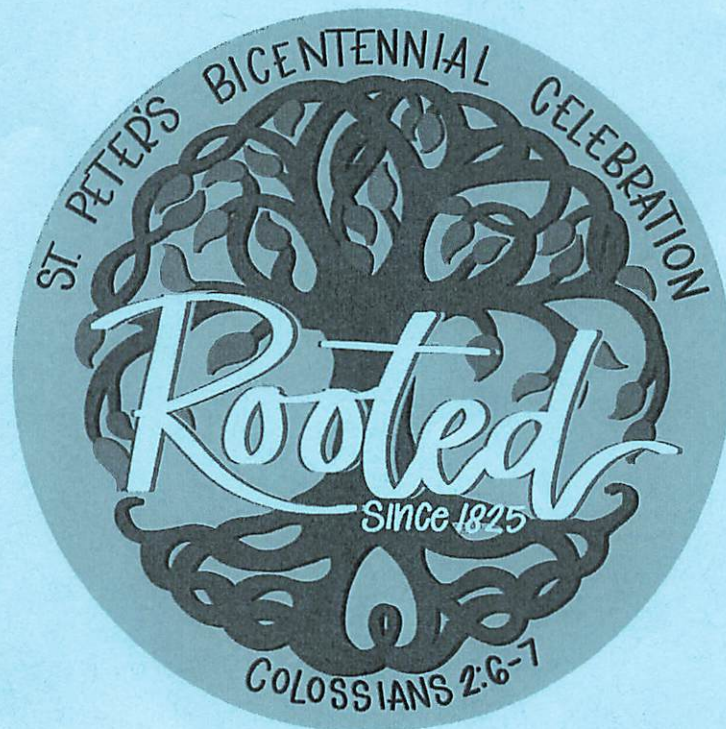


A History of St. Peter's Lutheran Church 1825-2025



So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built
up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were
taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

--Colossians 2:6-7

St. Peter's Lutheran Church History

(1825-2025)

To record the history of a church is to record how God in His mercy has extended His grace to people living in a certain community over a certain period of time. In presenting this history of St. Peter's, we must always realize that we are seeing how God has blessed us with his Word over the last 200 years and been with people who have lived in this community during this period of time.

The early beginnings of what is now St. Peter's Lutheran Church is rather obscure. In fact, the first reference to this congregation is as "...the Old Meeting House on the road from Oxford Ford to Lincolnton." This description is taken from the Lincoln County records of July 1816. From early records compiled by the Catawba County Historical Society and a brief church history by the Rev. C. O. Smith we are able to determine that the people of this area were descendants of German immigrants who first settled in Pennsylvania. These people moved to North Carolina about the time of the Revolutionary War.

The people who were the founders of St. Peter's were the so-called "Pennsylvania Dutch," whose ancestors were driven out of Germany by the cruel war of the Spanish Succession, came to the Netherlands, and then to England, where the Queen gave them refuge in America. They established a colony in Pennsylvania, but land was hard to obtain and crowded, so they decided to move to North Carolina where land was cheap and plentiful.

These "Pennsylvania Dutch" who were not Dutch but German, arrived about 1750 into what is now Catawba County. They brought along their German Bibles, catechism, and hymn books. Their services were conducted mostly in German. They were mostly Lutherans, but some German Reformed came with them. They built "Union" churches in some cases, where each denomination had a specified number of services each month. The deed for the original land of the church was for "the Lutherans and German and English Reformed" and was witnessed by Lewis Hefner and Peter Row who signed their names in German. The reason we know that German was the language used is because some of our members have their ancestors' German Bibles and the first known list of communicants is made up almost exclusively of people with German names: Hoffman (Huffman), Siegmann (Sigmon), Baumann (Bowman), Klein (Little), Heavner (Hefner), Eckhardt (Eckard), and Schmidt (Smith).

It is not known exactly where, when, or who built the "Old Meeting House" located on the old Oxford Ford Road, but possibly by Peter Harman. Peter Harman/Herman (1767-1853) was a very prosperous man, owning large acres of land including land from the Catawba River on the Catawba County side. He and his wife Barbara lived a little above the Oxford Ford. A ford is a shallow place in a creek or river that can be easily crossed by foot or wagon. This old ford was located where the current Highway 16 bridge is located.

The Old Meeting House did not have regular weekly church services. There was a preacher, Rev. R. J. Miller, who served several congregations including St. Peter's. Baptisms and weddings were performed whenever the preacher was here and services were irregular, as were memorial services for those who had died since his last visit. The earliest marked grave in our cemetery is that of a child, Laban Winebarger, and this is probably a case where such a service was necessary in 1816. The next oldest grave is that of Rachel Isenhower buried in 1831.

It was years later when St. Peter's was formally organized as a congregation on June 1, 1825, and the first recorded act was the baptism of Elizabeth Hefner, daughter of Elias and Sarah (Susan) Hefner, born on August 18th and baptized on August 29, 1825 by sponsors. Thus, 1825 was recognized as the founding year of St. Peter's Lutheran Church.

Shortly before 1825, nine acres of land were given by Peter Herman for a Lutheran and German Reformed church. On it, the Lutherans built St. Peter's Church. We must assume that St. Peter's received its name from Peter Herman. The Reformed never claimed their interest.

Peter's parents were members of the Reformed church and raised their family in that community. They belonged to the Reformed congregation at Old St. Paul's in Conover, where Peter was an elder. He raised his family in that congregation. St. Paul's was a union church, built and owned by the Reformed and Lutherans. Both are buried in the Old St. Paul's cemetery. Peter farmed his land in the area until 1828. Before he left the area in 1827, he signed a deed for the nine acres of land given to St. Peter's congregation.

St. Peter's first church building, "The Log Cabin" church as it was called, stood in the vicinity of the tennis courts and scout hut. It was a two-story log church. There was one high pulpit in the middle of the church with a balcony on three sides. This info was given by older members of the church years ago. It was built under the leadership of the first called pastor, Rev. Daniel Moser. It was built similar to the original log church of Old St. Paul's in Conover. Possibly this church was built similar to Old Paul's because of Peter Herman's association with that church.

Rev. Daniel Moser, St. Peter's first called pastor, served the congregation from 1825 to 1839.

The Rev. Christian G. Reitzel served the congregation as Pastor from 1829 to 1849. He may have been the first pastor to reside in the parish, since records indicated that his son was baptized here in 1841. Rev. Reitzel's grave is found in St. Peter's cemetery. He was buried in 1870.

From 1849 to 1856, St. Peter's was served by Rev. Timothy Moser. He was the son of Rev. Daniel Moser.

In 1856 Rev. J. M. Smith began his first pastorate at St. Peter's. It was his task to see the flock through the difficult war years, with its attendant death and destruction. Sickness, notably yellow fever and typhoid, took the highest toll among members of the congregation. For a period of time public worship services ceased at St. Peter's.

Following the tragedy of the Civil War, the congregation was reorganized as part of the Tennessee Synod. Under the leadership of Rev. Smith, a meeting was held and adopted a resolution stating:

“Whereas we have just passed through a most cruel and bloody war, by which the church has been torn and scattered, leaving us almost without knowledge who are and who are not members of this congregation, St. Peter’s: therefore, we the members of St. Peter’s, Cat. Co., N.C., do RESOLVE that we form a new list of all the members of this congregation, making it the duty of each member to come forward and re-enroll his or her name: any one neglecting or refusing to do so, after suitable opportunity, shall not be allowed church privileges as members of this congregation.”

The church was reorganized with 173 members signing the roster and Rev. Smith became the pastor from 1865 to 1876.

In 1873, a new sanctuary was built by the members in front of The Log Cabin church (about where the edge of the cemetery meets the parking lot). This building was a wood frame church, referred to as “The Frame Church.” Labor and material were given by the members as gifts of love. Nails were four-sided, uniquely hand forged by church members. It would serve the congregation for over 75 years. Wood stoves and kerosene lamps were later installed for heat and light. Outdoor toilets were located near where the Parish Hall is located today. The ladies decorated the altar with their prize garden blossoms. After morning services, voters’ meetings would be called whenever church business needed attending. The pastor usually served as chairman of the congregation.

There were many stories told in connection with the frame church—most of which have been passed down from generation to generation. This was a way of life most of us can’t imagine and needs to be documented before it is lost. One such story is how the Christmas trees had live candles on them (before electricity) and the acolytes knelt behind them during service. They had long poles with a tin can nailed to the end, so if a branch started to catch fire, they would snuff it out with the can.

The church had a “janitor” who served on a yearly basis. It was his responsibility to come to church early and start the fires in the two stoves and carry water from the spring (located behind the church) to put in the cooler for drinking water. There was one common dipper, which everyone used. Common cup communion was also practiced at this time.

Another custom practiced during this period of time was that the women and children sat on the left side of the church, while men sat on the right. There were three rows of pews with two aisles. There were spittoons placed on the men’s side, so that they could spit tobacco. Many of the older members remember this.

Another story passed down was that The Frame Church was cleaned by Betsy Elizabeth Rector who lived in a house behind Homer Little’s store that was located where the sharp curve is currently located. She was a widow and when there was a storm she went to the church because she felt safe there.

This was an era when family life and recreation centered around the church—a time when picnics after church were a big event. After church, people would hurry to their buckboards to get overflowing picnic baskets. Men set up long tables under the pine trees while the women set out the goodies. Children were seen nearby playing tag or marbles, men teasing and exchanging fish stories, while the women talked and exchanged recipes.

During the mid-1870's the Rev. P.C. Henkel guided the congregation, and assisted the move from the Tennessee Synod to the English Synod, which was affiliated with the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference. Rev. Henkel and Rev. Jonathan R. Moser helped to organize this conference. So, he was the pastor until his death in 1889 and the first president of Concordia College in Conover. It was largely by reason of this fact, and of his connection with the Missouri Synod in Gravelton, Mo., that the English Missouri Synod was invited to, and did take over the operation of Concordia College, and thus began its church work in North Carolina. He returned in 1889 to St. Peter's graveyard for his final resting place.

Strangely enough there follows a period from 1889 to 1897 that we have no record of who the pastor of St. Peter's was. We believe it to be Rev. J. M. Smith. He guided St. Peter's through another difficult time, as controversy developed within the membership. A portion of the members wanted to remain with the Tennessee Synod. This dissenting minority formed a separate congregation called St. Peter's-St. Luke's, and shared use of facilities and grounds. They eventually moved an unused church building from Old County Home Road to Houston Mill Road, where St. Luke's still owns a graveyard.

A major attempt at reconciliation was made in 1909, but when members of the Tennessee group removed the cornerstones from St. Peter's church foundation in a vain search for records, the split became permanent. The differences were not resolved until almost 50 years later. In 1947, St. Luke's Lutheran Church (LCA) sold their interest to St. Peter's (LCMS).

On November 21, 1897, the first official secretary's minutes of a congregational meeting were recorded. The entry concerns the first mission offering taken by the congregation for use in foreign lands.

In 1901, the English Synod officially became a district of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and adopted the Synodical Hymnal. In 1903, St. Peter's acquired a new address, as the Oxford Post Office was closed and the church road became a Conover route. On January 1, 1904 the aged Pastor Smith had to resign the ministry at St. Peter's.

In 1904 and early 1905 the congregation shared Pastor H. B. Hemmeter, a professor from the college, with Bethel Church of Claremont. Several changes were made at this time. Communion, which was only observed twice yearly, started being held three times yearly. In 1904, the first recorded mention of a service of Missions and Thanksgiving—now celebrated as Homecoming—saw members bringing the best of their harvested and preserved crops to decorate the Church. This is also the first year a Christmas tree was decorated and placed in the Church.

Sometime in 1906 the members built a parsonage for the preacher and his family to live in. The land for the parsonage was given by Rosana Killian Winebarger. Her husband, Noah Winebarger,

was killed in the Civil War. This parsonage was a two-story frame structure which was located beside where the brick parsonage was later built. The first pastor to occupy the parsonage owned by the congregation was Rev. A. A. Hahn. The parsonage was used until early 1963. Rev. Hahn helped to organize the first Sunday School picnic in 1905.

Rev. P. C. Henry came to St. Peter's in 1907 and served for six years, during which time he also served Friendship Lutheran Church in Alexander County. In 1911, two more small churches were added to his pastorate. Times were hard in the area and also for St. Peter's, which had a total income of \$74 in 1912.

Rev. Martin Kuegle was called to serve the four congregations in 1913. In the summer of 1913, St. Peter's built a "parochial school" on a tract of land across from the parsonage. The school was in session for about six weeks during the summer and students went all day. They were taught catechism, scripture, and Bible stories all by the pastor. They still held Sunday School on Sunday morning, but since there were no Sunday School rooms at the church, different classes met in different sections of the church. Sunday school rooms were 20 years down the road.

Rev. Kuegele and the pastor of St. Peter's-St. Luke's once again tried to settle the dispute between the two congregations, but were unsuccessful. The minority held occasional services at St. Peter's to reaffirm their claims, but each group had in reality its own church building. An interesting fact noted during this era is that the church was full just about every Sunday. You had to get there early if you wanted to get a seat near the stove to stay warm.

In the fall of 1918, an elder, Mr. Lee Eisenhower, designed new pews for the church, using much of the wood from the old-style benches. But his plan had to wait awhile because from October 15 to November 25, the Oxford area was struck by "the Spanish influenza" epidemic. No services were held except for funerals. Many were buried in unmarked graves. The benches were used for many years after this.

Rev. Robert L. Lail came to St. Peter's in 1922, after a joint meeting between St. Peter's and Bethel congregations, in which they decided not to unite into one congregation. Many customs in the church changed during this period. The custom of men on the right side and women on the left was abandoned when Mr. Garland Sigmon brought his wife Ophelia to join the church. He met his wife while he was working out west and brought her back to North Carolina. Being a stranger to the area, they came to church and sat together. Gradually, more couples and families started sitting together.

On May 27, 1923, Mrs. Robert Lail helped organize the first Ladies Aid Society, which is the oldest organization in the church. The purpose of this society was to assist the church in the work of the Lord. They were to foster and encourage a feeling of Christian fellowship among the women of the congregation, aid the pastor in missionary work, and further the work of the congregation overall. Monthly dues were ten cents per member. The first officers were President Mrs. John Stine, Vice President Mrs. Less Sigmon, Secretary Mrs. Bessie Smith and Treasurer Mrs. Loy Huffman. One of their first fundraisers was two quilts made and tacked at the parsonage. They made \$2.25. Some of their first projects were to buy new lamps for the sanctuary, have it painted on the inside, have an outdoor toilet built, make altar cloths, and buy a

telephone for the parsonage. Other fundraising projects included memory quilts, egg parties, measuring parties, plays and socials.

During this time, the congregation adopted two new ideas: the envelope offering collection system and the purchase of a new car for the pastor to replace his horse.

In 1926, one of the longest pastorates in the history of St. Peter's began. Rev. Walter Hunsucker began serving as the pastor of both St. Peter's and Bethel for 20 years. He had one of the largest pastorates in the area with a combined membership of over one thousand souls. He also served the Taylorsville area churches occasionally. To ease his burden somewhat, services were dropped at all churches on the fifth Sunday of any month, or four times a year.

A legacy from this custom may be found at St. Peter's today, where in Sunday School only 48 Sundays are required for perfect attendance. The Parochial School, meanwhile, had to be discontinued, but the building continued to serve as a Parish Hall.

The young people's society was organized by Rev. Hunsucker in 1927, a member of the International Walther League. One of the group's first projects was farming the land adjacent to the parsonage. Crops of cotton and peanuts were raised on the site of the brick parsonage. This is how the league got the nickname "the cotton-picking" Walther League.

Some of the Ladies Aid Society projects under Pastor Hunsucker included a 1929 supper to raise funds for the county hospital in Newton and the planting of flowers around the Parochial School. In 1930, the church adopted the individual communion cup system, with members of the Society taking turns cleaning the sacred vessels. Members of the society were paid \$1.50 a year to take care of the communion set. Today, the use of throwaway wine cups makes this unnecessary.

Two major construction projects were carried out during Rev. Hunsucker's ministry. In 1933, the new Sunday School rooms were built onto the frame church. Labor was donated and the material was obtained by razing the old parochial school. In 1935, the parsonage was remodeled with donated lumber and skilled volunteers. The two-story parsonage was reduced to a one story building in what was termed then as a "bungalow" style building.

The Ladies Aid Society continued to do just that, aiding the congregation in many ways. They hired the first Choir Director, Mr. Rookman in 1934. In 1936, when power lines were brought down St. Peter's Church Road, the congregation had electricity to replace the oil lamps in the church, and the ladies paid for the same at the parsonage. In 1936, the Ladies prepared the meal for the Walther League Convention held at St. Peter's. They had one social meeting a month and provided flowers for the death of a church member. In 1938, an organ fund was organized by the ladies. In 1939, the first annual pot pie supper was held at Oxford School. The next year the ladies brought the pot pie supper back to the Church, and a pulpit robe was bought for the pastor.

When the Southeastern District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod was formed in 1938, St. Peter's and Rev. Hunsucker were charter members. This is the district to which we now belong.

A building fund was created in 1940, but plans for a new structure were delayed by the advent of World War II. The monies collected up to that point were converted to Defense Bonds, and several special "Victory" collections were taken.

In December 1944, a motion was made and carried to join the newly organized International Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) of the Carolinas and Georgia. The ladies began a new fundraising project during this time selling Happy Home flavorings. Their dues were increased to 25¢ and the money was sent to the Red Cross. Their new aid project to the church during this time was the purchase of choir robes. In 1945, the celebration of V-E and V-J days signaled a return to more normal church activity. After the end of WWII, the ladies started making infant clothing to send to orphaned babies in Europe and adopted six families to support.

On September 26, 1946, the Lutheran Layman's League (LLL) was organized to help the church. Eleven men were present at the meeting and Harold Eckard was elected the first president of this organization. Dues were 50¢ a month and they met on the fourth Friday of each month.

Then in 1947, the size of the congregations increased and the pastor could not serve two parishes, so St. Peter's regretfully accepted Rev. Hunsucker's resignation. One of Pastor Hunsucker's last and major services to the congregation was to lead the group in 1947 to a settlement of the property dispute with the members of St. Peter's-St. Luke's congregations, a dispute that spanned nearly 50 years. St. Luke's sold their interest to St. Peter's for the sum of \$1,000. The money for the settlement was collected by the LLL.

In 1947, Rev. Roland Gabbert assumed the pastorate of St. Peter's. In 1948, extra land adjacent to the frame church was donated by Mr. James Killian for the purpose of a new church. The Ladies Aid purchased a new Wurlitzer organ for the church and the LLL discussed putting together a birthday calendar to raise money. The LLL began holding two meetings a month: one business meeting and one social. They decided to obtain a ballfield and organize a team and to sponsor a Boy Scout troop. A building committee was formed on May 8, 1948 for the purpose of constructing a parish hall behind the new brick church. Once the congregation approved the construction of the parish hall, they paid DaCosta Sigmon for the gas used in his truck to haul the lumber. In December 1948, the LLL agreed to help buy a ballfield in the Oaks grove. The purchase price of the land was not to exceed \$15.

In Spring 1949, the LLL planted corn as a fundraiser. They accepted the offer of Mrs. Louise Carpenter's land for this use. At harvest time, the corn brought in \$173.56.

On March 20, 1949, the cornerstone of the present sanctuary was laid. On Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 1949, the first service was held in the new church. Also on this date, the first Confirmation class of 28 people—13 girls and 15 boys—were confirmed in the new church. The formal dedication of the new church would be on June 16, 1949. The large bell which had hung in the frame church was cracked, but to serve as a link to the past, Mr. K. L. Reitzel repaired the bell which hangs proudly in the new tower and continues to ring clearly throughout the community today. Members of the LWML handscreened the symbolic designs painted on the ceiling tiles. They also ordered and sold plates with the old and new churches on them and paid for Melita Bumgarner to take music lessons so that she could serve as organist.

In 1951, the LLL spearheaded the construction of the parish hall. The ladies of the church bought china, a hot water heater, chairs and paid for the lights. In February 1950, the building fund for the parish hall was \$1,467. Lumber from the land was cut and used for construction. To raise money for the construction, the LLL mowed grass, sold wood, and made 50 wooden church banks for members to use for offering.

In 1952, St. Peter's opened a Kindergarten program with Pastor Gabbert as the teacher. The LLL supported this project by purchasing a Ford Country Sedan station wagon from Hafer Motor Company for use as a school bus. That year, the LWML paid Mrs. Summers \$5 a trip to give choir lessons and bought the choir music. This same year, the pot pie supper served the meal on plates instead of dishes. The price was \$1 for adults and 50¢ for a child's plate. On Mother's Day 1953, Mr. Cloyd Lee Eckard began his long and dedicated tenure of serving St. Peter's Lutheran Church as the organist and choir director.

In 1954, Rev. John C. Roock accepted the call as pastor to St. Peter's. The church's first vicar, Duane Brunette and wife Barbara, arrived in the fall of that year. Monthly communion services began during Pastor Roock's ministry. Also in 1954, the LLL decided to temporarily discontinue the Boy Scout program.

The first Easter Sunrise service was conducted in 1956 and held at the Springs Road Drive-In with other congregations. Families sat in their cars and listened to the service through the speakers. Today, this service is held in the church graveyard.

A new Educational Building, dedicated on September 6, 1959, was constructed using the Parish Hall as the lower level. The next major project planned for the church was a new brick parsonage. The LWML also began plans to build a dedicated building for their pot pie suppers.

Mrs. Emory (Jeanette) Huffman was the first church office secretary, serving part-time from January 1957 until June 1962. When the position was made full-time in 1966, she returned to serve the church for 26 more years.

In November 1962, Rev. Delbert R. Roth was installed as pastor and served St. Peter's Lutheran Church for 34 years. During his ministry, St. Peter's saw many changes. His family was the last one to use the old bungalow parsonage. A new brick parsonage was built beside the old parsonage and dedicated on Mother's Day 1963. The old parsonage was sold and moved to Lee Cline Road, where it still stands today. The LWML also completed the pot pie house that year. Both of these projects were made possible by volunteer labor. Also during that year, several other projects were completed at the church. The men prepared a new office in the parish hall and the church was treated with silicone weatherproofing and a new well was dug.

In 1964, the parish was divided into 13 elder districts. Each elder was to minister to the members in his district and serve as a leader in some area of the church organization. Also, this year an Acolyte Corps was organized. Other symbolic changes were made at the church during the next few years: new altar cloths, the red velvet dossal curtain, a suspended Eternal Light (placed in memory of Roy Bryant), a Christ Candle and stand, an Advent Wreath (given in memory of

Alice Hefner) and seasonal banners. Other changes occurred during this time: a new organ, interior painting, a new heating and air conditioning unit, carpeting and the refurbishing of the main doors in the narthex (they were beautiful wood doors).

On April 20, 1969, a special meeting of thanksgiving to God was held in the parish hall as the congregation officially retired its debt on the educational building. A ten-year list of objectives was prepared with a committee to update the church's goals as needed. On the list of priorities was the construction of an administrative unit and a covered walkway linking the church and the educational building. July 1969 saw the purchase of the house and land adjacent to the church from Mr. and Mrs. Peter Virgilio. A portion of the property became a paved parking lot in the summer of 1970, and the home served as a vicarage. In August 1970, ground was broken for the construction of the administrative unit and covered walkway.

The new administrative unit was dedicated on Mother's Day, 1971. This unit contains a multi-purpose room used by many church organizations, and the present offices of the pastor and church secretary. The altar from the old frame church was refinished and became the center of worship when the multi-purpose room was used as a chapel. Also in 1971, the LLL erected a new brick church sign.

Following the decision of the Synodical Convention in 1969 concerning women voters, the Constitution of St. Peter's was amended to recognize confirmed women as voting members, and eligible to hold non-pastoral offices.

Mr. Cecil Winebarger served as the church's first lay assistant after the position was created by the Board of Elders in August 1971. He served in this position for 15 years. Besides assisting the pastor with hospital calls, he ministered to shut-in members by bringing tape recordings of worship services to their homes. Confirmed members as of June 1, 1975 numbered 874, with a baptized membership of 1,200 souls.

In 1975, the congregation celebrated their 150th anniversary, with the theme "An Earthly Challenge, A Heavenly Goal." Guest pastors during the year included Dr. Oswald Hoffman from the Lutheran Hour, Southeastern District President Rev. Charles Mueller, former Pastors John C. Roock and Roland Gabbert, and Synodical President Dr. J. A. O. Pruess. Special trivets, plates and coins were designed for the occasion.

Ministry to younger members of the church ramped up in the mid-1970's. A Boy Scout hut was built in 1974 to serve members and others in the community. In 1975, the Walther League became the Lutheran Youth Fellowship, a name change adopted by the Synod three years earlier. The county school system began offering Kindergarten in 1976, so the church opened a program for four year olds under the direction of Dorothy Spencer. At Rally Day in 1978, Mrs. Dewey (Rea) Houston was chosen as Sunday School Teacher of the Year. On October 6, 1977 the LLL decided to plan a chicken pie supper for February. In 1978, tennis courts were constructed at the back of the Parish Hall.

In a major departure from the former practice, the Pastor moved from the parsonage to his own home in November 1980. The first vicar in our new vicarage program was Ken Wieting.

In 1981, several acres of land were purchased across the road from the church, with plans for a future ballfield for the church teams. In 1984, the timber was sold and a ballfield was under construction. A formal dedication of the completed facility was held in 1986 with Loy Huffman (oldest member at the time) throwing out the first pitch.

In February 1982, the Dialogue Evangelism program started under the leadership of then Vicar Ray Rohlf. In 1984, the ministry was enhanced by the creation of the Helping Hands Fund.

In 1985, a new program entitled "St. Peter's Pearls" was created. Each year in a morning worship, all those over 80 years old were recognized by the church. The LWML recognized pearls on their birthday by buying them groceries. Also this year, we began the practice of inviting our former vicars to return as guest pastor for Homecoming.

Prior to June 1986, the duties of both church organist and choir director had been held by Cloyd Lee Eckard. The two positions were separated, with Mrs. Judy Eckard hired as Choir Director. Judy is the daughter of Cloyd Lee Eckard.

In 1986, the church purchased six acres of land adjacent to the grounds beside the Parish Hall.

Mr. Cecil Winebarger retired as lay assistant in 1987 due to health reasons. His devotion and service were recognized by a special resolution of the Voter's Assembly in July. In November, the congregation celebrated the 25th anniversary of Rev. Roth as pastor of St. Peter's.

On Mother's Day, May 8, 1988, Mr. Cloyd Lee Eckard was honored for his 35 years of service to the Church as our organist and choir director for over 30 years. A special plaque was purchased to mark the occasion.

In Summer 1988, the Parish Hall was remodeled. Double doors replaced one window with a covered walkway that made it easy to enter without going through the kitchen.

In September 1989, Hurricane Hugo struck Catawba County. There were untold numbers of trees down, buildings damaged, and power was down for many days. However, the Lord protected the people of St. Peter's by sparing them from injury.

On June 10, 1990, St. Peter's celebrated Rev. Raymond Witt's 50 years of holy ministry. Pastor Witt preached a very moving message that Sunday. After the service, a congregational dinner was held in his honor.

On Reformation Sunday, October 28, 1990, Mr. Cloyd Lee Eckard played his last worship service at St. Peter's. He was suddenly called home by his Lord on November 9. On the following Sunday, November 11, the church organ remained silent and closed. Hymns and liturgy were spoken by the congregation in symbolic testimony to the love and leadership that Cloyd had given to the music, worship, and members of St. Peter's. Cloyd's daughter, Judy Eckard, who was choir director, assumed the duties of church organist.

Several members of St. Peter's who belonged to the Armed Forces were assigned to duty in the Middle East during the Gulf War in 1991. We were once again blessed by their safe return.

In the later half of 1991, a major capital funds drive entitled "Mission 2000 + Together with Christ" was conducted. From August 25 thru December 31, members raised over \$31,000. Funds were earmarked for outreach, facility, expansion and missions, with 20% reserved for unforeseen needs. The Catawba County Prison Ministry Chapel and North Carolina Lutheran Home were two of the first beneficiaries of the drive.

Although our church secretary, Jeanette Huffman, was honored in 1991 for her 30 years of service, she was again honored in July 1992 upon her decision to retire. In recognition of her service, a congregational dinner was held where people from organizations in and outside of St. Peter's were able to express their gratitude for her service. Mrs. Jeannette Gantt then assumed the position of church secretary.

On November 18, 1992, Pastor Roth completed 30 years of service to St. Peter's. The congregation hosted a reception in his honor on Sunday, November 22. Pastor Roth preached his last sermon as St. Peter's pastor on September 1, 1996. This occasion marked his retirement and he was honored during the morning worship service with a special song written for the occasion. A reception followed the service at which area ministers came to wish him well. The following Sunday, Pastor Bluhm (Pastor Dave) from Statesville started his tenure as interim pastor as the search began for a permanent pastor.

In October 1997, a new sound system was installed throughout the church with wireless microphones that could be controlled from one main sound board. A sound crew was trained to operate the new system.

In 1997, prayers were answered when Rev. Paul D. Birner accepted our call for pastor. Pastor Birner's installation service was held on November 16, 1997. Due to the growth of the congregation, the need for an assistant pastor was recognized by the voter's assembly. Pastor Bluhm was asked to remain and serve in that position.

After many years of caring for the altar linens, Mrs. Pinkney (Kathleen) Eckard passed this responsibility to others. The Altar Guild was formed in 1997, taking turns caring for the linens.

In April 1998, the first issue of "The Spirit" was published. This monthly newsletter continued to be a source of news, information and activities of the congregation. The newsletter has since been discontinued.

In September 1998, 22 couples in our church were honored for over 50 years of marriage. They were recognized in the morning worship service followed by a reception held in their honor that afternoon. That Fall, the church purchased 31 acres of land on Highway 16 for future use.

In Fall 1998, a group of 12 decided to participate in an Alaska mission trip scheduled for June 1999. The group would join other Christians to host a Vacation Bible School in Copper Center,

Alaska. Many months of preparation and fundraising projects, including the sale of afghans featuring all 3 of our church buildings, were needed in order to make this trip possible.

In Fall 1999, the growth of our congregation necessitated an expansion. On September 12, a new contemporary worship service began for our members with an 8:15 BASIC Training Service (Brothers and Sisters in Christ). This new service, which featured a contemporary band and music, was well received by the congregation and continues to be well attended today.

The next change for the congregation in Fall 1999 was the expansion of the Pre-K program. It went from a half-day to a full-day schedule consisting of a Pre-K and day care combination. Additional church staff was added at this time to accommodate the consistently full roster of students.

An outdoor chapel, located behind the Parish Hall, was built by Cody Combs and Jason Watts as a Boy Scout project for the church.

Also that fall, the sanctuary was remodeled for the first time in its 50 year history. The choir lofts and organ were removed from the front of the church and placed on the balcony. This opened up the altar area and gave the church a modern look. A new rail was installed around the stage area and molding was put around the arch to highlight the sanctuary's architecture. During this remodel, carpeting was installed throughout the sanctuary, whereas before, there was only carpeting in the aisles and at the altar area. When the pews were replaced in the church some of the front rows were removed to give people much needed room up front. The new look for the church was completed in time for the Christmas season.

The new millennium was celebrated at St. Peter's with a party. All of the anticipated Y2K concerns with technology did not occur, but bottled water and food supplies were collected by church members in case they were needed.

The new year 2000 brought more changes for the congregation. A year of celebration was planned for the 175th Anniversary of St. Peter's Lutheran Church. A committee was formed to plan special events for the year. An unanticipated event was Pastor Bluhm's decision to retire on February 29, 2000. He was recognized at both morning services and was honored with a covered dish luncheon in the Parish Hall.

A call committee was formed to seek a new assistant pastor. After months of work, we were given the names of six seminary students from which to choose. Pastor Birner and the selection team went to the seminary and taped interviews with all of the candidates. They were shared with the congregation and after weeks of waiting, the congregation was notified that Paul David Sundbom was to be our new assistant pastor.

Our 175th Anniversary year was celebrated by special services and different guest speakers throughout the year. On June 4, we celebrated for the entire day since June 1, 1825, was the founding date of our congregation. Former pastor, Delbert Roth, preached that Sunday and Pastor Bluhm assisted with the service. We were treated to lunch in the Parish Hall and afterwards entertained by numerous singing groups in the outdoor chapel. Later that evening, we

hosted a Christian concert by Brothers Keeper to which the entire community had been invited. The day was a first of its kind for the congregation.

The Sundboms (Paul, Beth and Joshua) arrived in Conover at the end of July. The installation service was planned for August 13. A reception was held in their honor after the service and our new assistant pastor preached his first sermon the next Sunday, giving our senior pastor a needed rest.

On August 27, St. Peter's hosted its first Friendship Sunday. Members were encouraged to invite their friends, neighbors and family to church with them and share the good news of Jesus Christ. The service was a great success. Many new faces were seen in the pews that Sunday.

The next celebration for the anniversary year was Homecoming Sunday, October 8. Our guest speaker was former Vicar Otto Wood, who served as a pastor in Richmond, Virginia. After the service, a covered dish luncheon was held in the Parish Hall where Rev. Wood and his family were honored.

The 175th Anniversary committee wanted to make this homecoming celebration an event that would be remembered for years to come. The congregation brought old pictures and objects that brought back memories of days gone by. The church was decorated in old quilts, hats, gloves and an old spinning wheel. For this Sunday, the members went back to the custom of former years when the men sat on one side of the church and the women on the other. People dressed in clothes that were worn throughout the history of the church. Hats, bonnets, long dresses, overalls, and many other types of clothing were displayed that day. Memorabilia was displayed in four rooms in the Education Building. This included old pictures, books, hymnals and the boards placed in the church during WWII that named all of the serving members. Many members toured through this trip down memory lane and were anxious to find family members or pictures and other things that they had not seen in years, or possibly never seen.

The 175th Anniversary of St. Peter's Lutheran Church came to a close and members looked forward to many more celebrations in future years. The members of this church have a strong faith in God and have, with His guidance, grown into the congregation that is here today, trusting Him to continue to bless us through the years to come.

A special thanks to the 175th Anniversary Committee for capturing a chronological history of St. Peter's. Histories of St. Peter's have been written for the 125th and 150th anniversary booklets and in many pictorial directories. The common theme of the first 175 years of St. Peter's highlights individuals working together as a church family for one goal—spreading the Good News of our risen Lord and Savior. As the church grew from the old log church, money was always needed. Members gave money, but also freely gave their time, labor, and talents out of love for their church and fellow worshipers. That theme is still alive and well at St. Peter's today.

The written history for the years 2000-2025 is a work in progress. The 200th Anniversary team is working on this and a book chronicling the first 200 years of our church will be available upon completion. Listed below are some itemized events (2000-2025), but we know there are many more. Your help would be greatly appreciated filling in the blanks and contributing memorabilia.

- Kindergarten celebrates 50 years with Class of 2001-2002
- Kindergarten discontinued in 2009? Not sure if this was the last year of preschool?
- Jeannette Gantt retires
- Nancy Bruce hired as administrative assistant
- Pastor Birner leaves in 2014
- Temporary pastors in transition from 2014 to 2016
- Spirit Center groundbreaking in 2015
- Spirit Center dedicated in 2016
- Pastor Graudin accepts a call to St. Peter's in 2016
- COVID-19 pandemic hits in 2020 leading to parking lot services. Communion kits used for the first time
- Pastor Graudin retires in 2023
- Pastor Frank accepts a call to St. Peter's in 2024

The Hurricane Helene Relief Effort in 2024 and 2025 was a huge undertaking by a large number of members, other congregations, and individuals wanting to help our neighbors in the devastated mountain region. The Southeastern District made St. Peter's the district headquarters for the relief effort. Sleeping facilities were set up for workers that could not find a place to stay in Asheville. Meals were served for workers that traveled back and forth daily. Hygiene packs and buckets with cleaning supplies were prepared with supplies that were donated locally and by people across the country, often arriving in truck loads. The Southeastern District directed what type of supplies were needed and supplies came rolling in. All in all, it was a dedicated group of volunteers that got the job done.

Our new pastor, Rev. Peter Frank, took on the task of organizing this relief effort. He spent many hours and months working with the District, the people of St. Peter's and our community to ensure we were doing all we could to assist our mountain neighbors. As a result of this all-out effort by the congregation, the Southeastern District awarded St. Peter's Lutheran Church "The Servant of Christ Award" on Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025.

Our 200th Anniversary is being celebrated today—August 24, 2025. God continues to bless our St. Peter's family today and every day!