Rev. Jay McKell shared a message with the Social Witness & Advocacy Task Force and gave his permission to share with all of you who have been praying for him during his fierce struggle with COVID-19. All of our hearts are filled with gratitude that Jay came home from the rehab center on Tuesday, May 12, after a 39-day battle with COVID-19.

Jay wrote: I am home and happy to be so! Good company, good food, good sleeping and a walk in the backyard are all good medicine. So too are the many ways you have contributed to my recovery. Your frequent contacts reminded me of the world outside my tiny room and the many friends who were and are continuing to encourage my recovery. All is going well.

Many have asked about my coronavirus struggle. Here are some of the thoughts that came to me while in isolation.

**Lessons I Learned While Dangling Between Life and Death**

Charles Dickens began his epic novel "Tale of Two Cities" with the words, “It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.” From a distance, these two thoughts seem to contradict one another. But now I know they do not. My experience with COVID-19 has taught me that there are times when the best and the worst dance together like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire.

It was terrifying when three different doctors looked in my eyes and said, “You almost died!” Of course there is truth in saying those startling words for the time will come when death will greet each of us with open arms whether we are ready or not.

While I lay at death’s door, I encountered that terror-filled truth but also came upon a valuable life-enriching truth as well. On occasion, terror and truth live together. Having survived COVID-19, I have now been given the opportunity to assess my remaining years. Doing so is a good thing to do on a daily basis, but perhaps particularly as our time on earth comes to a conclusion. I think Victor Hugo was on to both this terror and truth when he wrote, “It is nothing to die. It is frightful not to live.”

Frightful as it was, my 39-day COVID-19 battle taught me many lessons: the first being live your life to the fullest every day, pay attention to the all too often overlooked crabapple tree blooming in the backyard, the child swinging in the neighborhood park, the helpful and the unhelpful store clerk, the beggar by the roadside.

Our social distancing actually offers us the opportunity for this spiritual connecting in countless creative ways. I have had an abundance of quiet, lonely days that have been difficult for this extrovert. But in isolation, I have heard God more clearly as innumerable thoughts and hopes, fears and wonders have floated up out of my illness-induced fog giving me valuable insights to ponder and pursue in the coming days. If that is to happen, however, I suggest we follow the First Rule of Saint Benedict which is “listen.” To which I would add a second rule, that being “look.”

For more than two weeks I was totally dependent on others to keep me alive. I couldn’t eat or get out of bed or breathe without assistance. The medical community, countless young nurses, perhaps illegal Hispanic housekeepers, therapists with young children at home and doctors sorting through a maze of unknown and unproven theories risked their lives to keep me, a complete stranger, alive. God has worn many faces throughout my illness, theirs among them.
As I went in and out of awareness, these caregivers reminded me that there is something truthful about loving your neighbor and laying down your life that is crucial if we are to make it through life’s challenges. Something about giving that, for the sake of survival, must take priority over all else.

Of course it was Jesus who originated such an idea, not me. Actually, he went beyond having the idea to acting on the idea. In doing so, he became the most influential human to have ever lived.

During those weeks of hospitalization, I depended on an oxygen tank to breath for me. Increasingly while in that dark, frightening, quiet place, I found the familiar words “breathe in God’s mercies ... breathe out God’s mercies to the world,” rising Easter-like out of my tomb’s darkness; calming, reassuring, and encouraging me to be trustful of what was ahead. Those words plus Elizabeth’s constant care, Matt and Lisa’s daily FaceTime connections featuring Lila [Jay’s granddaughter], the light of my life, and the many prayers, cards, texts, emails and other expressions of encouragement and support that I received from you kept me alive.

Undoubtedly God has worn many faces these last months, yours among them. Had I known what was coming, I would have bought stock in Hallmark cards. Doing so would have made me a rich man. Yet rich is exactly what I am. Like my oxygen tank, it was you who enabled me to breathe in God’s mercies, for daily I was reminded of people’s love which, if you haven’t noticed, is the primary way we encounter God’s love.

I got the best of medical care...almost a week of monitoring by our primary care physician, René Bollier, followed by two plus weeks in a highly rated hospital, with well trained and knowledgeable housekeepers, doctors, nurses and aides watching over me, followed by three weeks in a rehab- facility where I was regularly given a workout that clearly contributed to my recovery.

I was blessed because of Medicare and health insurance that was paid for by the congregations I served. But I was also among the elite. My skin is white (unlike the majority of COVID-19 patients), my mind is educated, my income and access to good health care exceeds that of the majority of Americans. How do the poor cover COVID-19 expenses? Most get little or no therapy. Many have medical bills that will likely bankrupt them. Yet we live in the richest country in the world, a country whose Pledge of Allegiance speaks of “liberty and justice for all.”

We, who are people of faith, know that we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We know it is our responsibility to serve as Christ did, paying particular attention to those in need. My hope and prayer is that just as my illness opened my heart and mind, teaching me invaluable lessons, so may this pandemic motivate us to be the best we can be. The opportunity is ours, as is the choice.

Blessings abound,
Jay

While Jay fought for his life with COVID-19, his wife, Elizabeth, tested negative for the novel coronavirus. She later had an antibody test and tested positive. Elizabeth shared, “After Jay was admitted to the hospital and positively diagnosed with COVID-19, I was reminded of one of my refrigerator magnets that says, ‘Prayers are always answered. Sometimes the answer is no.’ I was fearful that the answer to my prayers might be no. Our friend Glenda reminded me that quote was part of one from President Jimmy Carter: ‘God always answers prayers. Sometimes it’s ‘Yes.’ Sometimes the answer is ‘No.’ Sometimes it’s ‘you gotta be kidding.’ I am so very aware that many, many families have also prayed for their loved ones with COVID-19…and the answer was no. My heart is breaking for those people.”

We are currently aware of one Village Church member who has died from the coronavirus, Barbara Irish, who passed away on April 20. Barbara Irish’s daughter, Megan Irish, says her family will celebrate her life at a later date by the sea in North Wales, England, Barbara’s birthplace.
You may have noticed a few more cars in the Village on Mission and Village on Antioch parking lots on weekdays. On May 18, some Village staff returned to work in the church buildings, although many continue to work from home. As of the date The Good News was sent to print (May 26, 2020), church doors remain locked and currently staff only are permitted to enter the building, following new on-site health and safety procedures and protocols.

On May 16, Rev. Melanie Hardison officiated the first memorial service at Village on Mission since the suspension of on-site worship on March 15, 2020. Following Kansas social distancing guidelines on May 16, 10 people attended, keeping six feet apart from fellow attendees and wearing masks as we requested. It was a small and meaningful service. The family expressed gratitude to the church. Rev. Tom Are officiated a wedding on Memorial Day in the Chapel.

The Village Church Child & Family Development Center reopened on May 26 and is following state licensing guidelines and protocols, including taking temperatures of children and teachers allowed to enter the building.

Discussions continue about emerging plans for reopening the Village Church on Mission and Village Church on Antioch buildings. The next reopening phase will be acted upon by the Village Church Session at its June 1 meeting, which will be held via Zoom.

### PASTORAL CARE & COUNSELING

#### Stephen Ministry…Helping with Grief During Difficult Times

Village Church Stephen Ministers provide care for those who are experiencing grief.

“During this coronavirus crisis, we are all experiencing grief...virtually everything we are used to has been lost,” comments Jane Goss, moderator of the Stephen Ministry Leadership Team. “Social distancing has required us to redirect our outreach to care receivers, but has not prevented ongoing ministry by our Stephen Ministers.”

Stephen Ministers have continued to maintain contact throughout this crisis. Instead of the typical face-to-face visits, some use a combination of phone calls and emails, FaceTime, Skype or Zoom. Those who are not reachable by phone or electronics receive cards and letters.

Know of a friend or family member who would benefit from having a Stephen Minister during this difficult time? Please encourage them to contact Rev. Becky Chamberlain at 913-449-0713 or becky.chamberlain@villagepres.org.

#### Growing Through Grief - Summer 2020

Given the ever-evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pastoral Care & Counseling intends to hold a Growing Through Grief class this summer. We do not yet have details on how it will look or where it will be (online or socially-distanced-in-person). If you are interested and would like details as they emerge, contact linda.alley@villagepres.org. We will make sure you will be the first to know about a Growing Through Grief summer series.
Food Pantry Distributes Over 22,941 Pounds of Food Over the Past Two Months

Since the stay-at-home order began in mid-March, the Village Church Food Pantry has been moving food through the pantry to some of our clients and pantry partners. The pantry has completed the following distributions between March 17 and May 12:

- 432 bags and 7,253 pounds of nonperishable food to three low-income senior high-rise apartments (Parkview Manor, Olathe Towers and Sunflower Apartments) that we regularly serve
- 3,926 pounds of nonperishable food to our pantry partner, Shawnee Community Services
- 2,143 pounds of canned food to another partner, the Renewed Hope Pantry in Overland Park
- 2,053 pounds of food to Lenexa Baptist Church for their home delivery program
- 5,752 pounds to Covenant Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Missouri
- 1,814 pounds for a distribution program at Village on Antioch in coordination with the Olathe School district

During March, April and May, pantry staff have managed all the operations, but we miss our volunteers and will be in touch with individuals and teams about returning to the pantry as soon as it is deemed safe to do so.

Furthermore, as the pantry continues to monitor food accessibility, staffing levels and community infection rates, we are developing plans to increase onsite client access in a way that ensures the health of pantry staff, clients and volunteers and maintains safe social distancing. After consulting with several Village Church members who are clinicians, we anticipate a slow reopening of onsite pantry distributions with curbside pick-up only. This approach will require less manpower than our normal operations and thereby allow the pantry to maintain social distancing. Furthermore, with no client-shopping occurring inside the building, the Village Church Clothes Closet will remain closed for the foreseeable future, and we will not be accepting donations of clothing and household items.

Thank you for your patience as we safely and responsibly move towards distributing food to clients at the Village Church Food Pantry.

Village Church Emergency Assistance Remains Open During the Pandemic

As stay-at-home restrictions start to lift and utility shutoffs and evictions are allowed to resume, emergency assistance services at Village Church and across the community are expecting a significant surge in requests. They are starting to come from clients who have never needed help before. Requests come directly from individuals and from other agencies such as Catholic Charities, El Centro, Metropolitan Lutheran Ministry, the mental health organizations and others working to pool enough money to prevent the loss of housing, electricity or gas. For example Village, in collaboration with the Johnson County Multiservice Center, helped with May rent for a family of four where both parents had lost their jobs and the mother had contracted coronavirus.

At Village Church, all rent and utility support is provided over the phone. Applicants must be able to provide a copy of their utility shut-off notice or eviction notice either by fax or email. In addition to the Village Church grant, applicants must also be able to identify how the balance of the bill will be paid in order to prevent shut off or eviction. The Emergency Assistance Office can also provide guidance on additional resources in the community for financial assistance. For more information, call the Village Church Emergency Assistance office at 913-671-2340 and leave a message. Calls are returned within 24 to 48 hours.
**Summer Sermon Series**

**Summer Reading Recommendations**

A good story can encourage and inspire as well as instruct. The stories that we tell and the stories we remember can give shape to our lives. The Bible is filled with wonderful stories that time and again open our souls to a deeper understanding of God. This summer we will listen to some great stories. Some of them funny. Some of them challenging. But through each of them, we will listen again for that word that stands forever.

Here are a few we have planned:

- **June 7** Samson and Delilah: Haircut at the Wrong Salon
- **June 14** David and Goliath: Just in Case
- **June 21** The Golden Calf: Updated Idolatry

**Adult Educational Ministries**

**Summer Adult Faith Formation Class Starting June 7**

You are invited to join our Sunday morning class as we explore the Bible passage that was preached in worship. The class meets from 10:45-11:45 a.m. every Sunday via Zoom video conferencing. Whether you are a novice Bible reader or a Bible scholar, come share as we reflect together on how the scripture is speaking to us today. Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka is the teacher for all of June. To register, contact Laura.Hobbs@villagepres.org.

**Mission**

**Village Church Community Garden**

If you are itching to get out of your house, you might consider helping tend the Village Church Community Garden at 99th and Mission Road during the growing season. This activity can be therapeutic and a good way to serve the community safely during this time of social distancing.

Food harvested in the garden goes to clients at the Village Church Food Pantry. By the time our community garden plants are ready to harvest for the Food Pantry, we hope to be distributing food again curbside for our regular clients.

Would you like to help with the garden? Call the Mission Office at 913-671-2369 for more information and to sign up.
Thank You for the Music
From Will Breyspraak, director of music

Village Music Ministry has had a very special year, and we give thanks for the seven of nine months of rehearsals, services and concerts we were able to have together before we disbanded due to the coronavirus pandemic.

This fallow time allows us to think of the dear friends of all ages who have helped to make this a memorable year sharing the gift of music. We have again been blessed with talented interns who provide beautiful singing, including tenor intern Spencer Ruwe, departing to begin graduate work at Texas Tech University. The many singers and instrumentalists in our choirs and instrumental ensembles have joyfully given hours of their time practicing and rehearsing together, and singing and playing for our community at the church, and around the city.

Finally, we thank all of those who made the music possible: the Worship and Music Committee, Choir Leadership Team, music librarians, volunteers, staff, pastors and every member of the congregation!

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Drive-Thru Ice Cream Social

You are invited to attend our 45th Annual Ice Cream Social from 5-7 p.m. Friday, June 26, in the south parking lot of Village Presbyterian Church on Mission Road. This year we are offering a free Drive-Thru Ice Cream Social.

Load your family in your car and invite your friends to head to Village Church in Prairie Village (6641 Mission Road). Come to the south lot entrance (look for balloon arch) and follow volunteers directing traffic flow, receive your goodies and proceed to the exit.

Following safe social distancing practices, our pastors, staff and committee members will distribute items to you through your car window. Goodies include ice cream bars, homemade cookies and bubbles for the children.

In these days when safety is a priority, VILLAGE IS HERE FOR YOU! We hope to see you at our Drive-Thru Ice Cream Social.
CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRY

VOM and VOA are PUMPED for virtual VBS! Please join us July 20-24 for some adventures via video. Keep checking our social media pages and the church websites for more information.

Village on Mission Lighthouse kiddos…we are launching our summer Sunday Funday on June 14. We’ll take June 7 off as we transition from school year curriculum to SUMMER FUN. Videos coming soon.

Don’t forget to join us on Instagram at @villagepreskids and Facebook @VillageChurchKids. We continue to post Jammies & Jesus videos every weekday morning and evening.

YOUTH MINISTRY

Class of 2020 to Lead Worship on June 14 for the Gathering – Join us at 5 p.m. Sunday, June 14, when the Class of 2020 will lead The Gathering service online. In addition to leading the various elements of worship, they will also reflect on the ways God has been calling them in their faith journeys through Village during their high school years. It will be a meaningful time to reflect on our own lives as well while we celebrate our graduated seniors.

YouTube – Subscribe to our YouTube channel @villagecplyouth. We’re posting new videos throughout the week: survival tutorials and other fun stuff, messages from Jenna and Zach, shout outs to students we’re missing this week, and interviews with volunteers and staff. Take a look and stay connected.

Summer Interns – Our summer interns will be joining us starting on June 8. We are excited for them to lead us in summer programming and share their talents and gifts with us. Join us in welcoming all four of them in June.

Youth Week – Although circumstances are very different right now, we still plan to have Youth Week starting on June 14. Keep an eye on our webpage and on social media for our events and join us in person or online throughout the week.

VILLAGE STAFF UPDATE

We are thrilled to welcome Michelle O’Neal to the Village Church Marketing and Communications Team as social media coordinator/videographer. Michelle has been a member of the church for almost 15 years. She is active in PW and has served on several committees and as director of vacation bible school. She is also a Stephen Minister. Michelle most recently worked as assistant director for the National League of Junior Cotillions; Greater Kansas City Chapter, creating marketing and social media content. She is a freelance writer and copyeditor and received bachelor’s degrees in English and psychology from the University of Kansas.

“‘You can share knowledge in two ways: you can push information out or you can pull people in with a story,’” said Michelle. “‘I am so excited to help share the story of our life at Village—our rich history, the big and little moments, the saints who walk among us, our reach locally and internationally, and how newcomers might see themselves here.”
VILLAGE COMMITMENT

Village Being Village

Well, we hoped to kick off our 2020 Commitment theme in person with a token of our appreciation for your support. An in-person exchange doesn't appear to be in the cards for a while, so the Good News felt right.

Our 2020 theme is Village Being Village. This amazing Village community is always pitching in, helping out, supporting others, and just being fabulous, in general. The Village Commitment Committee thanks you for all you do during the year to support our church and our mission. In this season of uncertainty, we appreciate your continued financial support as well as your resilience to move to online worship and connection.

Thank you for being YOU. You make Village a better place.

IN MEMORY

Wilma Van Leeuwen
Whitmarsh "Jack" J. Letts
Shirley Wood