

A Brief History of St. John's Church in the Village
224 Waverly Place
New York, NY 10014

On June 6, 1853, St. Jude's and the missionary congregation that had been organized by the Rev. Edwin R.T. Cook, prior to his becoming Rector of St. Jude's in April 1853, were incorporated as the church of Saint John the Evangelist. St. Jude's Church closed because it had been built on leased land at Amity (3rd) Street and Sixth Avenue. The first services of the newly incorporated church were held in the Bleeker Building on Morton Street and in 1855, in the Lecture Room of the Metropolitan Academy on Sixth Avenue.

Following the death in 1854 of the Rt. Rev. Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright, who was the Provisional Bishop of New York from 1852 to 1854, a group of missionary-minded ladies decided to erect a memorial to him. They found a Baptist church for sale in a rapidly growing neighborhood. The church was originally built in 1846 as the Hammond Street Presbyterian Church. In 1849, it was a Congregational church and in 1851, the South Baptist Church.

The building was purchased from the South Baptist Church by the "Ladies Society for Building a Free Church as Memorial of and in Thanksgiving for the Ministry of the Rt. Rev. Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright." The church and property were purchased for \$30,000 and were given to the congregation of the Church of Saint John the Evangelist for use as their place of worship. On Sunday, May 26, 1856, the first services were held at the Bishop Wainwright Memorial Church of Saint John the Evangelist, which was located on Hammond (West 11th Street) and Factory Streets (Waverly Place).

The Church was freed of debt in 1857 and was consecrated by the Rt. Rev. Horatio Potter, Bishop of New York on May 11, 1858.

Over the years, a few parishes have closed and been merged into St. John's. The Chapel of the Comforter, in Horatio Street, was known for its parochial school, which sustained the parish until it went out of business in about 1950. The parish has some of the church plate that belonged to that congregation. Of more contemporary interest is St. Jude's Church, which was located in Sixth Avenue, near Eighth Street. When St. Jude's closed, the building became, first, a stained glass studio, and then later, a movie theatre. It still operates as the Independent Film Center Theatre and a bit of ecclesiastical architecture is still visible in the form of the peaked roof which can be seen inside the auditoria and from the Sixth Avenue perspective of the facade.

Until 1971, Saint John's in the Village occupied a classical revival church on this site. After a fire destroyed this neighborhood landmark on March 6, 1971, the current church building, designed by Edgar Tafel, a colleague of Frank Lloyd Wright, was constructed.

On October 5, 1974, the first Eucharist was celebrated in the new Church of Saint John the Evangelist. The new building was dedicated on October 1, 1978 by the Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., Bishop of New York. This modern building was a gift of many parish members, friends, and residents of the community.

In the 1970s, the parish became known for its inclusive community, and welcomed its first openly gay rector in 1988. The parish leadership is fully integrated at all levels. Women have celebrated the Eucharist here since the canonical changes which allowed women to become priests in 1977.

The parish added a large tracker organ to its church in 1987. The organ was made by the Rieger Company in Austria and is a baroque style instrument of 21 ranks.

In 1974, the parish assisted in founding the St. John's Pastoral Counseling Center, which as of 2009, is a part of a larger therapeutic consortium called the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute. In 1997, the parish established The Open Door, a program of ministry to people with AIDS.

Recent rectors have included Charles H. Graf (1940-1975), John D. Cannon (1975-1985), and Lloyd Prator (1988 – present).