

Saint Peter's UCC

Celebrating 150 Years

Our church, Saint Peter's United Church of Christ, began as an Evangelical Church organized in 1874 by six area families. In the spring of 1875, the first house of worship, a log cabin, was built. A few years later, in 1891, because of rapid growth in the size of the congregation, a new frame church was erected across from the cemetery and dedicated to the service of God in the fall of that year. In the early years of our church, services were conducted in German and membership was counted by families; by 1899, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Saint Peter's, there were forty-nine families on the roll.

These families soon recognized the value of relocating the church building, then a short distance from town, into the village of Owensville. Thus, a new brick church (basically our present church) was completed and dedicated in 1908. At that time, the pulpit was on the south side of the church with the pews running east and west. A parsonage was completed soon after the church. With due thrift, most of the lumber used in the parsonage was salvaged from the former frame church.

In 1917, the church changed its roll from family to individual memberships, giving the church a total of about two hundred members.

By 1924, it was evident that the church building needed to be enlarged to accommodate both the congregation and the Sunday School. The sanctuary was extended to the south, and the second story was arranged to give space for the Sunday School. The pulpit was lowered and placed on the east side of the sanctuary, the pews were reset to run north and south, and a pipe organ was installed. The dedication of these renovations was on the first Sunday in November, 1924, the fiftieth anniversary of the church.

In 1934, the first of two major changes in the Evangelical denomination occurred when the Evangelical and Reformed denominations merged and our church became Saint Peter's Evangelical and Reformed Church.

A few years later, in 1939, the original church steeple was replaced with the present brick tower. The appearance of the church was enhanced in 1943 when, through the help of organizations, classes, and members of the congregation, beautiful art glass windows were installed throughout the church as memorials to deceased loved ones. The cost was about \$2,100. These windows, together with the two large stained glass windows, add both to the beauty and to the spiritual message of Saint Peter's.

In 1947, a set of Maas chimes was installed after an initial gift by the Dorcas Circle. A chime clock, which played the Westminster melody and tolled the hours, was soon added when the Women's Fellowship provided one-half the cost of the clock.

At the end of World War II, the congregation, recognizing the inadequacy of the parsonage, had voted to build a new one when materials became available. Then, in 1950, construction of the present parsonage was completed and dedicated as part of the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of the church. At that time, there were 491 members on the roll of the congregation.

In 1956, plans were made to add an educational building to house the growing Sunday School. The plans were completed in 1958 with the addition of fourteen new rooms on two floors.

It was during this period also that the second major change in our denomination occurred, with the merger, in 1957, of the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed church to form the United Church of Christ.

In 1965, the last major alterations were made to the sanctuary with the addition of a new chancel, new pews, carpeting, and other appointments. The chancel was moved from the east wall to the north wall with the previous chancel becoming the present choir loft. At the same time, a choir room was added between the new choir loft and the educational building on the south.

In 1980, the long-standing yoke between Saint Peter's and St. John's Bem was dissolved and they were no longer a two-point charge for the minister.

In recent decades, the congregation has continued to care for the church building. For instance, in 1981, the sanctuary was air conditioned for the first time. In 1989-90, the stained glass windows were enclosed with a protective covering to prevent breakage or harm from pollution. A beautiful new organ was purchased in 1994 and dedicated with a recital that same year. In 1996-97, the sanctuary was repainted, new carpeting laid, pew cushions were replaced, and overhead fans were installed to assist in the cooling of the church. General maintenance, of course, has continued over the years.

In 1997, the Gottenstroeter house, adjacent to the church, as well as some maintenance work on it, was donated to Saint Peter's. The house is now officially the Goettenstroeter Annex.

The history of our church is also found in the activities and organizations of the congregation, and in the Christian service of all members who make the work of the church possible.

From its beginnings, Saint Peter's provided a Sunday School for religious instruction. In 1948, the Board of Christian Education was formed to provide classes for the youth, securing teachers and other staff, and to sponsor Vacation Bible School. Over the years, Saint Peter's has also provided adult classes in Sunday School. Religious education was also one of the goals when, in 1915, the young people of Saint Peter's were organized in a fellowship. Throughout the years, the Senior Youth Fellowship and the Junior Youth Fellowship, organized in 1950, have engaged in many activities and fundraising projects.

In 1892, the Women's Fellowship was organized with twelve members. It was first known as "Frauenverein" and the meetings were conducted in German. Throughout the years, that Fellowship, which continues today, has made significant contributions to the support of the church, including sponsorship for many years of the annual Thanksgiving Supper and sale of fancy-work. Today, the Thanksgiving Supper is organized by the Hospitality Committee.

Music has always been a part of the Christian worship at Saint Peter's. Though little is known of the first twenty-five years of the congregation's life, the records do show that a choir of substantial numbers was formed shortly after 1900. In that tradition, the Chancel choir continues today to provide an important role at Saint Peter's through its Sunday anthems and special programs. At various times, a youth choir has also presented special music.

The Dorcas Circle was organized on June 17, 1934, with its name taken from [Acts 9:36-43](#). As in the past, through church suppers, sales, and other activities, the Circle today contributes to various programs and needs of Saint Peter's.

In recent years, additional organizations have been formed for the purpose of Christian fellowship and caring: Odds and Evens in 1980, Baby Boomers in 1991, and the Care Group in 1997.

In 1973, the idea of a nursery school was conceived and pursued. In support of community betterment, the Church Council approved the use of church facilities for the school, and the Board of Christian Education endorsed the program. On October 1, 1973, St. Peter's Nursery School began with one hired teacher, eleven students, and two mothers as helpers. In 1995, the Nursery School was reorganized and expanded to encompass a pre-school program. In 1997, the congregation approved the use of Saint Peter's for a latch-key program, serving both the church and community needs. Although the latch-key program has dissolved, St. Peter's Preschool continues to serve the community.

In 1980, a handbell choir was organized and two octaves of bells were purchased. A year later, another octave was acquired, and, in 1988, a fourth. Today, the Handbell Choir provides music once a month for Sunday services, as well as for special occasions. At times a Youth Handbell Choir has also offered special music for Sunday Services.

In addition to the services of organizations already identified, individual members of Saint Peter's have, through the years, faithfully served our church, our community, and the wider community of the denomination. It is impossible in a brief history to recognize all those who serve on the council and committees, prepare for meals and coffee times, teach, provide music for and assist in the worship service, visit and help others, and do countless other "jobs" in the church. Nor, is it possible to cite all the financial support that the members of Saint Peter's have extended to community and UCC benevolence projects.

1999 marked the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Saint Peter's. Now, in 2012, Saint Peter's continues to be a vital, vibrant, active, and caring church. With 243 members, two worship services on Sunday mornings, and Sunday School offered for all ages (including adults), Saint Peter's looks forward to promoting the work of God's kingdom on earth.

