

UNION SPRINGS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Historical Highlights, 1997-2020

William I. Sauser, Jr., PhD

Commissioned Lay Pastor

Preface: Union Springs Presbyterian Church History¹

This brief historical summary was written by Donald Parker in 1998 for inclusion by the Bullock County Historical Society in their history of the county. It is a fitting preface or starting point for the work that follows.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church was organized in 1853 with 19 Charter Members, most of whom were former members of the Bethel Presbyterian Church which is located ten miles south of Union Springs. Family names present among the Charter Members include Foster, Bethune, McDonald, McLeod, McCaskill, McKimmins, Pearce and Smith.

For over two years, the small congregation, accepting the gracious invitation from the First Baptist Church, met twice each month in their building for worship. In 1855, the Presbyterians erected a house of worship that served the needs of the congregation until it was destroyed in a windstorm in 1857. A larger building, built in 1858, was used by the growing congregation until it was replaced in 1883 by the present structure modeled after the First Congregational Church of Germantown, Pennsylvania.² This English Gothic style building was completed at a cost, including seats, of \$10,500. It is said that the Building Committee was very apologetic to the membership for exceeding the preconstruction estimate of \$6000!

In 1983, one hundred years after it was laid, the cornerstone was opened and found to contain a Bible, a Confession of Faith, various religious publications, a history of the Church, copies of two local newspapers, photographs of members and ministers, an engraved silver dollar, and a bottle of cotton seed oil. Copies of the materials were made and are displayed in the Church; the original items were replaced in the cornerstone which was sealed and returned to its place in the foundation wall.

¹ Extensive earlier histories of the church are provided alongside the present document. A short history of the church was mentioned in the Minutes of the Diaconate of 1918, but it cannot now be found; the Diaconate's minutes of 1917 indicate that membership at that time peaked at 194. Elder and Church Historian Cecil McNair compiled a Centennial Celebration History for July 26, 1953.

² Elder and Sexton Barbara McLaurine's review of the Minutes of the Diaconate and other records revealed these facts about the Sanctuary Building: The Sanctuary Building in Union Springs was designed by renowned architect Lawrence B. Valk. In 1903 the good women of the Church, led by Virginia Foster, paid for the addition of a Sunday School Annex and Pastor's Study. In 1916 a bathroom was added to the Sanctuary Building by the Ladies Aid Society. New chandeliers were furnished in 1976 by the Women of the Church.

Throughout its history, music has played an important part in worship in this Church. A pipe organ, installed in 1902 and, for a time, powered by a water-driven motor, still serves the Church that has been blessed with the services of many musically talented members.³

Over the years, many dedicated and beloved ministers have served this Church. For many years during this century, this Church and Bethel Presbyterian Church have shared the services of the same minister. One of the early pastors, Rev. Frank McMurray, was minister from 1857 until 1871; he left a strong mark upon the Church doing much to develop Presbyterianism in Union Springs. Rev. McMurray was granted leave from 1861 until 1864. He organized Company B, 23rd Alabama Regiment, Confederate States Army, and served as its Captain.

Since 1963 our Church has held a Community Christmas Eve Service which is always well attended by members of the other churches in the area and family members and friends home for the Holidays. This service has become a cherished Church and community tradition.

Poised on the threshold of a new millennium, the Union Springs Presbyterian Church looks forward to continuing to serve its people as God may lead and direct.

Introduction

Dr. William I. “Bill” Sauser, Jr., was ordained as a Deacon of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (now the Presbyterian Church, USA) in 1976 at the Clairmont Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia, while studying for his doctorate in psychology at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He and his wife, Lane, moved to Auburn, Alabama, in 1977 to take positions at Auburn University. They joined the First Presbyterian Church in Auburn, and Bill was ordained as an Elder there in 1981. When they moved to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1984, Bill and Lane became founding members of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, where they both served actively on the Session. Bill eventually returned to Auburn University as a full-time faculty member and administrator, and the Sausers rejoined the Auburn church, where they continue to be members today.

Sensing a call to preach the gospel, Bill finished a three-year period of formal education and supervised preaching in 1997 leading to a certificate of completion in Commissioned Lay Pastor Training by the Lay Institute of Faith and Life, Columbia Theological Seminary, in Decatur, Georgia. He was subsequently commissioned in April, 1997, by the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley to serve churches within its bounds. He filled the pulpit at the Union Springs Presbyterian Church twice in November of 1997, and was—at the invitation of the church—commissioned as its Interim Lay Pastor in December, 1997, while the church searched for a full-time pastor to replace the Reverend John Langham. After several years of a diligent but unsuccessful search for a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament, Dr. Sauser was called to

³ Ms. McLaurine’s review found that the original reed instrument was replaced with a pipe organ in 1988 by the Ladies Aid and Earnest Workers Society at a cost of \$910.08. They also gave the pulpit furniture that is still in use as of today. The present pipe organ was installed in 1902 and was first operated by a water motor. An electric motor was later installed. In 1949 the organ was completely overhauled and remodeled.

serve as Commissioned Lay Pastor in Union Springs on a part-time “tent making” basis. This call has been renewed annually by the Presbytery at the mutual request of the Session and Dr. Sauser. Bill is currently in his 23rd year as Commissioned Lay Pastor of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church, making him the longest-serving pastor in the church’s history.

The brief yearly sketches that follow are extracted from Dr. Sauser’s annual reports to Presbytery, supplemented with occasional notes from the Session minutes. They are intended to trace the vitality of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church as it continues actively to minister to the people of Bullock County and the surrounding area. We seek, in partnership with Christians of all faith traditions, to be the Body of Christ in the local community. We are the faithful remnant, seeking to spread and live the gospel until Christ comes again in final victory over sin, evil, and death. May God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

1997

Dr. William Sauser was commissioned by the Presbytery in December, 1997, to serve as Interim Lay Pastor of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church, Union Springs, AL, with authority to preach, teach, minister to the members, serve communion, perform baptisms, conduct funerals and weddings, and moderate Session meetings. He led the church in a series of Lenten and Christmas worship services that year. A highlight was the church’s annual Christmas Eve Candle Light Service for the community. Sadly, beloved member Nan Rainer died in early December. Members of her family conducted her funeral in the sanctuary, with Dr. Sauser and the congregation in attendance. Members of the church participated in the Salvation Army bell-ringing project and the Christmas prison project at the Bullock County Correctional Facility.

1998

Worship highlights for 1998 included special Maundy Thursday, Easter Sunrise, High School Baccalaureate (for Bullock Memorial School), All Saints Day, and Christmas Eve services plus three services conducted by Dr. Sauser at the Southern Springs Health Care facility. A flutist from Troy University performed at the May 24 worship service. Dr. Sauser preached and led worship four times at the Auburn Presbyterian Campus Ministry (APCM) chapel. He served communion four times in Union Springs and four times at the APCM chapel. A large contingent from the Union Springs church participated in the cluster worship service held on World Communion Day in Auburn.

Margaret Varner and Jean Welk (replacing Jimmy McMillan and Donnie Parker) were installed as Elders to join Graham Hixon, Bob Retzlaff, Pam Salter, and Shirley Varner in active service on the Session. Jean Welk was elected Clerk of the Session. A highlight of the year was the infant baptism in Union Springs of William Chandler “Will” Hubbard, the son of Wendy and Larry Hubbard and grandson of Pam and Bill Salter. The church held a week-long Vacation Bible School for the community and a summer event for the youth of the church. The church enjoyed covered-dish luncheons on March 22 and May 31.

Rhonda Langham was approved for transfer of membership to Graceminster Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana, where the Reverend Langham served as pastor. At their request, six members were transferred to the inactive roll: Lee Evans, Colin McLaurine, William McLaurine, Elizabeth Oberkirch, Joe Pickett, and Julie Wesley. Repairs were made to the church bell, chimney, and HVAC system in the sanctuary and the roof above the nursery in the CE building. Necessary painting in the church building and the manse was completed. New carpeting was installed in the sanctuary.

1999

In his report to Presbytery for 1999 Dr. Sauser made the following comments:

“The membership of the church is holding steady at roughly 50 members, but growth opportunities are limited due to continuing population decreases in Union Springs, located in one of the nation’s most economically distressed counties, Bullock. Most of the citizens of Union Springs and surrounding areas have long-time family affiliations with the many local churches in the community.

“Morale in the church is strong, lay leadership is excellent, church attendance hovers around 20-25 on a weekly basis, the church is heavily involved in community service projects and is generous in its benevolence, adult and children’s Sunday School classes are held every week, the Women of the Church meet monthly, and the Presbyterian Church often joins the local Baptist and Methodist churches in joint programs such as Vacation Bible School and Prison Ministry.

“The physical plant of the church is in good repair. The sanctuary, though over 100 years old, is holding up well. This year repairs were made to the sanctuary and new carpeting and pulpit furniture upholstery was added. The adjoining manse (vacant now for over two years) has been renovated, repainted, and given a new roof. The Christian Education (CE) building has also been ‘spruced up,’ and the grounds are in excellent shape.

“The church is also in good condition financially. There is no debt, there are savings in the form of a Certificate of Deposit (CD), the church has an endowment the interest of which it uses for benevolent purposes, and the church finished the financial year ‘in the black,’ having received in tithes and offerings approximately \$5000 more than was spent during the year.

“The church is now in its third year of an active search for a full-time pastor. Few prospects have been identified, and the Session has determined that the church is not now in a position financially to support a full-time Minister of the Word and Sacrament. The church has expressed willingness to enter into a yoke agreement, a tent-making agreement, or any other such arrangement which would allow it to continue active worship and service.

“In my role as Interim Pastor I have sought to fulfill the duties described in the *Book of Order* and Alan Gripe’s *The Interim Pastor’s Manual, Revised Edition*. I have kept myself at arm’s length from the pastor nominating process and have encouraged the Pastor Nominating

Committee (PNC) and Session to work closely with the Presbytery through its Committee on Ministry (COM) in this process (which they have sought diligently to do). My consistent statement to them has been, 'I am willing to serve the Union Springs Church as long as I am needed.'"

Worship highlights for 1999 included special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services as well as quarterly Communion services. The church held a special worship service and covered dish luncheon on May 30 at the Moorer's lake house. Elder Anderson Hembree was trained, ordained, and installed; Elder Phil Richardson was installed into a new term of active service and elected Clerk of the Session. (They replaced Pam Salter and Bob Retzlaff as Elders in active service on the Session.)

Reverend Ross Kirven, with Dr. Sauser assisting, performed the marriage service of Pat Varner and Alica Tompkins in the sanctuary of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church on November 27, 1999. James Dwight "Jad" Hixon was presented a Bible by the Session in recognition of his graduation from high school. Karen Crawford served as director of the Vacation Bible School hosted by our church. The pulpit furniture in the sanctuary was reupholstered and repairs to the manse, the front doors of the sanctuary, and the roof of the CE building were completed. To our sorrow, custodian Odessa Ray died during the year.

2000

In February of 2000 the search for a full-time pastor was ended and Dr. Sauser was appointed by the Presbytery as Commissioned Lay Pastor on a part-time basis for the Union Springs Presbyterian Church. His annual report to Presbytery that year contained the following comments:

"The membership of the church is holding steady at roughly 45 members, but the congregation continues to age and grow increasingly infirm. Growth opportunities are limited due to continuing population declines in Union Springs, located in one of the nation's most economically distressed counties, Bullock. Most of the citizens of Union Springs and surrounding areas have long-time family affiliations with the many local churches in the community, and they are not seeking a new church home. I am now the 'senior pastor' among the 'mainline denominational churches' in Bullock County, all of which are facing problems similar to those of Union Springs Presbyterian Church.

"Morale in the church is good despite our problems, lay leadership is excellent, church attendance hovers around 20-25 on a weekly basis, the church is heavily involved in community service projects and is generous in its benevolence, adult and children's Sunday School classes are held almost every week, the Women of the Church meet monthly, and the Presbyterian Church often joins the local Baptist and Methodist churches in joint programs such as Vacation Bible School and Prison Ministry.

"The physical plant of the church is in good repair. The sanctuary, though over 100 years old, is holding up well. The adjoining manse (vacant now for over three years) is suitable for

occupancy; the Session hopes eventually to find a renter. The CE building is in fair shape and is used weekly by Alcoholics Anonymous. The grounds are in excellent shape.

“The church is in good condition financially. There is no debt, there are savings in the form of a CD, the church has an endowment the interest of which it uses for benevolent purposes, and the church finished the financial year ‘in the black,’ having received in tithes, offerings, and memorial gifts approximately \$12,000 more than was spent during the year.”

Worship highlights during 2000 included special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services and quarterly Communion services. Elders Donnie Parker and Bob Retzlaff were installed to new terms of active service on the Session (replacing Graham Hixon and Shirley Varner), and Mr. Parker was elected Clerk.

After a period of preparation, two baptized members of the church—Jad and Graham Hixon—were welcomed into membership by the Session in December and professed their faith before the congregation on January 7, 2001, during a worship service led by visiting Commissioned Lay Pastor Rock Chambless. Other visiting pastors during 2000 included the Reverend Terry Newland and the Reverend Shauna Silmon. A Fifth Sunday worship service and dinner was held at the Moorer’s lake house on July 30. More repairs to the sanctuary were completed.

2001

Worship highlights this year included special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services, as well as five Communion services. Dr. Sauser also preached and led worship at the Sanibel (Florida) Community Church for three services held on August 26; and preached, led worship, and served communion (with the Executive Presbyter’s permission) for the Auburn Presbyterian Student Fellowship on October 18. Elders Martha “Tat” Hixon and Pam Salter were installed to active service on the Session, replacing Margaret Varner and Jean Welk. Dr. Sauser conducted funeral services for beloved Elder Roger D. Welk on May 7. A special prayer service was held on September 11 for the victims of the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania.

Miss Emily King (a member of the Auburn church), assisted by her friend Jennifer Staff, organized a youth program for our church, and it was well attended by our young people during the year. The youth of the church led worship on June 24. Under Miss King’s direction, they also repainted and redecorated a room on the second floor of the CE building for their use as a meeting room. Vacation Bible School was conducted in July in collaboration with First United Methodist Church. The Bullock County Tourism Council held its annual Veterans’ Day program in our church on November 11.

Repair work was completed on the sanctuary roof, and the stained-glass windows in the church were cleaned and repaired. Shirley Varner and Laura Hembree agreed to organize this year’s Christmas Eve service at Phil Richardson’s request, since he was ready to pass along this responsibility. (Mr. Richardson had organized this service ever since its inception in 1963.)

The Session approved a special gift of \$2500 to the Conecuh Springs Christian School Scholarship Fund as a benevolence from our church. In April Bill Salter agreed to serve as assistant treasurer during Bob Retzlaff's medical treatment. In June the Session enjoyed a visit from the Reverend Frank Covington of the Auburn church, who served this year as our liaison with the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry. In December the church learned of the death of the Reverend Robert Barron, who had served as pastor of our church in the 1950s and 1960s.

2002

The church held special services this year on Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve in addition to regular Sunday morning services. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of our worship services in Union Springs. With the Executive Presbyter's permission, he also served communion on January 17, while leading the worship service of the Auburn Presbyterian Student Fellowship, and on July 7, at the early service of the Auburn First Presbyterian Church, which hosted the Union Springs Presbyterian Church for two joint worship services that day, led by Dr. Sauser at the Auburn church's invitation. Lay Pastor Mr. Jim Foote led several worship services in Union Springs when Dr. Sauser was unable to fill the pulpit. The church met for worship and lunch at the home of Mrs. Dent Moorer on June 9.

Elder Anderson Hembree was installed for a second term of active service on the Session, and Elder Jean Welk was installed to active service to replace Phil Richardson. Elder Bill Salter was installed to fill the remaining year of Bob Retzlaff's term. (Mr. Retzlaff resigned from the Session at the end of 2001 due to his failing health). Dr. Sauser was called upon to conduct three funerals in Union Springs this year, for member Mrs. Doris Warren (February 9), Elder Robert Retzlaff (February 11), and Mrs. Clarice Retzlaff (December 2, mother of Mr. Robert Retzlaff). The loss of long-time members Doris Warren and Bob Retzlaff only two days apart was a tough blow for the church to absorb in February.

In January locks were installed on all exterior doors of the sanctuary building, with keys distributed to all members.⁴ In June the Session began making preliminary plans for a Sesquicentennial Celebration, since the church would be 150 years old in July of 2003. We again collaborated with First United Methodist Church to hold a Vacation Bible School during July. In August, at the request of our insurance carrier, the church contracted for an inspection and upgrade of the electrical systems in the sanctuary and CE building. In August we also received a bequest from the estate of Henry Goodson in the amount of \$25,000, for which we expressed considerable gratitude. These funds were added to the church's endowment.

2003

In addition to regular Sunday worship services, we held special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services again this year. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these

⁴ This action was taken due to vandalism to the interior of the building. Until 2002 the sanctuary had been left unlocked for anyone to visit and pray.

worship services. Elders William Salter and Joseph Varner were installed to new three-year terms of active service, with Mr. Varner replacing Donnie Parker. Martha “Tat” Hixon was elected Clerk of the Session. Dr. Sauser also conducted two training sessions with Barbara McLaurine to prepare her for ordination and installation as Elder in 2004.

Sadly, Dr. Sauser was called upon to conduct another three funerals this year, for Elder James D. McMillan (January 25), Elder Philip M. Richardson (February 26), and Mr. James C. Morris, a friend of our congregation (October 2). Losing two more of our dear elders was a great setback for our church. On a happier note, Miss Mary Frank Moorner, infant daughter of member Frank Moorner, was baptized by Dr. Sauser on March 2.

A highlight for this year in the life of our congregation was the 150th anniversary celebration and reunion held on October 19. More than 150 members, former members, friends, and family members participated in the joyous reception, worship service, and luncheon held on that date.

Another source of great joy this year was our welcoming of five new adult members! This was the first time in roughly 15 years that we had new members join our congregation. Al and Joyce Perrin, newcomers to Union Springs, joined us, and Mack Hixon and Syd and Jean Cook, all three of whom were former members who moved back to Union Springs, rejoined our congregation.

In January the Session decided to hold regular meetings in only even-numbered months, with other meetings being called when necessary. We also decided to stop scheduling “Children’s Sermons” (which had been a regular weekly feature of our worship services), since there were so few small children in our congregation.⁵ In February we received notice that Jennifer Richardson Oestrike (daughter of Sarah and Phil Richardson) had joined the First United Methodist Church of Baton Rouge, LA.

In preparation for the Sesquicentennial Celebration repairs were made to the roof of the sanctuary building. Painting and other repairs were also made to the buildings and grounds. Leather-bound Bibles were presented to Rebecca McLaurine and Laura Wesley in celebration of their graduation from high school. Jim Foote and Debbie Feagin, both lay pastors in our Presbytery, filled the pulpit several times when Dr. Sauser was away. The Session approved funds to support a Synod project to install water filters in several countries where clean water is scarce.

2004

In addition to our regular weekly Sunday worship services, we again held special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services this year. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. He also preached at Ramsay Memorial Presbyterian Church on

⁵ These two decisions were reached after prayerful Session discussion of how to adapt to the changing realities of our circumstances.

February 8. The church enjoyed a worship service and covered-dish luncheon in September at the home of Mrs. J. F. Moorer. Jean Welk organized this year's Christmas Eve service.

Elder Shirley Varner was installed and Elder Barbara McLaurine was ordained and installed to active service on the Session, replacing Martha "Tat" Hixon and Pam Salter. Joe Varner was elected clerk of the Session.

Dr. Sauser was called upon to conduct two funerals this year, for Dr. Charles G. Hixon, III, adult son of Elders Martha and Graham Hixon (October 26), and Miss M. Christine Fay, a lifelong member of our congregation (November 4).

The Session decided to rent the newly-repaired manse to Elder Barbara McLaurine for use as her residence. In anticipation of her move, Ms. McLaurine equipped the manse with a new refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher, and stove at her own expense. She also repainted the manse and steam-cleaned the carpet.⁶ The church replaced the inoperable heater in the manse with an electric air-conditioning and heating unit.

Bibles were presented to Sandy Crawford, Graham Hixon, and Josh Varner in recognition of their graduation from high school. Sue Retzlaff, who had moved to Auburn following the death of her husband Bob, requested a letter of transfer to the First Presbyterian Church of Auburn.

An ongoing issue of bat infestation of the sanctuary, CE building, and manse plagued the church this year. The Session hired a local expert to relocate the creatures (a protected species) away from our buildings. This action met with at least partial success. Bat damage was extensive in the rafters of the sanctuary.

2005

In addition to our regular weekly Sunday morning worship services we held special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services this year. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. Elder Pam Salter was installed and Elder Allen Perrin was trained, ordained and installed to active service on the Session, replacing Anderson Hembree and Jean Welk. On October 16 Kathryn Belle Varner, the infant daughter of Pat and Alica Varner, was baptized. We welcomed back to the church by transfer of letter Mrs. Joyce McMillan, who had moved her letter briefly to the Fitzpatrick Methodist Church (so she could attend with her brother) following the death of her husband. We also welcomed into membership Mr. Frank Hixon and Mrs. Jeanne Hixon, who reside in Duluth, GA. Frank had been a member of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church during his childhood and youth.

During the year the church hosted visitors to the Red Door Theater, who also enjoyed a display of quilts in our sanctuary. The church contributed \$1000 toward the Presbytery's (and General Assembly's) pledge to assist in humanitarian efforts resulting from a disastrous tsunami

⁶ Over the years Ms. McLaurine has continued to make repairs and upgrades to the manse, which she continues to rent for use as her personal residence.

in Asia. Also the Session pledged \$500 for 2005, and another \$500 for 2006, to help host the upcoming General Assembly meeting in Birmingham. In addition to our annual benevolences to charitable organizations within the community, we also provided financial support to churches within the Presbytery that had been damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

We established a Transient Aid Program (in collaboration with the police department) whereby we would provide funds for meals and an overnight stay to any transients through our town who were identified by the police as in need of temporary assistance. Numerous repairs were made to our aging buildings, including installing a new heat pump for the CE building. A worship service and picnic lunch was enjoyed by the congregation on May 22 at the Moorers' lake house in Hardaway, AL. The church presented a Bible to Garret Wesley in recognition of his graduation from high school. The congregation enjoyed brunch at the home of Mack and Sarah Hixon after worship on October 16.

This year ended on a very sad note as we laid to rest our beloved Elder Graham Hixon, Jr., on December 31, 2005. Mr. Hixon had just been elected to a new term of active service on our Session. (Mrs. Hixon graciously agreed to serve in his stead.) Earlier in the year Dr. Sauser also conducted funeral services for two other long-time members, Mrs. Willie Mae Wood (March 17) and Mr. Syd Cook (March 31). The loss of these faithful members further diminished the church in terms of numbers and leadership, but we continued striving to remain faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ in our community.

Mrs. Cook gave the church a beautiful new Steinway piano in memory of her late husband, Syd. This piano was placed in the sanctuary for use during our worship services.

2006

In addition to our regular weekly Sunday morning worship services we enjoyed special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services again this year, as well as a delightful Springtime worship service and picnic lunch at the Moorers' lake house in Hardaway in April. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. The Reverend Charles DeVane served as guest pastor during several of our worship services, and Tyson Hall was a guest soloist at another. Elders Anderson Hembree and Martha "Tat" Hixon were installed into active service on February 19, replacing Bill Salter and Joe Varner. Mrs. Hixon was elected clerk. The Session held planning retreats on January 22 and June 30 to review the work of the church and plan for its future. The Session decided to discontinue several largely-inactive programs and to focus primarily on worship, community benevolence, and maintenance of our physical plant. Dr. Sauser served as a local COLA contact, prayer partner, and e-mail center assistant for the General Assembly meeting in Birmingham in June. We hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at our church on June 5.

Dr. Sauser led a Communicants' Class that resulted in membership by affirmation of faith of Holly and Will Hubbard and Lauren and Hess Hembree. Since these were the last of our young children, the Session reluctantly decided to discontinue Sunday School for children. (The

adult class continued for a few more years, however.) Leigh Moorer Jones rejoined our church by transfer of letter, and Lil Hilliard-Cotton became our newest member through transfer of letter. (Mrs. Hilliard-Cotton was the first African American to join our church in many years.) Quilts were again displayed in our sanctuary to be enjoyed by visitors to town for the Conecuh People Experience. Repairs were made to the front porch of the CE building and to a window in the sanctuary that had sustained water damage. Bill and Lane Sauser donated new red and white paraments to the church in honor of the late Elder Graham Hixon, Jr.

2007

In addition to our regular weekly Sunday morning worship services we enjoyed special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services again this year. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. After a period of training, Elders Mack Hixon and Becky Stuart were examined, ordained, and installed into active service on January 28, replacing Barbara McLaurine and Shirley Varner. Both new elders had grown up as children in this church. Beloved Elder Jean Welk was laid to rest on February 22, having died after a short illness. The Reverend Charles DeVane served as guest preacher several times when Dr. Sauser was away from the pulpit, and the Reverend William McElveen also supplied the pulpit for us on one occasion.

We hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at our church on August 6. Six of her friends gave the church an engraved chalice in memory of Josephine McNair Holley. It was placed on display on the Communion table to the glory of God. Quilts again were displayed in the sanctuary in conjunction with Conecuh Days. Extensive repairs were made to the organ to restore its structural integrity and beautiful musical tone. We continued to make various needed repairs to the aging infrastructure of the church's physical plant (sanctuary, CE building, manse, grounds). A Bible was presented to Sam Hixon in recognition of his graduation from high school. Records of memorial gifts to the church were updated and the church's furniture was inventoried. Dr. Mac Varner contributed a generous financial gift to the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. The church made a gift to The Gideon Society in honor of Hope and Dennis Jinks, who led worship in early September.

2008

In addition to our regular Sunday morning worship services we enjoyed special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services and a beautiful lakeside communion service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County. Dr. Sauser served communion during six of these worship services. Following a period of training, new Elders Wendy Hubbard and Leigh Moorer were ordained and installed on January 28, replacing outgoing Elders Allen Perrin and Pam Salter. Both new elders had grown up as children in the Union Springs Presbyterian Church. We hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at our church on August 4. Allen and Joyce Perrin transferred their church letter to the First United Methodist Church of Union Springs.

The Session arranged to have our financial records maintained by a professional bookkeeper and our endowment to be managed by a professional financial manager (both under the general supervision of the church treasurer). Repairs to the physical plant continued; two air conditioning units and the furnace were replaced and plans were put in place to contract for a major renovation of the sanctuary. Lauren Hembree was presented a Bible in recognition of her graduation from Macon-East Montgomery Academy. We hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 4. Dennis Jinks brought The Gideons Report on August 17. More repair work was done on the organ.

With Committee on Ministry approval, our church contracted with the Reverend Mark Scott (a member of our Presbytery) to lead worship in Union Springs one Sunday each month until he was called into full-time service at another church. This gave Dr. Sauser an opportunity to spend some time with his family in Atlanta. During the two-year period that he was with us Reverend Scott was very well received by the congregation and this relationship was a Godsend to us all.

2009

Under the leadership of Elder Becky Stuart, chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, the Session undertook a major project this year to which considerable prayer and planning had been devoted for the past several years. Using endowment and memorial funds, we completely renovated our historic church building. We re-slatted the roof (using simulated slate plus some of the original slate shingles), repaired the gutters and HVAC system, scraped and painted the interior and exterior of the building (using the original paint scheme), restored and protected the stained-glass windows, and renovated the restroom. We are very appreciative for the work of the outstanding craftsmen who undertook this project under active supervision of the entire Session. The outcome, we believe, is a testament to God's glory and the faithfulness of the saints of the church.

In addition to our weekly worship services we enjoyed special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services in Union Springs and a beautiful Easter Sunrise Communion Service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County. Holy Communion was served by Dr. Sauser during six of these worship services. Elders Barbara McLaurine and William Salter were installed on January 25, replacing outgoing Elders Anderson Hembree and Martha "Tat" Hixon. Mr. Salter was elected Clerk of the Session.

Dr. Sauser co-officiated (with Reverend Ron Lee of the First United Methodist Church of Union Springs) at the funeral of member Jean Hampton Vaughan Cook on April 24.⁷ On July 25, Dr. Sauser officiated at the marriage service for Paige Marie Richardson and (member) Joseph Patrick Varner, which was held in our renovated sanctuary. We hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at our church on August 3. Bibles were presented to high school graduates Hayley Hixon and Holly Hubbard.

⁷ The funeral service was held in the Methodist church because our sanctuary was under renovation.

2010

In addition to our weekly Sunday morning worship services we enjoyed special Good Friday and Christmas Eve services in Union Springs, as well as a beautiful Easter Sunrise Communion Service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County, and a special All Saints Sunday worship service at that same lakeside location. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. Elders Mack Hixon and Becky Stuart (Class of 2012) were installed on January 25, and Wendy Hubbard and Leigh Moorer (Class of 2013) on December 12 and 19 respectively.

We hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at our church on August 3. Two new members joined our congregation by transfer of letter: Mrs. Shannon Capps and Mrs. Bootie Smitherman. On December 20 Dr. Sauser conducted a funeral service in Montgomery and a graveside service in Union Springs for long-time member Mrs. Ada Kate Morgan. Mrs. Morgan and her late husband were great benefactors to the church; their legacy has enabled us to continue doing God's work in their memory.

We also completed the process of updating our Record of Session Minutes; these 14 years' worth of minutes were subsequently presented to the Presbytery for review and approval (which occurred on April 7, 2011). We now have bound volumes of all the Session minutes of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church dating back to its founding in 1853. Most of the bound volumes (1853 through 1990) are now held for us in the archives at Columbia Theological Seminary.

We were saddened by the sudden death of our custodian, Ruby Thomas, on March 19. Elder Barbara McLaurine volunteered to take over these duties temporarily as Ms. Thomas' replacement.⁸ Antique quilts were displayed in our church during the Chunnenugee Fair. New guidelines for weddings to be held in our church were adopted by the Session at its April 25 meeting. The Reverend Bill McElveen filled the pulpit on August 8 and The Gideons made their report to the church on August 15. With approval from the Pickett family, the "Ida Pickett" piano was donated by the church to the Union Springs Library. Benevolences were given by the church to the Presbyterian Home for Children, Prison Ministries, Samaritans Purse, the Gideons, and the Department of Human Resources (to purchase Christmas gifts for indigent children).

2011

In addition to our regular Sunday morning worship services, we enjoyed special Good Friday and Christmas Eve Candle Light Services in our sanctuary, a beautiful Easter Sunrise Communion Service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County, and a special Reformation Sunday worship service at that same lakeside location. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. Elder Mack Hixon was appointed a trustee of the Presbyterian Home for Children; Bill Wills, president of the Home, led worship for us one Sunday. The

⁸ Ms. McLaurine was later appointed permanently to this position and, in 2018, was given the title Sexton by the Session.

pulpit was also graced by the Reverend Bill McElveen several Sundays while Dr. Sauser was away. Fred Holland brought The Gideons Report in August. Dr. Becky Burton led the church in worship on October 23.

We hosted the 100th Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at our church on August 1. Dr. Sauser conducted a funeral service in Union Springs on May 27 for our beloved member Mrs. Alla Maye Parker. He also conducted a graveside memorial service for our dear member Mrs. Jeanne Hixon on October 6 in Perote, AL. On a much happier note, Dr. Sauser officiated at the wedding service for Dr. Mac Varner (a member of the Union Springs church) and Miss Chelley Norris in Montgomery on July 23. The Session also granted permission for Miss Sarah Marie Singleton to hold her wedding ceremony in our sanctuary on October 8.

Lane and Bill Sauser took an educational journey in July to Wales, where they toured various sites sacred to Celtic Christianity, including the birthplace of Saint David (the patron saint of Wales) and the cathedral dedicated to him. While in Wales Dr. Sauser attended his graduation ceremony at the University of Wales-Trinity Saint David in Lampeter, where he was awarded a Master of Arts in Business Ethics.

This year, in addition to local benevolences, the church again supported the Presbytery's benevolences by participating in the "fair share" program. We also continued our ministry to transients. In collaboration with the Union Springs police department, we provide needy transients who are passing through Union Springs with meals, lodging, and assistance with transportation. Since its establishment in April 2005, this program had aided 35 persons as of February 2011. The church also helped to sponsor an Evangelistic Crusade held in Union Springs by several of the local churches. New window treatments were installed in the CE building and minor repairs were made to the physical plant. The Session is determined to protect the integrity of the restored sanctuary.

The Session adopted "business casual" as the dress code for Sunday worship. The Session did not want the lack of "Sunday dress-up" clothing to serve as a bar to anyone who wished to attend our worship services.

2012

In addition to its regular weekly Sunday morning worship services the Union Springs church held special Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve Candle Light services, a beautiful Easter Sunday Service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County, and a special Reformation Sunday worship service at that same lakeside location. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of those worship services. Elders Barbara McLaurine and Bill Salter were reinstated into active service on January 8. Filling the pulpit while Dr. Sauser was away were Dan Stevens, Ben Arellano, and Bill Wills.

At the invitation of the Episcopal priests and the family, Dr. Sauser co-officiated (with permission from the USPC Session) at the wedding of Elspeth Steinhaur and James "Jad" Hixon

(a member of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church) in Memphis on April 21. The church hosted the 112th Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 6.

This was another difficult year in the life of the church with respect to deaths. Early in the year we lost our substitute organist, Jimmy McDaniel (music director of the United Methodist Church in Union Springs), as well as John Santelli, a disabled veteran and faithful member of the local Catholic church, who was a frequent visitor during our worship services. Our church received a double blow in December when long-time members Joyce McMillan and Elder Martha "Tat" Hixon died after loving care at the local nursing home. Dr. Sauser conducted Mrs. McMillan's funeral on December 13 in Fitzpatrick, and Mrs. Hixon's in Union Springs and Perote on December 15.

The roof of the CE building was repaired, a new church sign was installed, bat sealant and escape tubes⁹ were installed in the roof, other minor repairs were made, and a framed banner was hung in the Session meeting area of the sanctuary building.¹⁰ Financial gifts from the church were made to Alabama Prison Ministries, the Bullock County Department of Human Resources (to purchase Christmas gifts for indigent children), the Presbyterian Home for Children, Gideons International, and the Food Pantry.

Dr. Sauser's report to the Presbytery included the following note: "I wish to commend the Session of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church for the extraordinary lay leadership they provide. The church has no staff, so all the work of maintaining the sanctuary, manse, educational building, grounds, organ, and church programs fall on the shoulders of the Session. Individually and collectively the elders of this church provide strong witness to the life of service modeled by our Lord and Savior. They also provide excellent support to me as commissioned lay pastor, and for that I am very thankful. We are truly partners in ministry."

2013

The Union Springs church held regular Sunday morning worship services throughout the year, and also enjoyed a special Maundy Thursday Service with Seder Dinner and a Christmas Eve Candle Light Service in Union Springs. The church also held a beautiful Easter Sunday Service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County and a special Sunday worship service and covered dish luncheon at that same lakeside location on September 22. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. When Dr. Sauser was away, the pulpit was filled very capably by two fine pastors, Ben Arellano and Bill McElveen.

Elders Anderson Hembree and Shirley Varner were installed to new terms of active service on January 27, replacing Mack Hixon and Becky Stuart. Mr. Salter was re-elected Clerk of the Session. Allen and Joyce Perrin rejoined our church by transfer of letter from the First United Methodist Church of Union Springs. A new roof was installed on the CE Building.

⁹ Escape tubes were required to combat humanely our persistent bat problems, since the bats are a protected species.

¹⁰ This banner was originally made for the church's 1994 sesquicentennial celebration.

Special events in the life of the church were (a) hosting the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 5, (b) a surprise "thank you" celebration for Dr. Sauser held by the Session on October 13 (recognizing his 16 years as Commissioned Lay Pastor), and (c) a special worship service recognizing the 160th anniversary of the founding of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church on October 20.

This was yet another difficult year in the life of the church with respect to deaths. Dr. Sauser led funeral services for Malcolm Cade Cook on March 1, Roger Conant Parker on August 3, and Homer Leigh "Dent" Fiveash Moorer on October 25. Mr. Parker and Mrs. Moorer were faithful members of our church, and Dr. Cook was a member of our extended church family. The Women of the Church organized meals for all three families.

In addition to financial gifts to Alabama Prison Ministries, the Bullock County DHR, the Presbyterian Home for Children, Gideons International, and the local Food Pantry, the church made a donation to the Presbyterian (USA) Typhoon Victims Relief Fund.

2014

The church continued to worship on a weekly basis, and also held a special Maundy Thursday Service and a Christmas Eve Candle Light Service in Union Springs. Jane Padgett, Tyson Hall, and Lynn Jinks provided music during the Christmas Eve service. A beautiful Easter Sunday Service was conducted at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County, and a special Sunday worship service and covered dish luncheon was enjoyed at that same lakeside location on October 14. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. Filling the pulpit this year when Dr. Sauser was away were Bill McElveen, Rosson Anderson, and Dan Jacobsen.

The Session decided to reduce its membership size from six to five¹¹, thus Elder Pam Salter was installed into active service on January 19, replacing both Wendy Hubbard and Leigh Moorer. Clerk of the Session Bill Salter reported during the congregation's annual meeting on December 21, 2014, that "we have about 30 members and attendance ranged from a high of 30 to a low of 8, with an average of 13 in attendance each week."

The Session expressed its gratitude to the family of Mrs. Martha "Tat" Hixon, who left in her will a generous bequest to the church. In addition to its regular benevolences, the church made a financial gift to One Great Hour of Sharing. Electrical repairs were made to the manse. A donation was made to the Presbyterian Home for Children as a memorial to Leif Carlson. Donnie Parker began writing the history of the church for the 25 years that had passed since the previous history was compiled. A digital copy of the church minutes from 1853 to 1960 was given to the Alabama State Archives. A second digital copy was placed in the church's safe deposit box.

¹¹ This action was taken in consideration of the reduced size of the congregation due to deaths and infirmity.

At the invitation of the Session of the Trinity Presbyterian Church (USA) in Fairhope, Dr. Sauser conducted the wedding service for Miss Lauren Hembree (a member of this church) and Mr. Barry Boan on May 3. Another special event in the life of the church was hosting the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 4.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church was greatly saddened by the death of Elder Mack Hixon in November. Mr. Hixon had served actively on the Session for six years, was our designated Commissioner to Presbytery for several years, had served as treasurer for the church, and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children. Dr. Sauser conducted his funeral on November 30; there was an "overflow" congregation in the sanctuary for the visitation and funeral. The Women of the Church organized a meal for 60 friends and family members who came to the funeral; we appreciate the United Methodist Church's generosity in allowing us to serve the luncheon in their Fellowship Hall.

2015

The Union Springs church met weekly for Sunday morning worship and also held a special Maundy Thursday Service and a Christmas Eve Candle Light Service in Union Springs (with Tyson Hall singing two solos), as well as a beautiful Easter Sunday Service at the Moorers' Lake House in Macon County, plus a special World Communion Sunday worship service and covered dish luncheon at that same lakeside location on October 4. Dr. Sauser served communion during six of these worship services. Bill McElveen, Rosson Anderson, Dan Jacobsen, and Dennis Jinks led worship services in Union Springs on several occasions when Dr. Sauser's work or family travel plans took him away from Union Springs.

Dr. Sauser conducted an elder training program for newly-elected Elder Darlene Hixon and ordained and installed her on January 19. He also installed Elder Leigh Moorers on that date. The newly-installed Elders replaced Barbara McLaurine and Bill Salter, whose terms of active service on the Session had expired. Ms. Moorers was elected Clerk of the Session. Our church hosted the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 3.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church was deeply saddened by the death of Mrs. Margaret Springer Varner, whose visitation and funeral service were held in the sanctuary on September 21. Mrs. Varner's children and grandchildren grew up in the Union Springs Presbyterian Church, and the church is now nurturing her great-grandchildren as well. Dr. Sauser had the honor of being her pastor for 18 years and conducting her funeral service. We had many happy times together with Mrs. Varner and she is precious in our memory.

Our church continued our ministry to transients this year. In collaboration with the Union Springs police department, we provided needy transients who were passing through Union Springs with meals, lodging, and assistance with transportation. We also provided financial support to several local charities that serve Bullock County and the larger community, including the food bank, prison ministry, Gideons, and the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children.

Furthermore, we hosted on a weekly basis several Twelve Step and community organizations that met in the CE building.

Since our church no longer had children of the appropriate age to participate in Vacation Bible School, we decided no longer to offer that program. However, the Session did vote to provide financial support to the First United Methodist Church's Vacation Bible School this summer. The Session also provided financial support to Water 282, a project devoted to providing wells and clean water to the poor in the African nation of Zambia.

The carport at the manse was repaired, as were the doors to the sanctuary. The Union Springs Tourism Council placed a plaque outside our sanctuary so visiting tourists could learn more about the church and its history.

2016

The Union Springs church held a special Maundy Thursday Service and a Christmas Eve Candle Light Service in addition to its weekly Sunday morning worship services. We also enjoyed a beautiful Easter Sunday Service at the Moorer's Lake House in Macon County. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services. Rebecca Mann filled the pulpit in August when Dr. Sauser was out of town. Elders Anderson Hembree and Shirley Varner were reinstalled into active service on January 3. Our church hosted the 160th Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 1. The church presented a Bible to Will Hubbard in recognition of his graduation from high school.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church was deeply saddened by the death of Mrs. Charlotte "Doodle" Hembree, whose funeral service Dr. Sauser conducted on April 6, and of Elder William Salter, a former Treasurer and Clerk of Session, whose funeral service Dr. Sauser conducted on August 7. These two fine leaders in our church are sorely missed.

The church continued our ministry to transients this year. We also provided financial support to several local charities that serve Bullock County and the larger community, including the food bank, prison ministry, Gideons, and the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children. Furthermore, we hosted several Twelve Step and community organizations on a weekly basis.

Handrails were installed from the sidewalk to the three main entrances to the sanctuary to make the church building more accessible to those with mobility impairments. A handrail was also installed at the stairway leading up to the organ. A new moisture barrier and treatment for powder post beetles and termites was completed by Terminix under the sanctuary. Plans were made to update the church history from 2003 to the present. Dr. Sauser agreed to write a history of the church during the time of his pastorate, which began in late 1997.

2017

The Union Springs Church met weekly for worship in the sanctuary, and also held a special Maundy Thursday Service and a Christmas Eve Candle Light Service in the sanctuary building. We held a beautiful Communion Service at the Moorers' Lake House in Macon County. Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services, including Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday. Dr. Sauser preached a series of sixteen consecutive sermons from Revelation during the year. We all gained a greater appreciation for the message of Revelation as a result. John Emfinger filled the pulpit in September when Dr. Sauser was out of town.

Elder Pam Salter was reinstated on January 22. Our church hosted the 172nd Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 7. This is a bi-racial monthly gathering of city officials, worship leaders, and other community members who pray for the well-being of our community.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church was deeply saddened by the death of Elder Allen Perrin, whose funeral service was conducted by Dr. Sauser on January 21. May he rest in peace.

We were pleased to welcome a new member into our congregation by reaffirmation of faith—Mrs. Arnett Duvic. Her husband Philip also attended worship as often as he could (on those weekends that his job did not require him to commute). We also have two other regular attendees who are members of other churches but enjoy worshipping with us.

Our church continued our ministry to transients this year. We also provided financial support to several local charities that serve Bullock County and the larger community, including the food bank, prison ministry, Gideons, and the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children. A donation was also made for the One Great Hour of Sharing.

Mona Crawford graciously substituted as organist while Jane Padgett recovered from surgery. The rope for the church bell was replaced so that we may ring it again for special events and occasions. Gutters were repaired and routine maintenance on our buildings and grounds was completed.

As a "labor of love," Elder Barbara McLaurine completed her restoration of all the congregational chairs (209, plus one bench) in the sanctuary. Over the years since their installation the chairs had darkened, and some had been damaged and cracked or chipped. Upon the completion of this restoration project the chairs gleamed in their original glory.

Bill and Lane Sauser donated a new pulpit Bible to the church to mark Bill's 20th year as commissioned lay pastor.

2018

In addition to its weekly Sunday morning worship services the Union Springs Presbyterian Church held a special Maundy Thursday Communion Service and our 62nd Christmas Eve Community Candle Light Service in the sanctuary building. We also enjoyed an Easter Morning Worship Service at the Moorers' Lake House in Macon County, and a second

worship service at that same location later in the year (followed by a covered dish luncheon). Dr. Sauser served communion during five of these worship services, including Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday. John Emfinger filled the pulpit while Dr. Sauser was on vacation in August.

Mona Crawford led us in music while Jane Padgett continued to recover from surgery. Even though our church no longer offers special programs for youth and children, the Session did adopt and enact a Child and Youth Protection Policy. Such policies are being adopted by all the churches in the Presbytery to guard against any inappropriate actions regarding our young people.

The Session voted to decrease further its size from five members to four. Elder Wendy Hubbard was installed into active service, while Elders Darlene Hixon and Leigh Moorner rotated off the Session. Wendy Hubbard was elected Clerk of the Session.

Our church hosted the 184th Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 6. We also hosted a local African American evangelist, Mr. Wilbert Jernigan of Gideons International, who delivered the sermon at our worship service on December 2.

The Union Springs Presbyterian Church was deeply saddened by the death of Mr. Bill Cook, son of member Carolyn "Bootie" Smitherman, whose funeral Dr. Sauser conducted on March 11; and of Elder Donnie Parker, whose funeral service Dr. Sauser conducted on June 13. Elder Donnie Parker had served on the church's Diaconate and Session, had written a history of the church for the years 1978-2003, and had served as Clerk of the Session for several terms. His steady hand and gentle spirit are greatly missed.

On a happy note, Dr. Sauser co-officiated (with Father Den Irwin) at the wedding service of Dr. Haley Hixon (daughter of the late Mack Hixon, an Elder of our church) and Mr. Wallace Henson at the Sacred Heart Chapel, a Catholic church in Fairhope, AL. Father Irwin is Dr. Hixon's priest, and he kindly invited Dr. Sauser to take part in the service with him.

The church continued our ministry to transients this year. We also provided financial support to several local charities that serve Bullock County and the larger community, including the food bank, prison ministry, Gideons, and the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children.

Barbara McLaurine was appointed Sexton of the church, and her work to keep our sanctuary and other buildings clean, safe, and functional was commended by the Session. Storm damage to the roof of the sanctuary and CE building was repaired; termite damage under the sanctuary was also repaired.

2019

The Union Springs Church met weekly for Sunday morning worship, and also hosted our 63rd Christmas Eve Community Candle Light Service. Dr. Sauser served communion during four of these worship services, including World Communion Sunday and Easter Sunday. Unfortunately, our Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday services had to be cancelled due to tornado watches.

Dr. Sauser reinstated Elders Anderson Hembree and Leigh Moorner on February 17. We received permission from the Presbytery to use the small church option for selecting elders (so we can maintain gender equity); the Session also voted to further reduce its size to three Elders plus the Commissioned Lay Pastor beginning in 2020. Thus Elder Pam Salter rotated off the Session at the end of 2019 and was not replaced on the Session. We plan to elect one elder per year on a rotating basis beginning in 2021.

Our church hosted the 196th Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on August 5. We also hosted a local evangelist, Mr. Ellis Ingram of Gideons International, who delivered the sermon at our worship service on September 22.

Dr. Sauser conducted the wedding service of Miss Katlyn Meagan Denise Dees and Mr. William Chandler Hubbard (a member of the Union Springs Presbyterian Church whom Dr. Sauser had baptized as an infant) at Lakepoint Resort State Park in Eufaula, AL.

On April 14 the Bullock County Historical Society mounted a plaque in the church in honor of the late Donald C. Parker, a lifelong member and distinguished Elder of our church. The plaque was mounted beneath the stained-glass window honoring Mr. Parker's late mother, Mrs. D. W. (Mabel Moore) Parker, who had served as the church's organist for many years.

Bill and Lane Sauser visited the Holy Land (Israel and Jordan) to see with their own eyes a number of sites mentioned in the Holy Bible. They shared their photographs and reflections of this journey with the congregation on December 29.

Our church continued our ministry to transients this year. We also provided financial support to several local charities that serve Bullock County and the larger community, including the food bank, prison ministry, Gideons, and the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children.

The master bathroom of the manse was redecorated and improved by Ms. McLaurine; the door to the bathroom in the sanctuary building also was improved. With help from the City, two large trees in front of the sanctuary were removed because they were badly diseased and could not be saved.

Dr. and Mrs. Sauser began the process of creating a website for the church that would include a description of the church with photographs, the complete history of the church, and numerous videos of recent sermons. Several of these sermons have already been posted on Dr. Sauser's YouTube channel to further our church's mission of evangelism to the world.

2020

Like Christian churches throughout the world, the USPC was challenged during 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the year we followed closely the Alabama governor's and Union Springs mayor's orders regarding safety precautions to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Ours is a small congregation and we have a large sanctuary, so it was possible to meet for worship and still maintain social distancing guidelines. We wore our masks as we entered and exited the sanctuary, we placed collection plates at the rear of the sanctuary rather than passing

them through the pews, and we altered our Holy Communion procedure such that each congregant picked up from the Communion table his/her own individually prepared elements.

As the pandemic worsened the USPC session voted to discontinue corporate worship following our March 22 worship service, and we did not resume corporate worship services until July 19. We were therefore unable to hold our traditional worship services for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, or Easter Sunday. We also did not hold our traditional Community Christmas Eve candle-light service this year, but our Sexton and her family lit our Advent and Christ Candles on Christmas Eve to maintain our unbroken 64-year tradition of lighting the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve. The mayor suspended his monthly Prayer Breakfasts during the year, so we were unable to host one at our church.

Dr. Sauser served communion during two worship services this year, including World Communion Sunday. During the period when we were unable to hold worship services he spent time updating 23 years' worth of our church's history and publishing the history on our new website, unionspringpresbyterian.church, which was created by Lane and Bill Sauser with the aid of their personal IT consultant. Lane also video-captured many of the sermons this year. They are posted on the church's website as well as Dr. Sauser's YouTube channel, "William Sauser." Dr. Sauser also distributed via email a special Independence Day sermon, "One Nation Under God." The Reverend Westby Anderson, nephew of Anderson and Laura Hembree, led worship for three weeks when Dr. Sauser was absent from the pulpit.

The Session held regular bi-monthly Session meetings during the months we were able to worship actively. Our 2020 Congregational Annual Meeting was rescheduled to be held when we are able to meet again in 2021. With permission from the Presbytery we are using the "small church option" for selecting elders so we can maintain gender equity. In accordance with the plan adopted by the Session in 2019, we reduced the size of the Session to three Elders plus the Commissioned Lay Pastor; we accomplished this plan by not replacing Elder Pam Salter, who rotated off the Session in 2020. Beginning in 2021 we will elect one elder per year on a rotating basis.

We were delighted to welcome into our congregation by reaffirmation of faith Mr. Larry Hubbard, who has been active in the life of the church (with his family) for many years. Our Sexton, Mrs. Barbara McLaurine (an elder not currently in active service on the Session) continued her excellent work maintaining the church buildings and grounds with oversight and assistance by the chair of our Buildings and Grounds Committee, Elder Anderson Hembree. Elders Wendy Hubbard and Leigh Moorner continued their fine work as Clerk of Session and Chair of Budget and Finance respectively. The Session worked cooperatively to ensure that all duties of the Session, Diaconate, and Board of Trustees were fulfilled this year, since they serve as all three bodies by choice and necessity.

Our church provided financial support to several local charities that serve Bullock County and the larger community, including the food bank, prison ministry, Gideons, and the Alabama Presbyterian Home for Children. We also contributed financially to the Presbytery's "Project

Empathy,” an effort to help economically distressed Alabamians living in the Black Belt region to retire millions of dollars in medical debt.

A highlight for this year was the decision by the Session to become a “Matthew 25 church,” an initiative endorsed by the Presbyterian Mission Agency and our own presbytery to become a more relevant presence in the world. Upon reporting this decision to our presbytery we were notified by Melody K. Smith, Manager of Organizational Communications for the Presbyterian Mission Agency, that we were the 700th church to make this commitment. Ms. Smith interviewed Dr. Sauser by telephone and distributed an article about the Union Springs Presbyterian Church through the Presbyterian News Service.

Due to the worsening nature of the pandemic, the Session decided not to meet for corporate worship again until it is safer to do so in 2021, since many members of the church (and its pastor) are in the especially vulnerable category due to age and pre-existing medical conditions.

Present Status

At present we have 26 members on our official roll. However, several of these members are shut-ins due to age and infirmity. Others are the former children and youth of our church, now grown up, graduated from college, and pursuing professional careers throughout the nation. Our weekly attendance hovers around eight or ten. Union Springs is a small town located in an economically distressed part of Alabama. As a result, very few new families move into our community. Furthermore, there are far more small churches than the community can realistically support, and most church affiliations are firmly established. Lack of growth and financial instability are conditions faced by many of the churches in our community.

While small in membership, the Union Springs Presbyterian Church has many assets that we seek to use to the glory of God. We have committed members and leaders; in fact, most of our active members are ordained elders in the church, and even though they may not be in active service on the Session, their work in the church and community sustains us. We have a committed pastor and a terrific organist. We have a website and YouTube channel that makes Dr. Sauser’s sermons available throughout the world.

Our beautifully-restored historic sanctuary building is open to all who seek to worship God. Our endowment and the steady volume of gifts and tithes from the membership allow us to operate “in the black” and to continue serving the community through annual benevolences. Our transient assistance program (conducted in association with the police department) provides funding for meals, lodging, and transportation for needy individuals passing through town. Our manse serves as home for our Sexton and our CE building, though vacant at present, is available for use by community organizations.

Our faith in God sustains us!

*He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered,
“O Lord God, you know.” (Ezekiel 37: 3)*

*For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them. (Matthew 18: 20)*

