



St. Peter's United Church of Christ

Washington, MO

St. Peter's was founded as "The German Protestant Church" in 1844. Herman Garlich, pastor of *Femme Osage Evangelische Kirche*, ferried across the Missouri River to meet sporadically with German immigrants anxious to establish a church similar to the one they left in their homeland. The Rev. Edward Arcularius was the first resident pastor to serve the new congregation. Many German immigrants were making their way to the United States at that time and the congregation grew rapidly. By 1868 a much larger church was erected and was known as *St. Petri Evangelische Kirche*. The congregation continues to worship today in this historic sanctuary.

Because they valued education, the congregation soon established a parochial school (*Gemeindeschule*) which remained open until 1918. By 1887 the congregation established and built a private high school. Both boys and girls attended the high school, which was "cutting edge" at the time. Many of the students came from surrounding communities, traveling

many miles to attend school. Washingtonians opened their homes to these students, allowing them to board locally rather than commute long distances for their education. The church trustees sold the private high school to the Washington Public Schools in 1900. It is still used as the administration building for the Washington School District.

St. Peter's has always been richly engaged in ministry, both within the church and out into the wider community. An active church school and music program have been mainstays throughout the congregation's history. The church has provided leadership for United Church of Christ related institutions, such as the Emmaus Homes, Deaconess Hospital, the Evangelical Children's Home, Camp MoVal, the St. Louis Neighborhood Houses, and other institutions. For many years St. Peter's has provided a food pantry for those in need, as well as meeting space for a variety of community groups. The Harvest Table is a free community dinner held each Saturday evening at St. Peter's. Many churches in Washington contribute food and helpers, on a rotating basis, to cook and serve these meals to anyone who wishes to attend. For the past ten years, St. Peter's "Festival of Trees" has brought in thousands of visitors to wander through the church, enjoying the 80+ decorated Christmas trees and the Christmas concerts each weekend in December. Admission is a donation of canned goods. The mountain of food that is collected is then distributed to each of the three food pantries in Washington.

St. Peter's has sent a number of members into the ministry. Among them is Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke, born without arms, who was instrumental in passing the Americans with Disabilities Act. Rev. Wilke was present when President George H.W. Bush signed the document. Rev. Dr. Lloyd Pfautsch, noted musical composer, grew up attending St. Peter's and became head of the music department at Southern Methodist University. Rev. Dr. Donald Crismon and Rev. Jeffrey Schwab (son of our long time pastor, Rev. Dr. William Schwab) have served as pastors at churches in the Midwest and Florida. Rev. Johanna Stroetker was the first woman pastor from St. Peter's congregation. A true trail-blazer, she returned to St. Peter's to serve as an associate pastor upon completion of her studies at Eden Theological Seminary in 1951. Our current minister is Rev. Gary M. Schulte.

This year St. Peter's is celebrating its 175th anniversary. Many changes have taken place during those years (including name changes-St. Peter's Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1934, then St. Peter's United Church of Christ in 1957), but St. Peter's continues to be a church that honors its rich history while enthusiastically looking to the future.

