

Virginia Shannon, wife of Pastor Lloyd Shannon, proudly welcomed all to Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church at the inception of its beautiful sanctuary located on State Street in New Albany, in 1964.

The church flourished and grew while serving the surrounding communities over the years. And 46 years later, Virginia was also present, even holding a shovel, at the groundbreaking ceremony for the newest Wesley Chapel UMC location off of Highway 150 in Floyds Knobs.

As they are at the present time without a building to call “home”, the members and visitors of Wesley Chapel UMC are currently meeting at two different ministry sites for worship, study, meetings, and other events, with the church office located at yet a third location.

The Sunday morning 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. blended worship services take place at Christian Academy of Indiana. Sundays at 5:00 p.m. there is an “Old Ship” service which is held at Grant Line UMC featuring favorite hymns and Scriptural teaching. And at 7:07 p.m. at Grant Line UMC, you will find the “Culturally Relevant” service, designed for younger generations with contemporary worship and Biblical teachings.

All weekday programming is also held at Grant Line UMC.

Logistically things are a little more spread out and take a lot of extra work to manage with all materials, worship team items, instruments, and everything else it takes to make four worship services flow well and easy to follow for participants.

But in speaking to the senior staff of Wesley Chapel UMC, they are grateful for the experience of “tent camping” just as the Israelites first did in the desert for 40 years in the Old Testament.

Basically everything that takes place each week has to be set up and taken down, and done again each and every weekend. The biggest sentiment echoed by the senior staff members is that what they are most grateful for is the new perspective they have gained by not having a building that houses their things.

According to Lead Pastor Tony Alstott, the mission of Wesley Chapel UMC is “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ to Transform the World” and they have never been more focused on that mission than they are right now.

Alstott said since they left the State Street location, it has opened their eyes to more areas of the communities they serve. Yes there is an element of being busy that goes along with moving from one church building to another but their focus remains on serving and how better to serve the surrounding communities than to be out in them since they have no building to invite them into?

Tammy Ivey, Director of Worship at Wesley Chapel UMC, said that the best thing about their “tent camping” experience is that “They have found different ways to do ministry. Out mindset has become more outward focused.”

Alstott is a firm believer that “in order to serve the community you have to be in the community.” And as a church they are.

They have partnered with Grant Line Elementary School as a direct result of their move offering tutoring programs and a “Blessings in a Backpack” campaign which according to the Wesley Chapel UMC website “provides elementary school children who are on the federal Free and

Reduced Price Meal Program with a backpack of food to take home for 38 weekends during the school year.

Backpack food includes easy-to-prepare, ready-to-eat foods like granola bars, juice boxes, mac and cheese, and oatmeal.” They have also formed a strong relationship with Christian Academy and have come to know and be involved with many of the students there.

Dennis Alstott, Lead Pastor and father of Pastor Tony Alstott, had been approached by his congregation to form the relationship with Wesley Chapel UMC as their attendance had dwindled in recent years and they are now grateful that their campus is being used more and more for God’s work.

So many good things have come as direct result of the move from the State Street location.

The members and attendees of Wesley Chapel UMC are highly involved in many areas of ministry in the local communities with a few examples being The Salvation Army, Choices for Women Resource Center, and Exit 0 Homeless Ministry but there are many more.

Teams from Wesley Chapel UMC even helped with cleanup after tornadoes ravaged the Henryville and Borden areas back in March of this year.

Alstott says that he highly recommends community involvement and action on an individual level to his congregation and it just happens. People go out and get involved and then come back and share the stories of how they have been blessed with others who then may be encouraged to serve.

The process of moving a church is easy nor quick.

It takes a lot of time, much planning, many hours of prayer, and quite a bit of capital.

In 2006 the building committee took a year to conduct a feasibility study and to educate themselves on the current state of the church.

Next came looking for land in a desired area. They came across 22 acres off of Highway 150 and believed that was the direction they were supposed to move in.

A church capital campaign as well as the sale of the State Street property would help fund the new venture with a projected cost budgeted at \$8.3 million. And ground was broken in 2010 at the Highway 150 location for the new sanctuary.

The move itself took several leaps of faith according to Alstott.

The first leap of faith came with buying the property itself. Although the property was in a great location, not too far from the previous site and just off of Interstate 64, there was no entrance, only a solid rock wall to contend with and to blast through in order to make an entrance to the property.

The second leap of faith, to move and to start building the new site before the State Street property was sold. This may not seem like a huge leap of faith to some as a deal was in negotiation for the sale, however this was the fifth set of negotiations as four previous deals going back as far as 2005 had fallen through.

So starting something new without having completed the sale was done on faith alone. The sale of the State Street property did in fact take place six years after deciding to sell, in December of 2011 to First Savings Bank. The old sanctuary no longer remains as they plan to develop a retail center there called Wesley Commons so the building itself will not remain. Understandably some will grieve the loss as a big part of Wesley Chapel UMC’s history took place there.

With the move from an urban to a more rural area Pastor Alstott said their opportunity will be to reach more people for Christ. He said that since the feasibility study discovered that their attendance came from 17 local zip codes in four counties that the move away from State Street

was not as significant an issue because they were staying in the same general area and again just off of the expressway.

When asked about attendance changes he responded that with “every major change you are going to lose some people and that while every loss is unfortunate, their losses were minimal.”

He said that the people who attended Wesley Chapel UMC in the fall of 2010 accompanied them on the journey to Christian Academy.

As of 2012 they have taken in new members, performed baptisms, and even have a few weddings being scheduled at the new sanctuary so the focus is on the excitement and continued growth, not the small frustrations along the way. And now with the building project being about halfway complete, with the steel going up and the building taking shape, there is more of a positive response than ever.

Alstott was appointed to Wesley Chapel UMC in 2010 and has very much enjoyed the journey since then.

On a personal level, Alstott said that even though he has been in ministry for years, he is still “always surprised that God is there before we get there. God already has it figured out, we just have to trust Him.”

He has already seen that with the new location. Wesley Chapel UMC offers CAPS (Christian Activities Program for Summer) to welcome children for the summer and in 2011 the number of children signed up from outside the church membership body outnumbered the children who signed up from within the church, with a high concentration from the Floyd County area.

Alstott added that “God is already at work in people’s lives in that area, He has just invited us to join Him.”

Vacation Bible School as well as other summer activities are also offered for children and information is available on their website www.wesleychapel.org.

Other staff members are excited about the move into the new building as well.

Tammy Ivey also commented that “With our new (outward) mindset in our new building we will have unlimited potential.”

Alstott is grateful for his ministerial calling to Wesley Chapel UMC and their new location.

In his words, “Wherever God has sent me, my calling has been to share the love of Jesus and to reach into the community. And now I get to reach into the community that helped shape me.”

When asked what the vision of Wesley Chapel UMC is as they serve daily and move forward into a new season as a church,

Alstott responded with a question. “How big is your us? When you pray, give us this day our daily bread who are you praying for – only yourself, your family, or the whole world? God has called us (at Wesley Chapel UMC) to make our us bigger. So if you are looking for a place to worship, where you can come to love and feel loved, a place where you can serve and help change the world, then Wesley Chapel UMC is the place for you.”

So as you can see, buildings may have life cycles, the buildings themselves may come and go but the body of believers, the true church stands ready to welcome in even more growth as they continually follow where God leads them.

The new sanctuary is set to open at what better time than Easter weekend 2013 and all are welcome to come and experience their calling along with the folks at Wesley Chapel UMC.

