

## **History of St. Peter's United Church of Christ Washington, Missouri**

The church that became St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Washington, Missouri, was organized in 1844. The story of St. Peter's is the story of a town founded on the south bank of a great river. This story, like those of the Evangelical and Reformed churches on a larger scale, is that of German immigrants who settled in Missouri and the rest of the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1844 the German Protestant Church was organized. This church was the forerunner of the church now called St. Peter's, as well as the Immanuel Lutheran Church. The church was led and organized by the Reverend Hermann Garlichs of Femme Osage. The German Protestant Church in Washington was formed by 25 charter members. In 1845, just one year after the congregation was organized, a church building was constructed at the southwest corner of Third and Lafayette streets. The first church building was a frame structure constructed at a cost of \$2,000.

The church at Third and Lafayette was used until 1868. Continued growth led to the need for a new building. The site at Fifth and Market street was selected by a building committee and was purchased at a cost of \$700. A 50-by-80 foot structure was planned and the structure eventually cost an estimated \$15,000, which included the land, structure, and furnishings. This church is the home in which St. Peter's still comes together for worship, teaching, and fellowship today.

The church was built of bricks made from nearby clay pits. Huge tree trunks formed the giant columns that still support the roof of the sanctuary. The cornerstone was laid on September 12, 1868. Eight months later, on May 17, 1869, the building was dedicated during a ceremony that attracted hundreds from the surrounding area. Later that year the congregation adopted the name of St. Peter. With the establishment of the church home at Fifth and Market, growth of the congregation continued. In 1875, a tract of land east of the city limits was purchased for a cemetery. The cemetery remains in use and is one of the largest in the Washington area.

The first major addition to the church came in 1878 with the construction of the steeple. This led directly to the purchase of the church's first bell, funded by the Ladies Aid Society. Another bell was added in 1890, a gift from Henry Tibbe, father of the corn cob pipe industry in Washington. The fresco painting of the Lord's Supper, which adorns the sanctuary to this day, was added in 1892 (repainted in 1968 by Henry Morgenthaler). The following year, on April 11, a tornado greatly damaged the church and others in the area. Photos from the period dramatically illustrate the damage. Much of the roof was torn away, although the painting was unharmed. The year of the tornado was also the year when St. Peter's associated itself with the Evangelical Synod of North America, one of the denominations that formed the United Church of Christ more than half a century later.

Growth continued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The parsonage immediately east of the present church was built in 1901. The first expansion of the church took place in 1914-15, when a hall was constructed on the south side of the structure. The addition was a two-story brick structure that included an auditorium and several smaller rooms, intended for educational and social purposes.

The 1920s marked a turning point in the history of the congregation. In January of that year, the church membership was expanded to include women and confirmands. Though active in the church and its many committees and organizations, women were not full members of the church until this time. Over the next several years, women were accepted as members, often dozens at a time. In 1934, the Evangelical Synod united with the Reformed church in the United States to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Many still refer to the "E-and-R" churches of the region. This moved the church a step closer to the eventual union that reformed the UCC.

Meanwhile, the facility itself continued to evolve. Stained glass windows which grace the sanctuary today were installed in 1946. The windows illustrate the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The next major

expansion of the church building took place in 1955, when a hall was erected to the west. The addition cost more than \$200,000 and included the present auditorium, dining hall, kitchen, and adjacent spaces.

In 1957, the Evangelical and Reformed Church united with congregational and Christian churches to establish the United Church of Christ. By the following year, St. Peter's was known as St. Peter's United Church of Christ.

In 1989, the church undertook a major renovation of the existing building. The facility was renovated with additional office space and a new entrance with an elevator on the south side. This renovation was completed in 1990, at the cost of \$350,000. Five years later, renovations of the auditorium began. This project led to the addition of classrooms for Christian education. The project initially cost \$600,000. Several years later, the atrium between the west wing and the sanctuary was added, bringing to completion the project to combine all sections of the facility into a common building. The atrium serves as a welcome gathering place for members and visitors. It was dedicated on August 29, 2004, which completed the facilities renovation that covers nearly a city block with adjoining parking lots.

Since 1844, the church has been served by 26 senior pastors. Today St. Peter's United Church of Christ remains a vital part of the community and a church home for approximately 800 members. The church is governed by a 12-person Church Council elected by the membership. The life and work of the church is further expressed through many boards, committees, and outreach efforts. The vitality of the church bears witness to the belief that God is still speaking, with the creed of "Enter to Worship and Depart to Serve".