

St. Peter's Church, Smyrna

The members of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Smyrna know their parish is a church worth finding; however, people may have to search for it for two reasons. First, traffic on North Union Street travels in three different directions within three blocks: one block south is one-way south, St. Peter's block is one-way north, and one block north is two-way. As a result, the church's front street is travelled primarily by locals or those taking shortcuts. Second, it is one of three historic churches with a steeple within a few blocks of each other. While St. Peter's steeple was originally 100 feet high, when it was rebuilt in 1880 after a windstorm blew it off in 1876, the steeple was capped at 86 feet high. That extra fourteen feet makes a difference, as people looking for St. Peter's usually find one of the other two churches first.

Anglican services may have been held as early as 1706 in the area; however, the first records for St. Peter's were contained in the parish records of Christ Episcopal Church, Dover, which were destroyed in a fire in the early nineteenth century. The first structure was a wooden chapel completed in 1744 in Duck Creek. The small chapel was replaced with a larger brick church 20 years later. At the time, the parish was sharing the Rev. Charles Inglis with Christ Church, Dover, and he named the new brick church St. Peter's. Historical records are silent for the period between 1793 and 1827 except for a report from the Rev. Alexander G. Cummins that the parish languished during these years. In 1827, the old church at Duck Creek had deteriorated beyond repair and was razed. A new one was built and consecrated in 1828 on Union Street, one mile south, to keep St. Peter's within the main town limits, which had also moved south. The former church site is St. Peter's cemetery.

St. Peter's continued sharing clergy with either Christ Church, Dover, or St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Middletown, until 1850 when the Rev. Samuel T. Carpenter was called as its first rector. Rapid growth of the town and congregation resulted in adding a transept and extending the sanctuary in 1857. A parish hall was added in 1872, and a Sunday school wing was completed in 1958. In the last fifty years, several older neighboring properties were purchased and converted into two parking lots, a backyard, and an open space.

On May 23, 1980, St. Peter's was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Smyrna Historic District. Beginning in 1885, the clear sanctuary windows were gradually replaced with gorgeous stained glass. The window depicting the Holy Family was made in Tours, France, and the window of the Good Shepherd was made in Innsbruck, Austria.

Since 1994, St. Peter's principal outreach is its preschool, preparing three- and four-year-old children for kindergarten. The preschool provides students with a faith

based, rich background of experience to develop reading readiness and nurture the natural creativity and curiosity of God's beloved children. The parish opens its doors throughout the year to community events such as a block party celebrating the patron feast of St. Peter, dinner with Santa, a pancake supper, lunch with the Easter Bunny, homecoming on the fourth Sunday in Lent, an event honoring those who work in helping professions, and a spring and fall tea party. All are welcome to come and visit.