

Bethel

Lincolnton

Organized: 1790

County: Gaston

Alternate Names: Little Mountain, Long Creek

Affiliations: NC Synod, Tennessee Synod, Tennessee Synod Reorganized,
Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States, Tennessee Synod, NC Synod

Status: Active

While the earliest records of the congregation which became Bethel Church are obscure, Little Mountain Meeting House was served first by Seceders and Reformed preachers and then by Rev. Johann Gottfried Arends by 1790. Known as “Long Creek Lutheran and Reformed Congregation” in the early 1800s, it was served by Rev. Philip Henkel and then by his brother, Rev. David Henkel. Rev. David Henkel and the Tennessee Synod’s insistence upon adherence to strict Lutheran doctrine made a significant influence upon the congregation. When the church followed Rev. Adam Miller into the Reorganized Tennessee Evangelical Synod, it persisted as a conservative Lutheran Church and rejected “new measures”. Bethel became aligned with the Concordia English District of the Synod of Ohio and Other States to provide seminary instruction for its members who strove to become pastors. Four sons of the congregation entered the ministry in the 1880s and 90s, devoted to confessional Lutheranism. A second factor involves the challenges the congregation has experienced. The congregation has had at least three physical locations and has been known under four names. The “Little Mountain Meeting House” was originally Reformed and used prior to the American Revolution, so the Lutheran influence came late. The Lutheran contingent became dominant even though it remained a small congregation. David Henkel regularly served “Long Creek Congregation” from 1814 through the 1820s. Isaac Mauney, a delegate from the congregation, witnessed the disputed ordination of David Henkel in 1819. After 1826 Rev. David Henkel’s visits to the congregation became less frequent. After David Henkel died, Rev. Adam Miller served the congregation. By the 1830s the congregation seems to have moved again geographically from Long Creek to a union church with Methodists near present Landers Chapel Methodist Church. When Rev. Adam Miller was accused of fathering an illegitimate child, the Bethel congregation supported the innocence of its minister. After Miller’s departure from the Tennessee Synod, Bethel became a leader in the Reorganized Evangelical Tennessee Synod and often hosted its meetings. These were difficult times with accusations and innuendoes. Prior to the Civil War the congregation moved again to the present location and the name “Bethel” was first used. The Reorganized Evangelical Tennessee Synod maintained an existence until the early 1880s. Leaders Rev. George L. Hunt and Rev. M. L. Carpenter, a son of the congregation, understood that the little synod needed an educational institution for instruction of future pastors and a sounder financial basis.

The congregation decided to join the Concordia English District of the Ohio Synod after its overtures to the

Tennessee Synod failed. Bethel took a leadership role in the new synodical organization and hosted two synod sessions. In 1892 tragedy struck as the church burned. Members joined together and built a brick church (which is still standing) that was completed until 1898. By 1912 the church followed its pastor, Rev. Jonas M. Senter, back into the Tennessee Synod. This move was probably done because of the limitation and disappointments of the St. Paul's Seminary in Hickory and because most of its Lutheran neighbors were now in the Tennessee Synod.

The members of Bethel are predominantly descendants of various local German farm families. As such, the congregation has continued to struggle for its existence and place in the community. The contemporary challenge is to see if the small family-oriented rural congregation will find its place of service in the community. In the 1970s Bethel initiated a futuristic building program. Despite delays and dissension an educational building and, finally, the new church was completed in 1991. Today's Bethel has begun to embrace change through an early contemporary informal service. It invites the community to fellowship nights once a month and has initiated a youth program. Bethel Lutheran Church continues to take seriously its calling to be a Lutheran witness to the community.

Pastors:

1790-1807 Johann Gottfried Arends

1805-1814 Philip Henkel

1814-1819 David Henkel, student

1819-1831 David Henkel

1831-1853 Adam Miller

1853-1858 George L. Hunt, student

1858-1873 George L. Hunt

1873-1877 George S. Pasour

1877-1891 Michael L. Carpenter

1891-1895 Benjamin L. Westenbarger

1895-1899 John H. Wannemacher

1900-1902 George A. Derhammer

1903-1912 Jonas M. Senter

1912-1914 John C. Dietz

1915-1919 O. W. Aderholdt

1920-1924 C. O. Lippard

1924 F. M. Carpenter, supply

1925-1928 F. M. Speagle

1928-1932 J. J. Bickley

1932-1940 H. P. Barringer

1940-1942 Walter N. Yount

1942-1943 Roy L. Fisher

1943-1961 L. Summie Miller

1961-1964 Roy L. Trexler

1965-1968 Wade Norman

1969-1974 Tommy K. Beaver

1975-1979 Steve Hackney

1980-1982 Darrell Norris

1982-1997 Charles Leavitt

1998 - Elizabeth J Toler