

St. Peter Catholic Church

The Jesuit Parish in Charlotte's Center City



Charlotte's oldest Catholic parish.

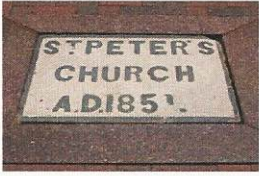


We welcome everyone desiring to be a disciple of Jesus. As disciples, we praise God in the liturgy and the Word, we reverence God by celebrating the sacraments, and we serve God by reaching out to and advocating for all, especially the neediest.

507 S. Tryon St., Charlotte, NC 28202

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Our History in Summary



Rev. Jeremiah J. O'Connell, a circuit riding priest from Columbia, S.C. and the Diocese of Charleston, spent two days on a stagecoach traveling to Charlotte to lay the cornerstone for the first Saint Peter's church on March 25, 1851. He was responsible for the nurturing of Catholics in the area.

Fr. Jeremiah served the areas in North and South Carolina for over 25 years. He helped secure the land for Mary Help, now Belmont Abbey, and lived out his final years there.

The cost for two acres of land and St. Peter's Church was \$1,000.00. Much of the money given was by non-Catholics who liked Fr. Jeremiah when he preached at the Episcopal Church. In the area of North Carolina and South Carolina from Columbia to "Warm Springs", there were approximately 100 Catholics - "Poor, virtuous, zealous." They were served by various priests beginning in 1824, including two brothers of Fr. O'Connell. At the dedication of St. Peter's in 1852, Bishop Reynolds of the Diocese of Charleston spoke of the "zeal and piety of the few Catholics" in building the church.

The Charlotte population at the time was 1000. The town was said to be "falling into decay and miserable existence and the only signs of life were during Court week, circus time and on the 4th of July." The people were looking forward to the railroad to Columbia being finished in early 1852 and as a result the city was "putting on its best" to welcome the Iron Horse.

An explosion at a munitions factory during the Civil War caused a crack in one of the walls of the church, and in 1869 the people began to raise money for a new church.

In 1878, one of the benefactors whose presence is still felt at St. Peter's came to town. His name was Dennis O'Donoghue and he was in charge of the new Weather Bureau. He was also a physician and was well known in the Charlotte area.

In 1888, St. Mary's Seminary, a day and boarding school began on the St. Peter's property. Mother Catherine Price, sister of the one of the founders of the Maryknoll Fathers, Rev. Frederick Price, was the Superior. The boarding school was discontinued in 1892 when Sacred Heart Academy in Belmont was established.

In 1892 the Benedictine Order from Belmont Abbey began their service to St. Peter's.

Fr. Francis Meyer came to be pastor and the present church was built a short time later. It measures 100 x 40 feet. In 1893 the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Leo Haid of Belmont Abbey who also donated a window for the church. The structure is of Victorian gothic style and was said to have a "steel" ceiling and American stained glass windows.

Besides Dr. O'Donoghue there were other benefactors including Sr. Catherine Drexel who was from Philadelphia. She had founded Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Black and Native American peoples. Her gift to the parish was contingent on a promise of pews reserved for the "colored" people, in fulfillment of her order's mission.





The old “parish house” behind the church became the first Mercy Hospital, founded by the Sisters of Mercy. This hospital had 25 beds. It remained at this location until 1915 when the hospital relocated to Vail Avenue. The present building was completed in 1922 as a convent (pictured left). Renovations improved the structure and functionality in order for it to serve today as the church office.

The Benedictine priests remained with St. Peter’s until 1960. At that time Diocesan priests began serving St. Peter’s. In 1970 the parish became a “Church of Convenience” since the population of the area had diminished and other Catholic Churches were in place. St. Patrick’s was begun as a mission of St. Peter’s in 1939. The spirit of St. Peter’s remains very strong in the whole of Charlotte as the “Mother” church.



The parish was again established in 1986 when the Maryland Province Jesuits led by Rev. John C. Haughey, S.J., came to serve the Diocese of Charlotte. Since its rebirth in 1986, the parish has grown to over 2,000 registered families. The people of St. Peter are strongly committed to the poor in this area, especially in the shelter of homeless men. There is also a commitment to the business community through the celebration of weekday Mass at 12:10pm. Parish outreach programs are many, including Urban Ministry, Room in the Inn, Druid Hills Academy Partnership, McCreesh Place, and various ministries that serve our community.

In 1986, artist Ben Long was commissioned to paint a Fresco. The fresco spanned the entire back wall of the church, and the triptych design portrayed the Agony in the Garden, the resurrected Christ, and Pentecost. After the renovation and restoration of the Church and completion of the Fresco, St. Peter’s was rededicated in 1989.

On the 20th of February, 2002, shortly after 11:00 am, one third of the central part of the fresco fell to the floor in a million pieces, and the left and right segments of the fresco remained partly attached to the wall and partly hanging free. After months of searching, St. Peter found a craftsman willing to save the parts of the fresco that remained by removing them from the wall. Through this tedious process we were able to save eighteen pieces of the original fresco which now hang in various areas of our campus.



The New Artwork



About the Artist - John Collier

In the spring of 2004, two years after the fall of Ben Long's fresco, we began the search for an artist to provide our sanctuary with a new work to inspire and focus the prayer of our community. We chose John Collier of Plano, Texas, the artist responsible for the Catholic Memorial at Ground Zero in Manhattan, as the one to create our art work. It was not, however, until 2007 that the work as conceived by John Collier began to become a reality in our sanctuary.

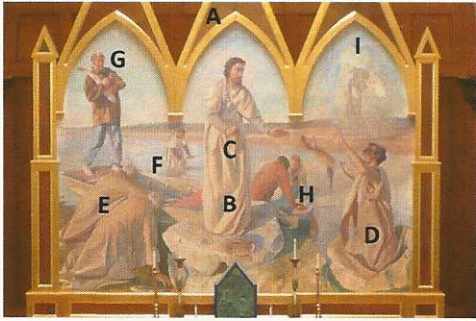
John Collier not only painted the central painting and sculpted the bas-reliefs; he also designed the frame in which the painting is set, and the background of oak panels behind the painting, as well as the knee wall which supports the painting and tabernacle. The tabernacle and the woodwork framing the

bas-reliefs are also the work of this artist.

Mr. Collier is one of America's most honored Artists. Each year the magazine Faith & Form, in conjunction with IFRAA, the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture, present awards for outstanding contributions in faith-based art. In four of seven recent years, John Collier won awards from this prestigious group, namely for his sculptures of the "Annunciation," "St. Mary Magdalene," his "Crucifix" and for his "Mary at the Wedding of Cana." John has also won numerous awards from Ministry & Liturgy magazine including three in 2008.



The background of oak panels behind the painting, the reredos, was the first element of the design to be put in place. Then in December of 2007, the painting with its frame and the tabernacle were installed in the sanctuary as a kind of Christmas present for our very patient congregation. Shortly before Easter of 2008, the bas-reliefs were set in place, and on Sunday, October 12, 2008, the entire work was blessed and dedicated.



The painting is John Collier's interpretation of **Chapter 21 of John's Gospel**. The painting, oil on aluminum, is a triptych - three panels closely united to appear as one. The frame is made of quarter-sawed oak and gilded with layers of 22 karat gold, which required a year to apply.

(A) The three gothic arches carry the traditional symbolism of the Holy Trinity.

(B) Jesus the risen Christ stands in the middle of the painting under the central arch of the frame. He is standing upon a large

rock shaped like a keystone. *He is the rejected stone which holds everything together.*

(C) Jesus is carrying a fishing line in his hands. Scripture indicates that Jesus has already prepared bread and fish over an open fire. In the artist's mind Jesus caught those fish, and indeed the men to make them his disciples.

(D) St. Peter kneels on a large stone symbolic of his name "Petrus". The rock on which he kneels is separated from the rock on which Jesus stands, symbolic of his separation from Christ by his triple denial of Jesus on Holy Thursday. His hands are extended as if in supplication and prayer, and he gazes into the eyes of Christ with a look that seems to long for understanding. Christ's hands extend as if to catch Peter's hands in his; a touch that brings physical life as well as spiritual life or reconciliation. Christ requests that Peter "feed His sheep" - a sign of the Lord's forgiveness of Peter's denial and the primacy that he places on Peter as leader not only of his apostles, but of his church.

(E) Two apostles lean over the boat behind Jesus gathering or counting the fish that have been caught. Their backs take on the form of rocks. They are, as Paul tells us, part of the "living stones" that make up the church.

(F) In renaissance painting it was not at all unusual for some of the people portrayed in a scriptural event to be dressed in contemporary garb rather than first century dress. Likewise, things which might seem "historically" incorrect appear in our painting. Peter's boat is more like a "bass boat" that you might find on Lake Norman than the fishing boats of first century Galilee.

(G) We can also see that the apostle standing in the boat is dressed in blue jeans and a leather jacket. The meaning of the scriptural event is as important and relevant to us today as it was in Jesus' time.

(H) If you look at the apostles throughout the scene, you become aware that the artist has shown them in various ages and ethnic backgrounds to indicate the universality of Christ's call. All these men, like the apostles leaning over the boat in the foreground, are engaged in gathering the fish from the great catch of 153 fish.

(I) In the upper right of the triptych there is a series of faint blue images to one side and an angel. John Collier goes beyond John 21 here to **Luke 15:10**, "I tell you, there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents". Peter's three-fold affirmation of his love for Christ is his repentance for his three-fold denial of him on Holy Thursday evening in the High Priest's courtyard. The angel is leading a choir of angels in the blue, in rejoicing over Peter's repentance and reconciliation with the Lord.

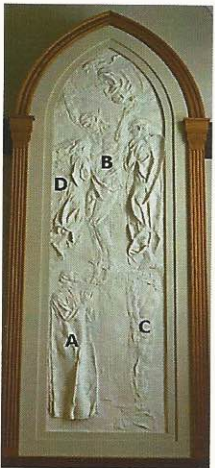


Bas Relief - St. Katharine Drexel with Madonna & Child

When the second church on this site was being built in 1892, Katharine Drexel, a wealthy Philadelphian and founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Black and Native American peoples, donated funds towards the pews at St. Peter's so that African-Americans would always have a place to worship in Charlotte.

- (A) The bas-relief pictures her in the distinctive habit of her order, as she prays in a kind of ecstasy.
- (B) Her spectacles, in which she was almost always pictured, lie on the floor.
- (C) A moth and a rusty nail lie on the ground at her feet evoking St. Matthew 6:19-20: "Do not lay up for yourselves earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode ... Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure..."

(D) The Madonna and Child above her have African-American features since it was in the poor blacks of the South and the Native Americans of the Southwest that she saw the Christ who calls us to care for the least of his people. Mary is depicted holding Jesus, possibly as a teenager, calling to mind her loving care for all ages. Jesus holds an orb, the world, in his hand.



Bas Relief – Saint Ignatius with Homeless Man before the Crucified Christ

- (A) St. Ignatius, praying before the (B) crucified Christ, commemorates that the Jesuits have been serving St. Peter's parish since 1986.
- (C) Next to him a homeless man also worships the Lord. This man is humiliated every day, but he sees that Jesus too was humiliated. By including him with Saint Ignatius and Jesus, we are reminding all homeless people of a dignity they may not know they have...that they are loved by God. The homeless man being consoled before Christ evokes the Mission of St. Peter's, calling us to continual work with the poor and disenfranchised.
- (D) The angels that surround the cross both grieve and offer support to Christ. They are traditionally included in early Renaissance paintings of the Crucifixion, as in Giotto's work.



The Tabernacle

The tabernacle is made out of jade and lapis. The door of the tabernacle is bronze with an image of the nativity in relief.

(A) Joseph gathers wood for a fire while (B) Mary in a Carolina rocking chair comforts the Christ Child.



Baptismal Pool

The baptismal pool was given by the Jesuits to honor their brothers who have served at St. Peter's. Designed and installed by Gelbach Designs, Inc., it incorporates the traditional Jesuit **IHS** executed by local artist Annette Cossentine using Mexican Smalti mosaic stone.

Key Moments in the History of St. Peter Catholic Church

3/17/1851	Cornerstone of the first St. Peter's church is laid by Rev. Jeremiah J. O'Connell, the first pastor. This cornerstone is now imbedded in the sidewalk in front of the present church.
1884	Fr. Mark S. Gross built a combination convent and school at the corner of Tryon and Stonewall Streets. He invited the Sisters of Mercy to Charlotte to staff the day/boarding school St. Mary's Seminary. The school later became a parochial school of St. Peter's church.
12/24/1893	Present St. Peter's church dedicated by Abbot-Bishop Leo Haid, OSB, Belmont Abbey, who was Vicar Apostolic of North Carolina appointed by Pope Leo XIII.
1897	A rectory was built adjoining the church; it now serves as "The Ignatius Center" for meetings.
1905-06	Fr. Joseph Mueller, OSB, converted the former parish hall behind St. Peter's church into a hospital staffed by the Sisters of Mercy from Belmont. This was the predecessor of Mercy Hospital. Church membership of about 600 grew to about 1,000 by 1910.
8/2/1923	Fr. Ambrose Gallagher, OSB, native of Charlotte from St. Peter parish, became pastor. He secured the Dilworth site for St. Patrick's church, school and convent. From 1939 -1942, the new St Patrick church remained under the charge of priests from St. Peter's.
1949-1969	Fr. Edward Biss, OSB, served as the last Benedictine pastor. The church was renovated and the pipe organ was rebuilt. After Fr. Biss died, the Diocese of Raleigh administered St. Peter. St. Peter's ceased to be a full-fledged parish in 1970 and became instead a "church of convenience."
1970s	Bishop Michael Begley, of the new Diocese of Charlotte, assigned pastors to St. Peter. Restoration of the church and rectory continued through this decade including the addition of a center aisle, repair of the stained glass windows, restoration of the statuary and stations of the cross and correction of structural flaws in the rectory.
1983-1985	Attendance dropped and fewer liturgies were offered; no Holy Week services were held at St. Peter's in 1985.
3/2/1986	Bishop John F. Donoghue invited the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) to serve the people of St. Peter and the parish was restored under their leadership. Fr. John Haughey, SJ, installed as pastor, Fr. Eugene McCreesh as parochial vicar and Fr. Tom Gaunt, SJ, in residence. Fr. Haughey commissioned the fresco by Ben Long.

11/18/1986	135th anniversary of St. Peter's founding celebrated in back parking lot. Mass celebrants include Frs. John Haughey, SJ, Thomas Gaunt, SJ, Peter Stragand, OSB, Fr. Peter Jugis, and Bishops Begley and Donoghue. Fr. Gene McCreesh was homilist. Parish had 150 families registered.
1989	Fr. Robert J. Paquet, SJ, appointed assistant pastor and the fresco was completed.
1990	Fr. Haughey returned to academia. While pastor, he established an urban ministry for the poor and homeless, helped found Mecklenburg Ministries, a coalition of congregations involved with social issues and served the business community by fostering ethics in the workplace. His efforts to integrate religious values with business practices brought about The Executive Forum of Charlotte Professionals and The Catholic Business Guild.
1990	Fr. Eugene P. McCreesh, SJ, appointed pastor. His tireless work for the poor, and the establishment of an uptown homeless shelter, earned him a reputation for compassion and community concern.
9/1/1992	Fr. James A. Devereux, SJ, installed as pastor after serving as Parochial Vicar for one year. A noted Shakespearean scholar and lecturer, he was a constant motivating force, committed to St. Peter's role in the community, especially outreach to other religions.
1993	Gift from Wrenn family enables church to revoice and rearrange the pipes and install a functional facade facing the altar with new chambers which would enhance the beauty of the church.
5/18/1997	Building behind the church became the Parish Office. This site was a school, General Hospital (the predecessor of Mercy Hospital), convent for at least three different orders and used by the USO in WW II, as a parish hall and by Catholic Social Services.
Jan. 2000	Fr. Joseph Sobierajski, SJ, installed as pastor. Fr. Lucian Martinez, SJ appointed Vicar. During his tenure, the fallen fresco was replaced by a newly designed & commissioned sanctuary and artwork.
3/17/2001	St. Peter's sesquicentennial celebration began & continued through the year with many programs.
2001/2004	Fr. Vince Alagia, SJ offers the "Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" and guides the Ignatian Spirituality Ministry/ Fr. Thomas McDonnell, SJ, appointed as Parochial Vicar.
2009	Fr. Patrick Earl, SJ, installed as pastor. The parish grew to more than 1,700 households, with the addition of many young adults moving to the Charlotte Uptown area. Families engaged in several innovative faith formation programs including Whole Family and Homeschool catechesis.
2015	Fr. James Shea, SJ, installed as pastor. Prior to coming to St. Peter, Fr. Shea served as the Provincial for the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus for six years, as pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Washington, D.C., and provided pastoral care and directed programs of clinical pastoral education at St. Louis University Medical Center and Georgetown University Medical Center.
2016	Fr. John Michalowski appointed as Parochial Vicar, having served as pastor of Saints Mary and Joseph Parish in the Salem, New Hampshire.

Thank you for coming to our parish community. We welcome all in the name of the Lord.



Scan the QR code to join the parish mailing list and receive our biweekly eNews. This electronic newsletter serves as a reminder for parish events, programs, liturgies and other pertinent information occurring within 2 weeks of publication date.



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Our parish website: www.stpeterscatholic.org