island of Nantucket, MA, at the historic First Congregational Church (circa 1711).

Her contagious passion for knowing and serving Jesus in community is evidenced in her life theme, "Alive, Alert, Awake, Enthusiastic!" We look forward to her energetic enthusiasm to serve the Lord at Siesta Key Chapel as we enter our next 50 years.

## ***The End—almost***

Yes, the foregoing pages have brightened memories of many and shown a roadmap for others. As we Rejoice throughout 2020, we will do the usual celebratory activities: continuing to pull out special memories and pictures to enjoy and have a special celebration worship service and banquet. We will also install a new pastor as spiritual leader of our congregation.

While this is an introspective period, we also want to celebrate the joys of being a mission-oriented church. We want to look *outward* as well as *inward*. To that end we have asked our congregation to fund a program called **RIP Medical Debt**. Simply put, contributions will go toward eliminating the oppressive burden of medical debt of at least \$2.5 million for the 'least of the least among us' in our community. Scripture in the book of *Leviticus, Ch. 25*, reminds us that in the biblical Jubilee Year *debts are forgiven and the captives are set free*. This Legacy Gift to our Sarasota County community will remove debts and release the debtor from his or her captivity. May we embrace the totality of our **Jubilee Year!**

## ***The Next Chapter***

The next chapter in the life of Siesta Key Chapel is up to **YOU** to write. As we spend the year 2020, our 50th Anniversary, celebrating, it is important to:

***REMEMBER, REJOICE, and ENVISION***



## Addendum The Paraments

These paraments were made by Nancy Johnson at the request of Dr. Blackwood to temporarily cover the lectern at the Out-of-Door School. They were begun in 1971 and completed in 1974. Nancy graduated from the University of Florida, taught art at Riverview High School, and was the daughter of Charter member Elizabeth Johnson. Eight of the paraments (we have two for Easter) represent the Festivals of the Liturgical or Church Year and two (2) represent happenings outside of the Liturgical Year.



Advent: This Pulpit Hanging was not made by Nancy Johnson but by the children of St. Petersburg Presbyterian Church. The hanging was hung on the pulpit at Out-of-Door School for Siesta Key Chapel's first Advent Season. It was hung on Advent Sunday or for Ordinary Time. (Note: unfortunately, we have lost the Advent Parament made by Nancy.)



Christmas: The birth of Jesus as suggested by the manger and the star against a white background. White signifies joy and light; the circle is the symbol of eternity. December 24 until the Sunday prior to January 6<sup>th</sup>.



Epiphany: A natural colored, burlap fabric with a stylized figure of a man with upraised arms applied on it. There is no explanation of the symbolism from the artist, other than it portrays Epiphany. Perhaps it represents an attitude of praise and adoration of God. It is hung during the period beginning January 6 and continuing until Ash Wednesday.



Lent: "The Pelican in Her Piety." Symbolic of the Lenten Season and Holy Week. Legend has it that the pelican will give its life for its young by drawing blood from its chest if the bird cannot find food otherwise. This symbol offers a parallel to the atonement of the savior. The color purple suggests that Lent is a solemn season. This pulpit hanging goes up from Ash Wednesday until Easter.



Easter: The Hand of God receiving Christ back again. The hand is dark green fabric holding the white Lamb of God. The tie-dye spots of green and white represent the rays of the sun. This pulpit hanging can be hung from Easter through the seven (7) Sundays until Pentecost.



Easter: A red, pink and yellow butterfly (a symbol of the resurrection) emerges out of a black tomb, here surrounded by gray stones, beyond which rays of pink and yellow spread to the edges of the hanging. The butterfly is a symbol of the resurrection coming as it does from a seemingly lifeless chrysalis. Easter is the festival of the resurrection and one of the most joyous days of the church year. It corresponds with the Passover of the Jews. This hanging can be hung from Easter through the seven (7) Sundays until Pentecost.



Pentecost: The artist did not describe this, but Pentecost is pictured as flames of fire. This recalls the experience of Pentecost when flames were said to rest upon the heads of the apostolic band. Additional information: Pent means five (5) and there are five divided flames representing the divided tongues. We believe the background was originally red and has faded over 50 years to a soft brown. The eleven (11) bars across the bottom represent the eleven (11) Apostles (Acts 2:3-4). This hanging goes up on Pentecost Sunday for one week.



Trinity: Trinity Sunday is the Sunday after Pentecost. Since the trinity is beyond human experience, there has grown up in the church symbols of this mystery which was believed but was beyond man's ability to explain in words. The triangle affirms oneness and 'threeness' at the same time. The white, opaque background is a symbol of the God head— perfection, completeness, light, purity, innocence and joy. This hanging remains for three Sundays.

#### **Pulpit Hangings outside the Liturgical Year:**



Creation: The artist did describe this as 'Creation'. The hanging shows different shades of green, broken up to form a circle against a background of blue. Artists use blue to symbolize heaven; green evokes thoughts of life and growth; and a circle indicates unity or eternity. (Ordinary Time)

In 1994 a wall hanging was made by Kay Kangas depicting many symbols of Jesus. It hangs in Fellowship Hall.





*Surrounded by the beauty of creation  
we respond to God's grace in worship,  
fellowship and praise,  
eager to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior  
as we follow the Spirit's call to love one another,  
proclaim the Gospel, and serve the world God loves.*