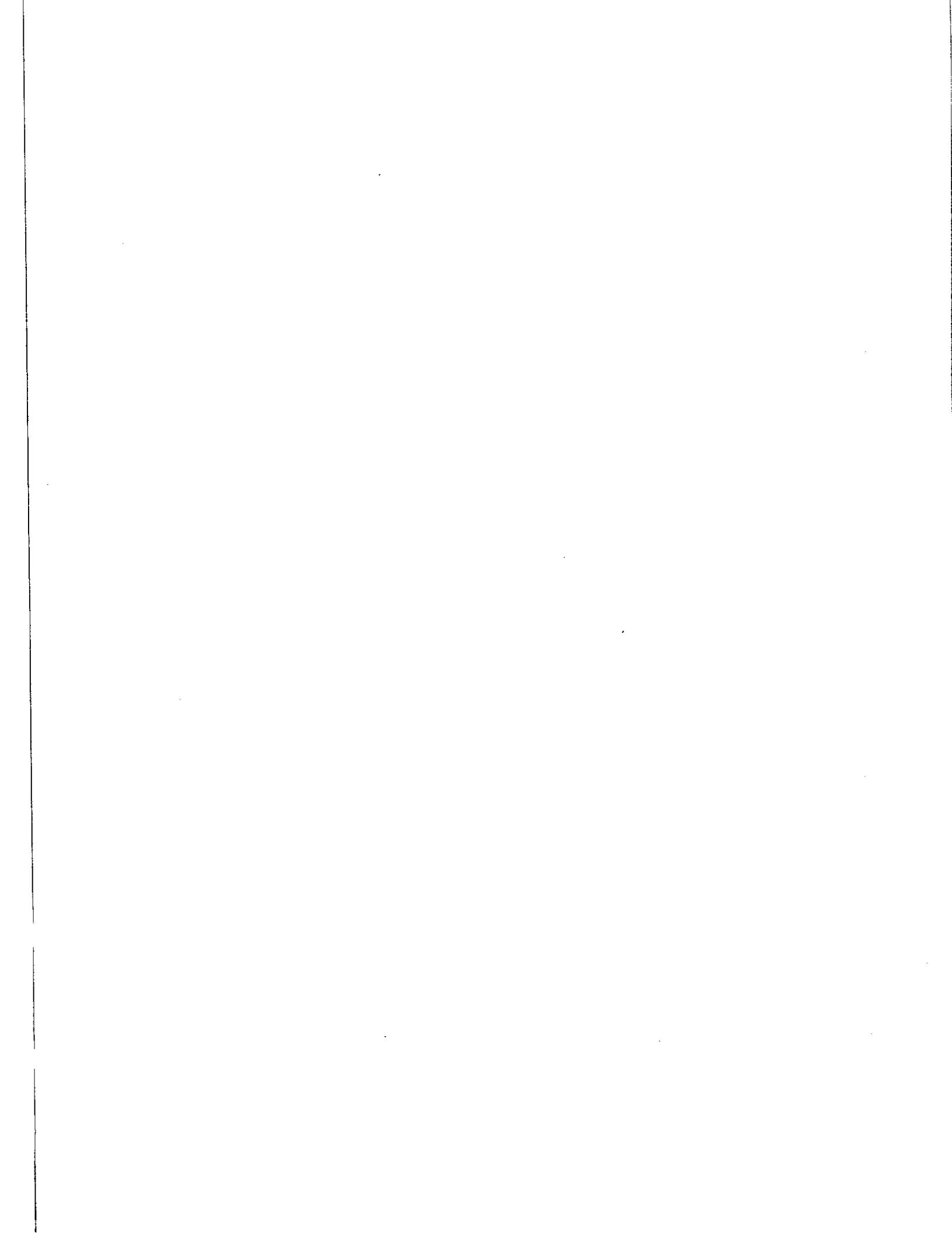


LIBERTY AND UNION

A Story of Faith, Freedom and
the Ties That Bind a Nation



Gary L McGinnis



Liberty and Union

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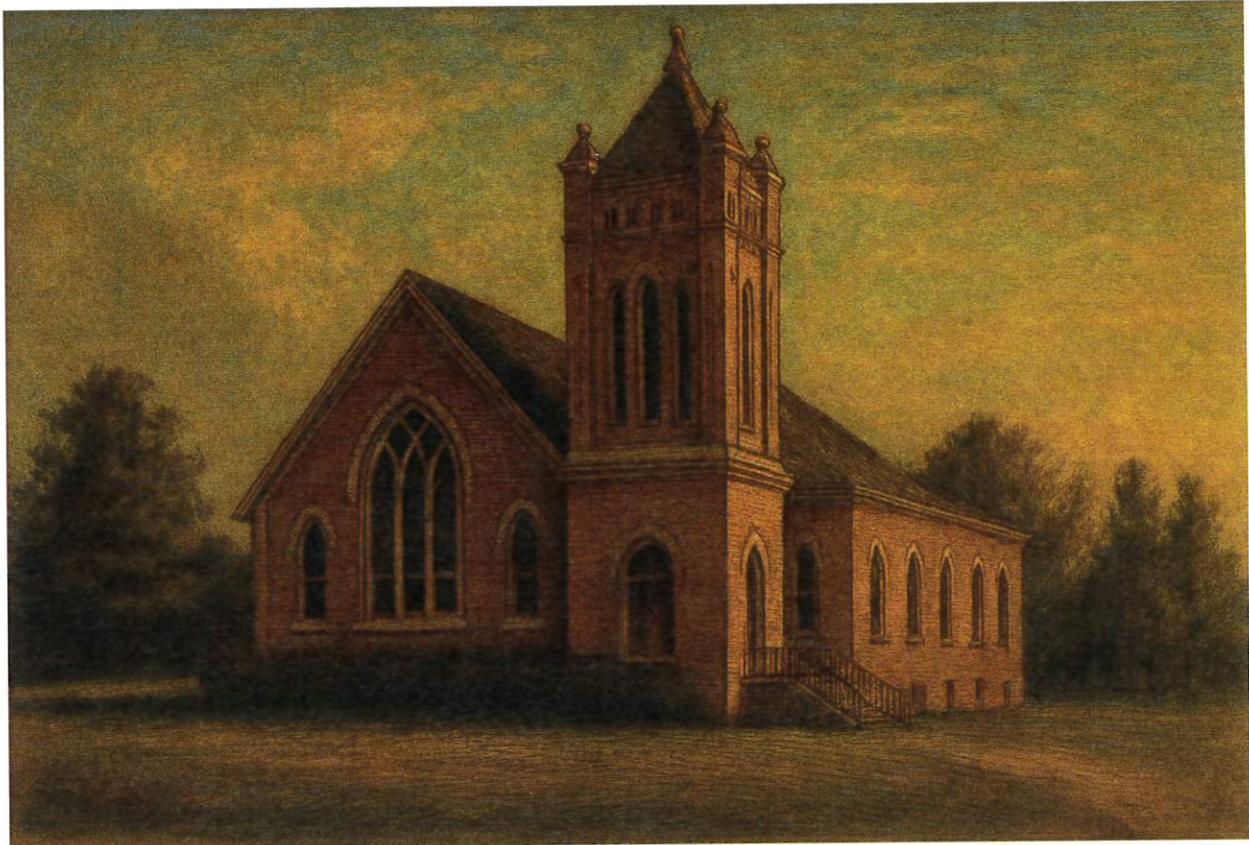
Union Community Church
175th Anniversary Celebration
Gastonia, North Carolina

November 9, 2025

This booklet is published to celebrate the 175th anniversary of Union Community Church, formed in 1842, established in 1850 within Lincoln County, which is now part of Gaston County, North Carolina.

It accompanies the forthcoming book: *Liberty and Union: A Story of Faith, Freedom, and the Ties that Bind a Nation*, by Gary L. McGinnis.

Dedication



To the Scots-Irish immigrants who first gathered on the red clay hills of the Union Community, between Catawba and Crowders Creek, with little more than faith and determination;

-to the men and women who kept that faith through war and hardship, revival and renewal;

-and to all who carry that same light forward, this work is humbly dedicated:

Their footsteps mark our path.

Their prayers still echo through the sanctuary walls.

Their hope is now ours to keep.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” — Hebrews 12:1

The 175th Anniversary of Union Community Church

Welcome, Dear Friends, Family, and Honored Guests,

Today we gather beneath the same Carolina sky that has sheltered this congregation since 1842. The years have changed the landscape around us. The forests and fields have given way to neighborhoods and schools, the hum of passing cars replaces the sound of wagons, but the heart of Union Church has remained steadfast.

For one hundred seventy-five years, men and women have come through these doors to worship, baptize their children, marry, mourn, and give thanks. Every hymn sung here carries a thread of their voices. Every prayer offered stands upon their faith.

We mark this anniversary in remembrance of the past and as a living testimony for our future. Union's story is not finished; it continues in each person who enters, each act of kindness, each generation that learns to love God and neighbor.

We give thanks to all who have served and all who still serve. We thank our pastors emeritus, elders, choir members, military veterans, Sunday-school teachers, congregants, and volunteers whose quiet labor built this house of worship. May this day remind us that we are part of something larger than ourselves: a communion of saints stretching back through the centuries and into God's future.

With gratitude and hope,

James Holeman

Rev. James Holeman, Pastor
Union Community Church (ECO)

The Road to Union

The road to Union Community Church has led to this moment of its one hundred seventy-fifth anniversary. What brings us here today began long before a single brick was laid for this sanctuary. It started in another time and on another shore, among the people who sought the liberty to worship God in freedom.

To understand the beginning of this road to Union, imagine the cold wind of the North Sea off the coast of Scotland. Envision the narrow lanes of St. Andrews Cathedral, as the bells toll, as they had for centuries, calling a restless nation to prayer. At that moment, imagine Scotland as it was in the sixteenth century, as a country in motion. Its people were poor but proud, its leaders uncertain, and its preachers alive with conviction. Out of that awakening came a faith strong enough to cross oceans and endure for generations. This is a faith whose echoes would one day be heard in these red-clay hills, in this sanctuary, in North Carolina.

This story begins with the reformers of Scotland, where the Holy Scripture was at odds with the word of kings, and the question was which authority was considered the highest. Their inspiration came from Geneva, where John Calvin taught that everyone stood equal before God. Scripture was the proper foundation of faith. His ideas found a voice in a fiery preacher named John Knox, whose sermons echoed through towns and villages from Edinburgh to the Highlands. He spoke plainly to farmers, merchants, and nobles alike, insisting that truth was not the property of princes.

In 1560, the Scottish Parliament acted with remarkable courage. After centuries of religious control from Rome, it embraced a new confession of faith. Parliament adopted the Scots Confession and declared Christ alone to be the head of the Church. That act, simple in form but revolutionary in meaning, gave birth to the Presbyterian Church. Its religious structure was democratic and orderly: ministers guided by elders, elders chosen from among the people, and congregations bound together by shared covenant rather than royal command.

The Presbyterian system suited the Scots. It matched their temperament and history as disciplined, independent, and practical. Yet faith seldom remains untouched by power. When the Stuart monarchs later sought to impose bishops on the Church (pronounced “Kirk,” in Scotland and Ulster, Ireland), the people resisted. They signed the National Covenant in 1638, some signing with their own blood, pledging to uphold their beliefs against interference from the crown or court. It was a solemn promise, written in a time when such promises could cost a life.

Many of the Covenanters who signed that document paid dearly. Some were hunted, others imprisoned or executed, but their cause endured. They believed that Christ, not the king, was head of the Church and that conscience could not be compelled. Their courage was deeply ingrained in the Scottish people and subsequent generations. From their struggle came a humble and unyielding faith that would travel far beyond the shores of Scotland.

Across the Sea

By the early 1600s, the faith that had taken hold in Scotland began to spread across the Irish Sea. King James I sought to strengthen his control over Ireland by encouraging Scottish settlers to occupy the northern province of Ulster, Ireland. For these families, the move promised fresh land and a new beginning. They packed what little they owned, such as tools, seed, livestock, and family Bibles, as they crossed the narrow channel in open boats. They found a countryside with rich soil and beauty, scarred by conflict and mistrust.

The Scots who came to Ulster, Ireland, brought their Presbyterian faith, love of hard work, and stubborn independence. They built small farms, fenced the fields, and erected meetinghouses on the hillsides. On Sundays, they gathered with neighbors to worship in simple buildings, often made of stone, timber, and thatch. The sermons were usually long, the music was simple, and their faith unadorned. Their strength lay in conviction rather than grandeur.

In time, these settlers became known as the Ulster-Scots or Scots-Irish. They were neither wholly Scottish nor wholly Irish, but something new. They were a people shaped by endurance and experience. They were loyal to their Presbyterian faith first, to king and country only as conscience allowed. For them, religion was not so much a Sunday affair as a way of living. The Bible was read daily. Education was valued as a means of knowing God's Word. Family and community life revolved around the church.

The peace they hoped to find in Ireland proved uncertain. The English crown favored the established Church of England and required all ministers to conform to its rule. Presbyterian preachers were banned, their churches closed, their marriages and baptisms declared invalid. When ministers refused to yield, they were imprisoned or driven into hiding. Congregations met secretly in barns, glens, and along the rocky shorelines, determined to keep their covenant faith alive.

The Scots-Irish learned to rely on one another. Hardship forged their sense of fellowship. They endured poor harvests, high rents, and the constant suspicion of the authorities. They also experienced the heartbreak of famine and the repeated sense of being strangers in their land. Over time, a saying emerged among them: "We have no community here." For many, the words meant they would have to leave.

To the New World

The first ships left Ulster, Ireland, in the 1680s, small and overcrowded, bound for the American colonies. The Atlantic crossing was perilous. Disease, hunger, and storms were constant threats. Yet they continued to come. In 1739, Gabriel Johnston, the royal governor of North Carolina and a native Scotsman, encouraged Scots to settle in North Carolina and later granted them a ten-year tax exemption for doing so. Between 1717 and 1775, more than a quarter of a million Scots-Irish Presbyterians would make the voyage, one of the largest migrations of

the eighteenth century. They sailed from Belfast and Londonderry, landing in Philadelphia, Charleston, and the Chesapeake. Most brought little beyond their hands, families, and Presbyterian faith.

The American frontier offered hardship and hope for those who survived the crossing. They found fertile land for farming, freedom to worship, and the chance to build a future free from the reach of landlords and bishops. They carried three traits that would leave a lasting mark on the colonies: a devotion to education, a fierce sense of independence, and a commitment to the Presbyterian system of shared leadership.

By 1706, Presbyterian ministers in America had formed the first presbytery in Philadelphia, creating a structure of church governance that mirrored the Kirk of Scotland. They built schools and seminaries, trained new ministers, and sent them into the backcountry to serve the growing settlements. From the meetinghouses of Pennsylvania, their faith spread southward down the valleys of the Blue Ridge Mountains and beyond.

The Great Wagon Road

The old Indian trading route they traveled became known as the Great Wagon Road. It wound through Pennsylvania into the Shenandoah Valley and through the Carolina piedmont, a long artery of movement and settlement. Along this road rolled the covered wagons of Scots-Irish families, creaking under the weight of barrels, tools, bedding, and the occasional spinning wheel. Inside were the Psalms of David, catechisms worn by use, and generations of memories.

They traveled in groups for safety, setting out before dawn and camping by streams at night. Children walked beside the wagons. Older people rode on benches lashed to the back. They followed the same rhythm daily, drawn by the promise of fertile land and a life shaped by their labor. Wherever they stopped, they built a meetinghouse first, a school next, and a graveyard last. The pattern repeated itself from the Susquehanna River down to the Catawba.

The Carolina Frontier

By the 1740s, the Scots-Irish wagons that once rolled through Pennsylvania were finding their way into the Carolina piedmont. They followed the line of the Catawba River, crossing into the lands then known as the “New Acquisition District,” a vast stretch of frontier wilderness. The District was established in the 1770s and included areas now part of York County, South Carolina, and parts of Lincoln, Mecklenburg, and Gaston Counties in North Carolina. The land was fertile and plentiful, and the King’s agents offered generous tracts to settlers willing to work it. For many, the long journey south had ended. They had found their home.

The families who came here carried the same qualities that had sustained them in Scotland and Ireland: thrift, courage, and faith. They were farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and millers, and they wasted no time turning the wilderness into a community. They cleared fields,

raised log houses, and planted corn and wheat. They traded with the Catawba Indians, built grist mills along the creeks, and sent word north that the land was good.

But above all else, they built churches. The services were all-day affairs, the preaching was plainspoken, often in Gaelic, and they usually sang psalms without accompaniment. Solos were frequently sung in the spirit and tradition of sean-nós, exclusively oral, without music, and it remains customarily so, as it was the faith of their fathers, carried now into a new world.

Among the earliest of these congregations within the New Acquisition District was Bethel Presbyterian Church, organized near present-day Clover, South Carolina, in 1764. It became a spiritual anchor for the settlers of York District and some families who would one day form Union Church. Bethel's people were much like those who filled the pews of Sugar Creek (also spelled Sugaw Creek) and Steele Creek on the North Carolina side of the line. They were mainly Scots-Irish pioneers who carried both Bible and rifle, unafraid of hard work or hardship.

Sundays on the frontier were as demanding as the weekdays. Families rose before dawn, traveling miles by wagon or horseback to reach the meetinghouse. They brought food for the noon hour and stayed the day. The Sabbath was not a formality but a necessity, a pause that gave meaning to the week's labor. Ministers, few in number, rode long circuits between congregations. A preacher's arrival was an eventful occasion, and his words, often delivered from the pulpit of a rough-hewn log church, were received with deep attention.

The Presbyterian influence spread quickly across the backcountry. Churches were established in the valleys and along rivers like Steele Creek and Crowders Creek, including Olney and Beersheba Churches. These congregations were more than centers of worship; they were schools, community halls, and sometimes places of refuge. They offered a moral order in a world that was still half-wilderness.

By the time of the American Revolution, the region between the Catawba Creek and Crowders Creek was well settled. Many of the men who later served as elders or deacons in Union Church were descendants of the early settlers. They had inherited their faith and independence from their ancestors. When war came, they were quick to act. Their pastors preached liberty of conscience, and their members took up arms for the cause of independence. King George and his men said that the American Revolution was but a "Presbyterian Rebellion," and there was truth in the remark.

After the Revolution, the Carolinas grew rapidly. New counties were formed, towns surveyed, and trade expanded along new roads and rivers. York County, South Carolina, became a hub of settlement, and from it radiated smaller communities where Presbyterian families gathered to worship across the state line in North Carolina. Mecklenburg and the newly created Gaston County shared much of the same blood and faith. The Scots-Irish Presbyterians who lived along the ridges between Crowders Creek and the South Fork of the Catawba River formed one such community.

They were people of quiet determination. They prized education and independence, but most of all, they prized the fellowship of believers. As their families grew and the distance to the nearest church increased, they began to meet in homes and barns for worship. One of these humble and sincere gatherings was the start of what would eventually become Union Presbyterian Church.

A Church Takes Root



After America gained independence from Great Britain, the Presbyterians returned to building. New churches appeared along every trail and river crossing. Each bore the hallmarks of its faith: simple design, sturdy timber, and a pulpit placed squarely at the center. It was not ornament that mattered, but substance. In the Carolinas, the same structure of elders and ministers that had guided the church in Scotland now provided order for American frontier life.

By the 1830s, the early settlers in the Union community began meeting more regularly. The land was becoming more settled, and nearby towns were growing. They had worshiped with neighboring congregations, such as Bethel and Mill Creek, for years, but desired a church closer to their homes. In 1843, some pioneers built a small brush arbor on a ridge between Crowders

Creek and Catawba Creek. The ground was high and shaded by oak, longleaf pine, and hickory trees. They named it "Union."

The name spoke of purpose. Union was meant to signify their fellowship and covenant in union with God and one another in faith and labor. The first members were drawn from families who had tilled these same fields for generations. The church became the center of community life. Baptisms, weddings, funerals, and revivals occurred within its boundaries or beneath nearby trees.

The ministers who served Union in those early years came on horseback, traveling from one congregation to another. Services were long, but no one complained. To provide more shelter, a log cabin soon replaced the brush arbor. Through it all, faith was their anchor. In that log sanctuary of rough-hewn timbers, the descendants of Scotland and Ireland again found strength that had carried their forebears across oceans and through centuries of change.

Union Independent Presbyterian Church

Founded on Saturday, November 9, 1850

The organizing pastor was the Reverend Joseph O'Daniel, M.D.

Organizing Elders were Daniel Franklin Ragan, Robert Henry Craig, and George Riddle Bryson

The Founding Members were as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Eliza Jane Berry | William Darby Glenn |
| Frances E. Bryson | Jane Herdman |
| Harriett E. Bryson | Margaret Herdman |
| William P. Bryson | Mary H. Herdman |
| James Milton Craig | Margaret Moore |
| John H. Craig | Phebe Catherine Moore |
| Martha Permelia Craig | Daniel Maxwell Nolen |
| Mary Catherine Craig | James F. Nolen |
| Mary Cox Craig | Margaret A. Nolen |
| Sarah Neil Craig | Oliver M. Nolen |
| James S. Fewel | Susan Nolen |
| Jane Elvira Fewel | Winslow W. Nolen |
| Mary Ann L. Ford | Samuel M. Pursley |

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Elizabeth Gingles | Sarah M.S.B. Pursley |
| Elisabeth M. Glenn | Robert Martin Ratchford |
| Elizabeth Ann Glenn | David Ward |
| Enos Berry Glenn | Minerva W. Ward |
| Frances N.C. Glenn | |

What Happened to the Charter Members?

By Rev. David Carriker with the Author's additional information

A thorough search has been made in the Bethel, New Hope, and Goshen records (1822–1866), and none of the charter members are found on their rolls. The Olney records were destroyed in an 1888 fire. Thirteen of the charter members lived in or were from Mill Creek (SC), and some were from Olney. This is important because the Mill Creek Presbyterian Church had just folded one year before the Union beginnings, and the charter minister served all three churches. It is equally interesting to see what names are not on the charter list.

Joseph O'Daniel, M.D., D.D. (42) was the charter pastor of Union. He had been pastor here since 1843, before the organization. He had been the Olney and Mill Creek pastor since 1837, and later included Hephzibah in his care. He died one year, one month, one week, and five days after the organization. Joseph and Esther O'Daniel had lost two sons before coming to Union; she lost two more during the Civil War; a fifth son did not marry; one final son (Joseph Leander O'Daniel) did marry and is the great-grandfather of Junius Eugene O'Daniel, Jr. Esther remarried in 1861 and moved to Arkansas.

Daniel Franklin Ragan (42) was one of three Presbyterians on the original committee of the Union Meeting House, along with two other Baptists. He was already married to Harriet Frances Glenn (29). She was raised in Mill Creek (SC), and her parents were from Bethel Presbyterian Church. Harriet had a sister (Elizabeth Ann Glenn) and brother (Enos Berry Glenn) who were also charter members, and four other brothers and sisters who later joined Union. However, Harriet, her five sons, and four daughters did not join Union. One daughter did: Harriet Rebecca Ragan, who married William Richard Harrison. The Ragans and Harrisons are buried at Union and have the following descendants:

Great-grandchildren: Daniel F. Harrison, Jr.; Rebecca Ragan Dameron, Charles, Don, Dick, and R.P. Jr. Harrison.

Great-great-grandchildren: Holly, Katherine, and Julie Harrison.

Robert Henry Craig (51) was already married to Sarah Neil Craig (46), a charter member. They had two boys and two girls who were also charter members (James, John, Mary, and Martha), as well as two other sons. They were the most prominent family in the new church. Only one of the Craig children has descendants in the church (see the statement on Martha Permelia Craig [Henderson]). William Robert Kendrick, Jennifer Kendrick Nelson, and Leslie Kendrick Harris are all descendants of Robert Craig's eighth child, Margaret Ann (1839-1917), who married James Madison Kendrick (1839-1873), buried at Union, and served in the Civil War. Margaret is buried at Bethel with her first husband, James E. Quinn (1836-1865). The other Kendrick family descendants of Union Church members include William Daniel Kendrick, Elizabeth Grace Kendrick, Matthew Robert Kendrick, Charles Wyatt Nelson, Emma Kate Nelson, Ella Ruth Nelson, Ensley Sue Nelson, Emory Lillian Harris, and Gracyn Meredith Harris.

In six months, Mary Catherine Craig (19) married Oliver M. Nolen (25), another charter member. She was the daughter of Robert H. and Sarah Neil Craig, who were also charter members and had three siblings who were charter members (John, James, and Martha). Oliver was the son of William A. Nolen and had three other brothers (James, Winslow, and Maxwell) and a sister-in-law (Margaret), both of whom were also charter members. Mary and Oliver supposedly moved out west. Two other Nolens went to Arkansas.

James Milton Craig (24) had been married 1½ years to Mary E. Cox (19), another charter member. They lived on Mill Creek (SC), but were married at Catawba Creek by her father, A.B. Cox. James was the son of two other charter members, Robert and Sarah Craig. He had three other siblings who were charter members (John, Mary, and Martha). James was a captain in the NC Militia and fought in the Mexican-American War. During the Civil War, he was a private in Regiment 23: Company H. James and Mary are buried at Union, but had transferred their membership to New Hope after the Civil War. They have no descendants at Union. They lived on Mill Creek in SC.

Martha Permelia Craig (15) later married Augustus Leonard Henderson. Both of them are buried at Union. She is the daughter of two other charter members, Robert and Sarah Craig. She had three other siblings (John, James, and Mary), a sister-in-law (Mary Craig), and a brother-in-law (Oliver M. Nolen), all of whom were charter members. The Hendersons lived in the old Henderson house on Meek Road. Their descendants are: great-grandchildren C.C. Moorehead, G.W. Wilson Jr., James R. Henderson, and Nell H. Riddle; great-great-grandchildren Billy Wilson and Len Wilson.

George Riddle Bryson (43) was already married to Harriet E. Bryson (31). They already had five children, three of whom later became members of Union. George had a brother who was also a charter member (William) and two sisters who later joined (Jane and Sarah). He also had three brothers (John, James, and Hugh) and a sister (Ruth) who were members of or related to Union Baptist Church, which met in the same log meetinghouse with Union Presbyterian Church. Before this generation, all Brysons (or Brisons) were spelled "Brison." In this generation, the Presbyterians chose "Bryson" and the Baptists kept "Brison." George and

Harriet, three children, two sisters, and two brothers are all buried at Union. Even though the father of these Brisons and two sisters were previously members at New Hope, none of the charter Brysons were.

William P. Brison (44) was already married to another charter member, Frances E. Brison (33). They are buried at Union. They left Union Presbyterian for Union Baptist before 1860 and retained the old spelling. He had a brother who was also a charter member (George) and two sisters who later joined (Jane and Sarah). He had three other brothers (John, James, and Hugh) and a sister (Ruth) who were members of or related to Union Baptist, which met in the same log meetinghouse. All four of their children were members of Union Presbyterian Church.

James S. Fewel (54) married Jane Elvira Ardrey Fewel (51), another charter member. They lived on a 700-acre farm in Mill Creek (SC). They had five children, none of whom joined Union Church. James was an ensign in the 5th Regiment of the Detached Militia of NC in 1814. They moved west in the 1860s, but Elvira came back in 1868. She rejoined Union Church with three other Fewel women in 1869 and had two infants baptized. In 1873, she moved back to Mississippi.

Elizabeth Gingles was a charter member in 1850. She was probably the wife of either Andrew J. Gingles of Mill Creek (SC) [age 18] or Ephraim D. Thompson of Mill Creek (SC) [age 32]. Nothing else is known of her. If she were married to E.D. Thompson, Sally Thompson Kendrick McGinnis is her descendant. There is a female Gingles on the Union Church rolls, married to Ephram Davidson Thompson, also on the church rolls. Ephram is the great-great-grandfather of Sally and her descendants.

John Henry Craig (21) was the son of Robert and Sarah Craig, both of whom were charter members. John's wife did not join Union Church, but he had six children baptized here (1867–1880). He transferred to First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia in 1882.

Margaret A. Nolen (25) was the wife of William M. Nolen. She was a sister-in-law to four Nolen brothers, all of whom were also charter members (Oliver M., James F., Winslow W., and D. Maxwell). Her death and burial are not recorded.

Dr. James F. Nolen (23) was one of five brothers, four of whom were charter members (Oliver, Dr. Winslow, Maxwell, and Dr. James). Before moving to Arkansas, he was married by the Rev. R.Y. Russell (10/3/1865) to Ione Sadler. He is also a brother-in-law to Margaret A. Nolen, a charter member.

Dr. Winslow W. Nolen (18) was one of four Nolen brothers on the charter list (Dr. James, Oliver, and Maxwell). He is a brother-in-law to Margaret A. Nolen, another charter member. He was a Regiment 16: Company M lieutenant during the Civil War. Dr. Winslow W. Nolen moved to New Hope and then Lincolnton after 1868. His death date and burial site are unknown.

Daniel Maxwell Nolen (15) was one of four charter-member Nolens (Oliver, Dr. Winslow, Dr. James). Nothing else is known of him.

Susan Nolen is not found in any other document in Gaston/York Counties. The membership roster states she went to Arkansas (possibly with Dr. James F. Nolen?), but is not found with the Nolen family.

David Ward (37) married Minerva W. Ward (35) in 1850 and had six children then. Their death dates and burial sites are not known.

Enos Berry Glenn (32) was related to other charter members: a brother to Elizabeth Ann Glenn, brother-in-law to Daniel F. Ragan, and uncle to William Davis Glenn and Frances Naomi Caroline Glenn. He grew up in Mill Creek (SC) and moved to Gaston County. His wife (Juliet Wallace Glenn) had died three years before Union's organization, and he died three years after. He had remarried in 1847, but neither of his wives joined Union. Three of his children and four brothers and sisters later joined.

Elisabeth M. Boyd Glenn (50) is buried at Bethel with her husband, William. He did not join Union, nor did any of their nine children. She was a first cousin by marriage to Enos Berry Glenn, Elizabeth Ann Glenn (Baldwin), and Eliza Jane Berry, and related to William Davis Glenn, Frances Naomi Caroline Glenn (Moore), and Daniel F. Ragan. Before dying in 1870, she watched all seven of her sons and one son-in-law fight in the Civil War. Three came home. She is the only charter member with descendants in Union who still have the same name: D. Fabian Glenn and Dana Glenn. Elisabeth M. Boyd Glenn lived on Mill Creek (SC).

Samuel M. Pursley (25) was already married to Sarah M.S. Brison (35) in 1850. Her brother, James H. (Union Baptist Church), raised him. He died during the Civil War on March 29, 1865, in Richmond, Virginia. It seems that they had one child (J.B.). Both Sarah and J.B. are buried at Union. She is the sister of two other charter members (George and William) and two brothers in the Baptist Church (James and Hugh). Samuel's brother David joined Union one year before Sarah's death. He had married Sarah's sister-in-law (Ruth Brison) in 1854.

Phoebe Catherine Moore (18) was the daughter of Margaret Hayes Moore (48), another charter member. They were related to Frances N.C. Glenn, who married John Moore, the son of Margaret. She was married to Walter Wisher Moore, who never joined Union. Catherine married Abbs Lackey. Both families moved to Georgia, but Margaret moved back to Union. Their death dates and burial sites are unknown. Margaret is the great-great-grandmother of Diane Glenn, Fonda Hargis, and Sandra Hoyle, as well as the great-great-great-grandmother of Greg Ramsey and Dana Glenn.

Elizabeth Ann Glenn (23) was the sister of Enos Berry Glenn, sister-in-law to Daniel F. Ragan, and aunt to William D. Glenn and Frances N.C. Glenn, all charter members. She was raised in Mill Creek, SC, and married William Baldwin. She had four other siblings who were early members, but nothing else is known of her.

Jane Herdman (21), Margaret Herdman (17), and Mary H. Herdman (16) were daughters of Dr. and Rosannah Herdman. The parents did not join Union, even though the mother is buried here. Dr. Herdman died between 1840 and 1850. The family arrived in New York between 1830 and 1840 and owned three slaves. Margaret died in 1861 and is buried at Union. Mary died before 1866, and Jane transferred to Bethel in 1885 and died in 1897.

Mary Ann Lewis Ford (32) was the daughter of Ann Lewis (b. 1780) and had married Eli Martin Ford Sr. She died in 1901 and is buried in the Lewis Cemetery.

Frances Naomi Caroline Glenn (15) later married John Hayes Moore. Her in-laws were Margaret and Phoebe Moore. She was the sister of William D. Glenn, niece of Enos Berry Glenn and Elizabeth Ann Glenn, and the sister-in-law of Daniel F. Ragan, all charter members. She was raised in Mill Creek (SC). She moved to Rome, Georgia, with her five sons (James W., John W., Newton W., George F., and Smiley).

Robert Martin Ratchford (26) became an elder in 1853 and served for 54 years. His family did not join Union, and he did not marry. He was a major in the army during the Civil War. He was also wounded at Gettysburg, PA, and became a POW. He was the brother of Union's pastor during the war and is buried at Union.

William Davis Glenn (17) was a brother to Frances Glenn, a nephew to Enos B. Glenn and Elizabeth Ann Glenn, and a brother-in-law to Daniel F. Ragan, all of whom were charter members. He lived in Mill Creek (SC). He transferred to Olney in 1884 and died in 1911, being buried at Oakwood.

Eliza Jane Berry (18) lived in Mill Creek (SC). She was the daughter of Eliezer Milton Berry, who joined in 1872. The church "lost sight" of her.

A Legacy of Perseverance

The story of Union Community Church is not only the congregation's story. It is the story of a people who carried a covenant through exile, migration, and frontier hardship to a new land where they could live and worship freely. It is also a story of character, of the men and women who believed that faith and education were the foundations of liberty and union.

Union Church endured wars, famine, and the Great Depression. It survived the Civil War, Reconstruction, World Wars, and the long years that followed, always returning to its simple purpose: to preach the Gospel and serve its community. Generations of families have worshiped here, their names now inscribed on stones that mark the cemetery and the memory of the church itself.

The world around Union has changed. The mills that once drew workers to the area have quieted, and the farmlands have given way to neighborhoods and schools. Yet on Sunday mornings, the church bell still rings, calling the faithful to worship. Its sound carries over the same fields where the first families knelt to pray in 1842. The pews may be newer, and the hymns sung from printed books instead of memory, but the spirit is the same.

The Road That Endures

The road from the Scottish Reformation to a small hilltop in Gaston County is one of the longest journeys in the history of faith. It began with a belief that no earthly power should stand between a person and the Word of God. That belief survived kings and wars, crossed oceans, and took root in the hard soil of the Carolina frontier. Each generation renewed it in its own way.

Union Community Church stands as one chapter in that larger story. For 175 years, its congregation has gathered to read the same Scriptures, sing the same Psalms, and give thanks to the same Providence that guided their ancestors. They are heirs to a tradition that values education, liberty, union, and service. Their faith has been tested by time and strengthened by use.

On November 9, 2025, as the congregation gathers to celebrate its one 175th anniversary, it will be surrounded by the presence of all who came before it. The stones in the cemetery, the pulpit in the sanctuary, the baptismal font, the communion table, and the bell above them are reminders of a journey that began in the highlands of Scotland and found a home in the Carolinas. It is a story of faith carried across centuries, renewed in every generation, and still alive today.

The First Years

Word of Union spread quickly through the countryside. Within a year, new families attended services, arriving by horseback or wagon along rutted trails that wound through the forests and grassy lands. Children learned their letters and grammar from the Psalms. Neighbors shared crops and stories after worship beneath the open sky.

Their ministers were circuit riders who came when the weather allowed. On those Sundays, the meetinghouse often filled shortly after sunrise. The preacher's voice carried beyond the doorway, through the scent of split pine and candle wax. The sermons were long, but no one minded. Faith was the center of their week, and these gatherings tied the scattered homesteads into a single community.

When rain swelled the creek and wagons could not pass, the congregation met in homes. They read from the same worn Bible and prayed for guidance. By 1850, the membership roll listed dozens of names now carved in stone in the churchyard. They had planted crops and a church, and each season tested their endurance.

Union Church became a landmark on the old road between York and Gastonia. Travelers paused there for rest and news. Within its church walls, weddings joined young couples who would raise their children in the same pews. The first Union funeral hymn also rose from the church, the sound and spiritual emotion carried out over the hills.

The foundation stone and some recycled timber from the first wooden structure of Union Church still lie beneath or within the sanctuary today. Every board and nail bears the imprint of their faith, steady and unhurried, built to last. From that modest beginning, a story of endurance and devotion would unfold across the next one hundred seventy-five years.

Through War and Reconstruction

The War Comes to Union

By the summer of 1861, life at Union Presbyterian Church moved to the uncertain rhythm of a nation at war. The men who had once gathered to mend fences or raise barns now met to shoulder muskets and bid their families farewell. Robert Craig's grandsons marched with the Carolina regiments. Younger boys, not yet of age, drilled with stick rifles in the fields and farms beyond the churchyard. Mothers packed small parcels of food and Scripture verses, tying them with ribbon before the wagons rolled east.

On Sunday mornings, the bell still rang. The same voices that once sang Thanksgiving Psalms now joined in petition hymns. Letters arrived from distant battlefields, such as Gettysburg, Shiloh, Petersburg, and Bentonville, some written in a careful hand, and others barely legible through the stains of rain and dirt. Each was read aloud in the meetinghouse, followed by silence and prayer.

The war reached deep into every household. Fields went untilled for want of men. Horses were taken for the Army. Yet even in hardship, the people of Union held to their worship. When the roof leaked, they spread oilcloth over the pews. When candles grew scarce, they gathered earlier in the day. The minister often spoke of perseverance, of faith tested by fire. His sure and straightforward words comforted those who feared they might not see peace again.

When the conflict ended, the hills were quieter. Men returned home worn by years of marching. Some never returned at all, their names later inscribed on family stones that still stand among the pines.

Rebuilding Faith and Community

The years that followed were lean ones. The land bore the scars of neglect, and hearts carried heavier wounds still. However, where many saw only loss, the congregation of Union Church saw work to be done.

In 1867, the church was repaired, its roof straightened, its pulpit sanded and stained anew. Neighbors shared what little lumber they could spare. Women mended the hymnals and sewed new curtains for the windows. Each restoration act was an act of faith, a statement that hope would outlast despair.

The Reconstruction era tested more than the land's recovery; it tested the community's character. Freedmen worked the surrounding farms, and black and white children played near the same fields where their fathers had toiled. From the pulpit came reminders that charity must be larger than memory, that the Gospel belonged to every soul willing to hear it.

By 1870, Union Church once again stood as a center of its community. The sound of hammer and saw gave way to singing on Sunday mornings. A new generation learned the stories of Abraham and Moses, of liberty won through endurance. When the crops began to yield again, the first sheaves were sometimes placed on the communion table in gratitude.

From those uncertain years, a renewed strength grew. Once battered by war, Faith settled back into daily rhythm, steady, resilient, and grateful. The people of Union had learned what their forebears already knew: that no storm, however fierce, could sweep away a church built on conviction and bound by grace.

Faith in the Modern Age

The Turn of a New Century

By the dawn of the twentieth century, the clay roads that once carried wagons were lined with telephone poles and the first rattling automobiles. The new cotton mills brought new families to the region. In their company came a fresh generation of Presbyterians, young men and women who worked long hours in the spinning rooms and returned on Sunday mornings to the quiet order of Union Church.

In 1886, the old log structure was replaced with a frame building of painted wood and tall windows that poured light across the pews. The congregation raised the funds, one dollar and one nail at a time. The new manse was built in 1892. One of the First hymns sung there was probably "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." Its melody carried out through the doors and over the fields, as if to announce that Union was ready for another century.

Electric light arrived not long after. The switch was thrown for the first time during an evening service, and the glow of the bulbs drew astonished smiles from those who had known only candlelight. The world beyond the church was changing quickly—railroads, telegraphs, and the spread of public schools—but the rhythm of worship remained steady: Scripture, song, and prayer. The constancy of faith allowed the people to meet a restless new age with calm purpose.

The Bell Rings Again

Union grew into a gathering place for the community through the following decades. Women's circles organized missions and charity drives. The youth built campfires and sang the old hymns beside the new gospel songs. During the Depression, farmers left baskets of corn and potatoes on the pastor's porch so no family would go hungry. When the world wars came, the congregation once again sent its sons and daughters across the ocean, their names read each Sunday from the pulpit.

In the autumn of 1945, word reached the church that the war had ended. On a bright Sunday morning, the bell was rung until its sound echoed over the ridge and down the valley. Families wept and embraced in the churchyard. That same day, a simple prayer was offered: "Lord, grant us peace, and keep us faithful." It became a tradition that every year on that date, the bell would toll in remembrance of those who served.

The years of recovery brought new hope. A Sunday school wing was added, and the first organ was installed. Choirs formed, and the churchyard filled with children's laughter after worship. Union had entered the modern age without losing its character. Its people had found a way to hold fast to their heritage while meeting the future with open hearts.

Their faith, once measured in hard labor and long days, was now expressed in service, music, and fellowship, a living testimony that the strength of Union lay not in its buildings, but in the steadfastness of its people.

From Reunion to Renewal

The Presbyterian Reunion of 1983

The early 1980s brought a season of reflection across the Presbyterian world. After more than a century of division, two great branches of the church—the United Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in the United States—voted to reunite. For many, it felt like the closing of a long and complicated chapter that had begun in the days following the Civil War. Across the country, congregations stood together again beneath a single banner of faith.

At Union, the news arrived with quiet optimism. The congregation had long held to its identity as steadfast and welcoming, rooted in the old doctrines yet open to new fellowship. Members gathered in the sanctuary one Sunday morning as the pastor read aloud reunion words. When the hymn “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” was sung, it carried a weight of history, an acknowledgment that faith, like family, often requires patience and grace.

The church grounds improved during those years, and a new generation stepped into leadership. The voices of children echoed through the education building on weekday afternoons. The women’s circles supported mission work both at home and abroad. Elders met around polished oak tables to plan, pray, and care for those in need. The spirit of cooperation, born from reunion, fostered renewed life within the congregation.

Beyond the churchyard, the world was changing. The Cold War was ending. Technology and travel were shrinking distances. Yet amid a hurried age, Union’s sanctuary remained a still point in the turning world, where neighbors could pause, hear familiar Scripture, and remember who they were.

A Community Renewed

The decades that followed brought steady growth. Marriages joined families that had once known each other only through the Sunday handshake. Choirs grew larger, youth groups livelier, and the Christmas Eve services filled every pew. The sound of the bell marked baptisms, funerals, and celebrations alike, its tone unchanged through the generations.

Pastors came and went, each leaving a mark of their ministry. Among them were the Rev. R. Flay Riddle, who guided Union through the mid-century years; Rev. David Carriker, whose sermons on perseverance and compassion shaped a generation; and, later, Rev. Jim Cockerham, as an interim pastor, who witnessed the renovation of the sanctuary that still stands today. Each pastor brought new insight, yet the same devotion to Scripture and community endured.

By the turn of the new millennium, Union was a church and a gathering of families bound by shared memory. Fellowship dinners, choir performances, and youth mission trips stitched together the old and the young. The church began to look outward again, to local ministries, global missions, and new partnerships that carried the Gospel beyond its doors.

When asked what held the congregation together, an elder said, “We’ve seen the world change, but the Word has not.” That conviction became Union Church’s compass. Through every season of challenge and change, it guided the church from reunion toward renewal, preparing the way for the next great chapter in its story.

A New Covenant: Joining ECO

A Time of Discernment

In the early years of the twenty-first century, conversations that had long stirred within the national Presbyterian church began to reach Union's doorstep. Across the denomination, congregations wrestled with questions of theology, mission, and the meaning of covenant faithfulness. For Union Church, these were often matters of politics and preference but mostly of conscience and conviction. The elders gathered in session in discernment and prayer. They sought clarity in Scripture and unity in spirit.

Session minutes from those years record words both measured and heartfelt. Members spoke of love for their heritage, respect for the wider church, and concern for future generations. They did not move quickly, nor did they act alone. Letters were exchanged with presbytery representatives; congregational meetings were held in the fellowship hall, where neighbors discussed what it meant to remain faithful in changing times.

Through those discussions ran a steady theme: that truth and grace were sometimes in opposition, but most often as companions. The call to love God fully and one's neighbor as oneself was not to be redefined, only renewed. The people of Union understood that every generation must decide how it will carry the light handed to it. Their forebears had faced war, scarcity, and rebuilding; now they faced questions of spiritual direction. In the quiet of the sanctuary, they listened for God's voice and resolved to follow wherever it might lead.

A Church Reborn

After years of prayer, study, and discernment, Union Presbyterian Church voted to seek dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and join the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). The decision was not made in haste. It came as the culmination of years of reflection and respectful dialogue. On July 26, 2025, the presbytery formally granted the request, affirming Union's continued witness in the Reformed tradition.

Union Church entered into a new covenant family, continuing its past and reaffirming the enduring faith that had carried it through generations. In that moment, the people of Union stood together once more, grateful for the path behind them and confident in the path ahead.

A Walk Among the Witnesses



The Stones Speak

The cemetery beside Union Church is older than the brick sanctuary above it. Long before the first hymn echoed from wooden walls, these fields were already set apart as sacred ground. Here rest the men and women who built the early homes, tilled the land, and shaped the community that would become Gastonia. Their names are written in stone, but their stories still live with the church members they helped to raise.

Each marker tells of labor, faith, and endurance. Some verses are chiseled in stone by hand, their letters softened by time and weather. Others carry only a name and a date, yet each represents a chapter of the larger story of Union Church. Together they form a kind of silent congregation, a gathering still surrounding the living.

As we walk these grounds today, we remember them not as distant figures but as neighbors whose work we continue. The grass beneath our feet once bore the steps of their children. The oaks and pines that shade the graves were young saplings when they stood here in worship and song. This is their testament, and through it, their voices remain.

Colonel Thomas Neel (1730–1779)

The life of Colonel Thomas Neel reaches back to the nation's founding struggle. A soldier of the Revolution and one of York County's earliest patriots, Neel commanded local militia under General Thomas Sumter during the campaign for independence. He was among those who gathered near this very ground to defend liberty at significant personal risk.

Colonel Neel fell in battle in 1779, but his example endured among the Scots-Irish settlers who followed him southward from Pennsylvania into the Carolina backcountry. His name appears in the early records of Bethel Church and among those who helped establish a network of Presbyterian congregations stretching from York to Crowders Creek.

His descendants would later stand among the founders of Union Church, carrying forward the conviction that faith and freedom are bound together by duty. When we pass his resting place at Bethel, we remember not only a soldier, but a man whose courage helped light the path for those who would build a church and a nation. Today, some of Colonel Neel's descendants continue their active membership at Union Church. Billy Wilson and Sally Thompson Kendrick McGinnis, and children, are direct descendants of Colonel Neel.

Henry Craig (1728–1807)

A patriot, craftsman, farmer, and patriarch, Henry Craig was born and baptised in Scotland, immigrated to America, and lived long on the frontier of York District, South Carolina. His land lay near Crowders Creek, where Union Church would one day rise. Family tradition holds that Craig was among the earliest Presbyterians to worship in the area, gathering neighbors for prayer long before the Union meetinghouse was built.

Henry Craig's grave at Bethel Presbyterian Church stands as one of the oldest links in the chain of heritage connecting those early settlers from Scotland and Ireland to Union's founding generation.

His son, Robert Henry Craig (1799-1875), was among the founding members and first elders of Union Church, serving as stewards of the congregation's infancy. His wife Sarah Neel Boyd was the great-granddaughter of Colonel Thomas Neel. He and his wife are buried at Union Church. Through their family lines, Henry and Robert Craig and their descendants built a lasting legacy of service and steadfastness that still shapes the Union community today.

Daniel Franklin Ragan (1808–1872)

Daniel Ragan belonged to the first generation born after the Revolution, when the frontier had become farmland and the region's families sought permanence after years of hardship. He was one of Union's first three founding Elders. A farmer, magistrate, and respected leader, Ragan chaired the Gaston County Court and later served in the North Carolina House of Commons.

He was also a man of faith. Records and family accounts credit him as a founder of Union Church and one of the voices that guided its early organization. The Ragans helped secure the land, build the first log sanctuary, and maintain the surrounding burial ground.

When Ragan died in 1872, his family placed a simple stone at his grave, marked only by his name and years. Yet his memorial is the congregation he helped found, a living witness to his belief that faith, education, and public service must work together.

Reverend George A. Sparrow (1845–1922)

Born in a different century yet moved by the same calling, Reverend George A. Sparrow served as pastor of Union during the early decades of the twentieth century. He came into the ministry shortly after the Civil War, when rural churches were striving to meet the challenges of modern life. Under his guidance, Union strengthened its mission work, expanded Sunday school programs, and deepened its role in the surrounding community.

Sparrow was known for his quiet strength and clarity of speech. Parishioners recalled that he spoke plainly, convinced that Scripture was best understood when lived rather than debated. His years of service helped prepare Union for the transitions ahead, ensuring that the congregation entered the modern era grounded in faith and purpose.

Many of Rev. Sparrow's current living descendants are attending members of Union Church; Frank Suggs; Glenn Sparrow and his children, Emily Tsuikes, and Steven Sparrow, and grandchildren Laurice Tsuikus; George R. Rathchford and his granddaughter Emery; Sally McGinnis and her children Jennifer Nelson, and Leslie Harris; and grandchildren Wyatt Nelson, Emma Kate Nelson, Ella Nelson, Ensley Nelson, Emorie Harris and Gracyn Harris.

Rev. Sparrow is buried in the Union Cemetery surrounded by many of his descendants.

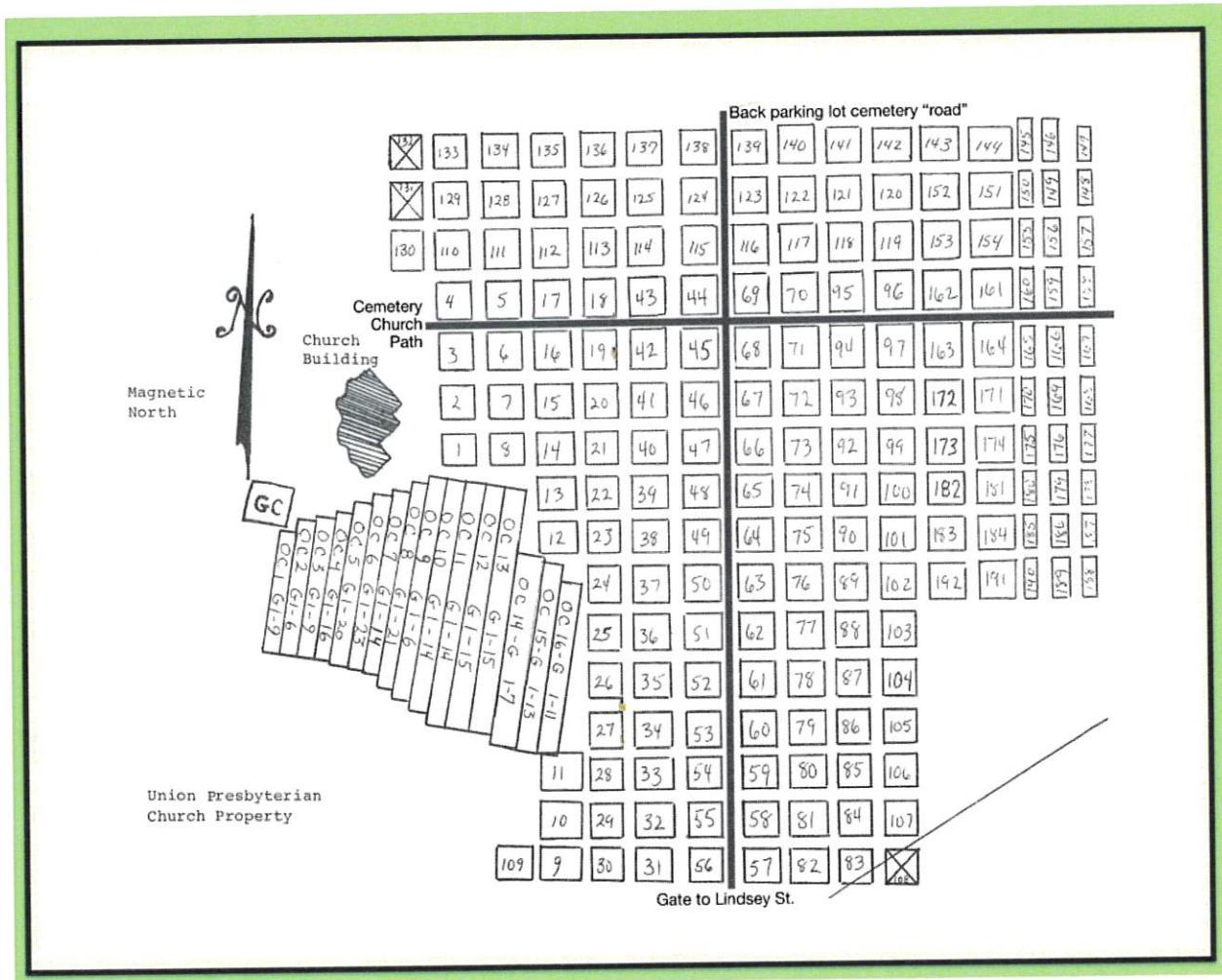
Reverend Walter L. Baker (1889–1969)

Reverend Baker's ministry spanned the years between the two world wars, when families faced economic hardship and loss due to the Great Depression and World War II. His sermons carried messages of hope and endurance. He encouraged the congregation to care for the poor and strengthen ties with neighboring churches. Under his leadership, Union began ringing its bell each Armistice Day to remember peace.

Those who knew him said he walked the churchyard every morning, pausing at founder's' graves to offer prayer before writing his sermon. His example of humility in service and constancy in faith remains part of Union's pastoral heritage. Rev. Baker is buried in the cemetery of Union Church among the congregational family he loved.

Map and Reflection

As we complete this walk, we remember that each of these lives was part of the same great story of faith carried forward from generation to generation. The stones are weathered, yet their meaning endures. They remind us of how we loved, served, and faithfully kept the light.





Upon This Rock

Our Foundation Remembered

Beside the main entrance to this sanctuary, above the structure's footings, lies what is believed to be one of the earliest foundation stones laid by the founders of Union Church. It was most likely cut and transported by mule and wagon from the old quarry established in 1830 off Ridge Road in Clover, SC. The same type of stone was quarried to build the nearby Bowling Green Presbyterian Church. The granite is unique to this area and is made primarily of granodiorite, a coarse-grained granitic rock. Granodiorite contains more plagioclase feldspar

than granite, quartz, and minor amounts of biotite or hornblende. Granodiorite typically exhibits a gray to light color, with varying speckled patterns depending on mineral content. This type of granite is known for its strength and durability, making it highly useful for construction. It was shaped by hand with hammer and chisels, and may be a reused foundation stone used to support the log walls of Union's first log Church. For nearly two centuries, it rested onsite as a silent witness to the prayers spoken above its place.

The decision was to mark the foundation stone with a permanent plaque so that future generations might remember the beginning. The words chosen for its inscription reflect Scripture and embody the heart of the congregation itself:

Upon this rock, our fathers built in faith. Upon this rock, our children shall stand.

Our foundation stone is more than a monument. It is a reminder that the church is not only a brick-and-mortar structure but a fellowship of souls joined over the years by trust in the same unchanging God.

The Dedication Prayer

Eternal God, who provided for us before the first stone was laid and who shall be with us after the last bell has rung,

We give You thanks for those who, in faith and courage, built this church upon Your Word.

Bless this foundation stone, and bless all who gather near it.

May it remind us that our lives are part of Your lasting work and that what we build in faith shall endure beyond our days.

Grant that this place may always be a house of prayer, a refuge for the weary, and a beacon for those who seek You.

Let Your Spirit dwell among us as it dwelt among our forebears, so we may leave a firm foundation for those yet to come.

We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord, the cornerstone of the universal Church.

Amen.



Milestones of Faith, 1842–2025

By Rev. David Carriker and the Author's additional information

1824: Preaching by the Independent Presbyterians begins at the Chalk Level Baptist meetinghouse on Mill Creek for those of the Independent persuasion; Mill Creek Presbyterian Church (Independent) is finally organized in August 1835.

August 1837: The Rev. Joseph O'Daniel is ordained and becomes the pastor of Olney and Mill Creek.

1840: The Mill Creek Presbyterian Church folds, and the Mill Creek Baptist Church is organized in May 1841. Uplanders of South Carolina continue across the NC/SC border; the Union community grows; O'Daniel begins work in the Union area.

Winter, 1842: A “memorable outpouring of the Holy Spirit,” according to the Rev. Robert Y. Russel, in this area among Independent Presbyterians. This led to the formation of a Christian community in the Union.

1843–1844: According to Augustus L. Henderson, this was the period when the log meetinghouse was built and used by Presbyterians, Baptists, and other Christians; it was dismantled about 1880.

Feb. 5, 1845: A committee (Robert Baird, Alexander A. Rhyne, Jacob Lineberger, Isom Ford, and Daniel Ragan) bought four acres of land for ten cents from Jacob Rhodes for a “meeting ground for said church for the use of all denominations of Protestants to preach at....”

July 13, 1845: The Independent Presbyterians at Union send a “paper relative to intercommunion” between regular and independent Presbyterians at sacramental services. It is accepted.

1846: The Rev. James Davidson Hall, D.D., moved to Gaston County and became the pastor of New Hope, Goshen, and Olney (regular) Presbyterian Churches. He also preached at Union, Hephzibah, and Olney Independent Presbyterian Churches, probably to bring them “back into the fold.”

Nov. 9, 1850: Finally, after regular worship had been held for seven years, Union Independent Presbyterian Church was organized, with the Rev. Joseph O’Daniel, M.D., D.D., as pastor; Daniel F. Ragan, Robert H. Craig, and George R. Bryson as elders.

Dec. 21, 1851: Rev. Joseph O’Daniel, age 44, dies from a “painful and protracted illness.” Three of fourteen IPC churches were now empty; one of four IPC pastors was now gone.

Jan. 1, 1852: The Rev. James Stark Bailey, who had only been in ministry for eight months, came to Union and Hephzibah but not Olney. He remained at Union through 1857.

Jan. 1, 1858: The Rev. William Washington Carothers becomes Union’s pastor and remains for nine years. He nurtures the church through the Civil War and the denominational merger. He moved to Alabama during the era of the carpetbagger.

1861–1865: The Civil War. The Union community contributed 84 men; 23 were killed, and 24 more were wounded. The Union also had to deal with the dissolution of the Independent Presbyterian Church Denomination.

May 10, 1863: The Rev. William Wallace Ratchford becomes a co-pastor with Carothers, each preaching once monthly. His three brothers fought in the war; two were killed. He remains through 1869.

Dec. 11, 1863: Union Independent Presbyterian Church and twelve others merge with Bethel Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, along with Bailey, Carothers, Ratchford, and Russell. Union was independent for 21 years.

1864: Rev. Ratchford and John H. Craig collect money for additional land and a new sanctuary, after Bethel Church's design.

Jan. 1, 1870: The Rev. Thomas Elim Davis becomes pastor of Union and Olney. He had been a teacher in Marion, N.C. Under his leadership, Union joined Mecklenburg Presbytery and finished the frame sanctuary in 1870.

Jan. 1, 1875: The Rev. James H. Douglass becomes pastor, but remains for only 22 months, the shortest pastorate. The Baptists, meeting in the log meetinghouse next to the Presbyterian sanctuary, move up the road and change their name to Sandy Plains.

Nov. 1, 1876: The Rev. William B. Corbett, M.D., becomes pastor of Union and Olney. His home near Olney was built in 1870 and became the joint manse in 1876. The old log meetinghouse was dismantled and moved to the John H. Craig place; Billy Wilson inherited the land/logs in 1975. Corbett remains at Union through April 1882.

Dec. 1, 1882: The Rev. James Millen McLain becomes pastor at Union and remains through 1889. He is the only full-time pastor at Union until Sparrow in 1921. In the few months before McLain's pastorate, Union sent members to the newly organized church in Gastonia (First). The Union sanctuary was repaired in 1884, and a session house (18x24) was built. It remained until 1907, when it became the manse's kitchen. It was connected to the "hut" in 1949 and finally given to James Thompson in the 1960s. The old granite foundation stones were given to Gary and Sally McGinnis, who built them into two Scots-Irish-style stone walls in 2023.

April 1, 1890: The Rev. William Clark Coolidge Foster became pastor for 35 months. He sold the church's five acres and had the first manse built in 1892. Foster was also the pastor of Olney.

Nov. 1, 1893: The Rev. George Attmore Sparrow became the next pastor of Union, serving almost 29 years, the longest pastorate. His ministry was also yoked with Olney Presbyterian Church for most of that time. Under his ministry, the church grew from exactly 100 to 200. He led the congregation in building the brick sanctuary (1906–07) and helped organize Kings Mountain Presbytery in 1902.

April 21 – August 13, 1898: Young men from the Union served in the Spanish-American War; the congregation prayed for their safe return.

Nov. 18, 1902: Union becomes a newly organized Kings Mountain Presbytery member.

Feb. 18, 1906: Final service in old 40x60 frame sanctuary. Services are held twice monthly in Sandy Plains.

June 16, 1907: First service in the new brick sanctuary. The architecture is found in many turn-of-the-century Presbyterian sanctuaries.

August 23, 1910: Dedication of the new sanctuary, as all debts are paid. The \$7,500 sanctuary was expensive and beautiful.

1914–1918: World War I involved 32 men from Union. Two die from complications right after the war.

1918–1920: The Spanish flu pandemic, also known as the Great Flu epidemic. Within two years, nearly a third of the world population, estimated at 500 million, is infected, causing an estimated death of 50-100 million people, including about 14,000 in North Carolina, about 20% of the state population.

Jan. 1, 1922: Olney and Union separate as a two-church field. Sparrow remains as pastor at Union. Olney obtains a new minister. This field had existed since 1843 (except for McLain's pastorate). Sparrow dies later in the year, at age 77, as the oldest minister. Sparrow and O'Daniel are the only ministers to have died in this pastorate. Rev. Sparrow is buried at Union Church alongside both wives and many of his descendants.

Sept. 21, 1922: The Rev. Joseph Edgar Berryhill becomes the full-time supply of Union. It is not known why he did not become a pastor. He remained almost eight years and was not yoked with any other church. In 1924, the "hut" was built about where the Riddle building is now. It offers the church kitchen facilities.

Oct 29, 1929–1930s: The stock market crashed, marking the beginning of the Great Depression, a day commonly referred to as Black Tuesday. This event triggered a severe global economic downturn.

Aug. 17, 1930: The Rev. Walter Louis Baker becomes pastor of Union for 14½ years. He leads the church through the Depression and World War II.

1939–1945: World War II involved 42 men and one woman from Union. Three men are killed in the war: one in Italy, one in France, and one in the South Pacific.

May 1, 1945: The Rev. Frank Bisaner Rankin becomes the interim supply for 11 months.

Mar. 31, 1946: The Rev. Charles McKinley Voyles becomes pastor for 4½ years. In 1949, the Riddle building was built.

Sept. 26, 1950: The Rev. Ernest Jones Arnold becomes interim supply for eight months.

Nov. 12, 1950: Union celebrates its 100th organizational anniversary by constructing the Union Church Henderson Building for \$12,561, with the debt paid in full by 1952.

Jun 25, 1950–Jul 27, 1953: The Korean War was fought between North and South Korea with significant involvement from international forces, including members of the Union Church.

1950s—1968: The Civil Rights Movement across America sparked widespread discussion of race and justice, including the Women's Ordination.

June 1, 1951: The Rev. Robert Wilbur Cousar, Jr., serves as a summer minister and pursues a Ph.D.

Jan. 1, 1952: The Rev. Benjamin Hoyt Evans becomes pastor of Union for 4½ years. During his ministry, the stained-glass windows were installed. The scout hut (formerly sexton's quarters) was built, and the "hut" was moved across the street.

Sept. 1, 1956: The Rev. William Sanford Patterson becomes interim supply for 11 months. Union sells and moves the old manse to Rev. Baker. The \$2,000 house was moved for \$750, plus \$440 for setup. The new manse was completed by August 1957.

Aug. 1, 1957: The Rev. Norman Martin MacDowell becomes pastor of Union for five years. His family occupies the new brick manse, built for \$17,000 and replacing an earlier wooden manse.

Sept. 1, 1962: The Rev. Walter Louis Baker serves three months as a temporary supply.

Dec. 1, 1962: The Rev. Joseph Barton Overmyer serves as temporary supply for five months.

May 1, 1963–1967: The Rev. Richard Porter Shaw, Sr., becomes pastor of Union for 4½ years. During his ministry, the educational building was built (1967) for \$55,800 with the debt paid in full within three years, the sanctuary renovated (1964), and Sunday School rooms were moved from the rear of the sanctuary (1964).

1962–1973: The Vietnam War involved 10 Union men. One is killed and buried in the cemetery, even though he was not a member of Union.

June 16, 1968: The Rev. Roy Flay Riddle, Sr., becomes pastor for 16 years, the second-longest pastorate at Union. During his ministry, the church grew from 190 to a peak of 315 (1974). Giving to the church and benevolences tripled during this period.

Jul 20, 1969: The first moon landing occurred during the Apollo 11 space mission. Soon after landing, astronaut Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first men to walk on the lunar surface.

June 1, 1982: The Rev. Robert J. Goforth serves three months as a student minister, the first seminary student to serve in that capacity.

1983 – Union participates in the reunion of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church, forming the PC(USA).

Sept. 1, 1984: The Rev. Joe Eugene Stowe, Sr., D.Min., serves for 16 months as an interim supply.

Jan. 1, 1986: The Rev. Samuel David Carricker, Sr., begins Union's 18th regular pastorate.

Sep. 22, 1989: Hurricane Hugo made landfall near Charleston, SC, as a Category 4 storm and caused approximately \$10 billion in damage across the southeast.

Nov. 11, 1990: Union celebrates its 140th organizational anniversary and holds Homecoming. The church expands community outreach programs and establishes a mission partnership with local food ministries.

1992: Union Church members built a youth scout building for \$25,000, with the debt paid in full the same year.

2000–2010 – Union engages in denominational studies and local historical preservation efforts. Membership remains steady through national church transitions. Union begins to serve as a relief hub during regional storms and emergencies, providing shelter, meals, and assistance.

Sep 11, 2001: Terrorists attacked on 9/11, hijacking four planes by al-Qaeda terrorists, leading to nearly 3,000 deaths, significant economic disruption, and lasting changes in U.S. security policies and foreign relations. This event sparked a Global War on Terror that lasted almost 10 years, until August 2021. The economic loss is estimated at \$6 trillion and costs about 7000 US military lives.

2007-2008: Union Church conducted campus construction and expansion, including a new rotunda addition connecting all parts of the church under one roof for \$1.4 million. The debt was paid in full by 2015.

2015 – Discussions begin regarding denominational alignment and renewed mission focus.

2025 – After three years of discernment, Union Presbyterian Church is formally dismissed from the PC(USA) and joins the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). The congregation celebrates 175 years of continuous ministry. A memorial Pink Dogwood tree is planted in the church cemetery and a memorial plaque is placed to mark the original foundation stone, and the church's story is recorded in *Liberty and Union: A Story of Faith, Freedom, and the Ties that Bind a Nation*.

Servants of Union

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (1842–2025)

From the first circuit riders who preached beneath in the open air or under brush arbors to the pastors who now stand before the same congregation nearly two centuries later, Union ministers have helped shape the church's worship and spirit.

Each minister brought a distinct voice, yet all shared the same calling, to proclaim God's Word faithfully and to shepherd His people with care.

This roster lists all known ministers who have served Union Church from its early origins as the Union Meeting House through its current identity as Union Community Church in ECO. Roles include full-time and supply pastors, interim ministers, and students. This listing reflects the enduring faith and leadership legacy of Union's shepherds.

| Name | Dates of Service | Role | Notes |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|------|------------------|
| Joseph O'Daniel, M.D. | Nov 1842 * – Dec 21 1851 | SS | |
| James S. Bailey | Jan 1 1852 * – Dec 31 1857 | SS | |
| William W. Carothers | Jan 1, 1858 – Dec 31 1863 | SS | |
| William W. Ratchford | May 10 1863 – Dec 31 1869 | SS | |
| Thomas E. Davis | Jan 1 1870 – Dec 31 1874 | SS | |
| James H. Douglass | Jan 1 1875 – Oct 31 1876 | S | |
| William B. Corbett, M.D. | Nov 1 1876 – Apr 30 1882 | PP | |
| James M. McLain | Dec 1 1882 – Dec 31 1889 | S | |
| William C.C. Foster | Apr 1 1890 – Mar 1 1893 | PP | |
| George A. Sparrow | Nov 1 1893 – Dec 31 1921 | PP | Yoked with Olney |
| George A. Sparrow | Jan 1 1922 – Jul 25 1922 | FP | |
| Joseph E. Berryhill | Sep 21 1922 – Jun 30 1930 | FS | |
| Walter L. Baker | Aug 17 1930 – Apr 30 1945 | FP | |
| Frank B. Rankin | May 1 1945 – Mar 1 1946 | IS | |
| Charles McKinley Voyles | Mar 31 1946 – Sep 19 1950 | FP | |
| Ernest J. Arnold | Sep 26 1950 – Jun 1 1951 | Std | |
| Robert W. Cousar, Jr. | Jun 1 1951 – Sep 2 1951 | TS | |
| B. Hoyt Evans | Jan 1 1952 – Aug 31 1956 | FP | |
| William S. Patterson | Sep 1 1956 – Jul 31 1957 | IS | |
| Norman M. MacDowell | Aug 1 1957 – Aug 31 1962 | FP | |
| Walter L. Baker | Sep 1 1962 – Nov 31 1962 | TS | |
| Joseph B. Overmyer, D.D. | Dec 1 1962 – Apr 30 1963 | TS | |
| Richard P. Shaw | May 1 1963 – Dec 31 1967 | FP | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----|--|
| R. Flay Riddle | Jun 16 1968 – Aug 31 1984 | FP | |
| Robert J. Goforth | Jun 1 1982 – Aug 31 1982 | Std | |
| Joseph E. Stowe, D.Min. | Sep 1 1984 – Dec 31 1985 | IS | |
| S. David Carriker | Jan 1 1986 – Aug 8 1993 | FP | |
| William J. Cowfer | Oct 15 1994 – Dec 31 1995 | IS | |
| James H. Stahr | Jan 7 1996 – Oct 14 1999 | FP | |
| James Cockerham, D.M. | Feb 2 2000 – Jan 31 2001 | IS | |
| Wanda S. Neely, D.M. | Feb 1 2001 – Jul 13 2003 | FP | |
| James Cockerham, D.M. | Sep 1 2003 – Dec 31 2004 | IS | |
| Joan Martin, D.M. | Jan 1 2005 – Feb 7 2010 | FP | |
| Jack R. Davidson, D.D. | Jan 1 2011 – Jun 16 2013 | IS | |
| James Jeremy Holeman | Jun 19 2013 – Present | FP | |

Three others have gone into mission work: Billy Meek (Kentucky), Winifred W. Callister (Africa), and Mary Rebecca Glenn (Brazil).

Legend

- * approximately
- FP — full pastor
- FS — full supply
- IS — interim supply
- PP — part pastor (joint)
- S — supply (joint)
- Std — student
- SS — stated supply (joint)
- TS — temporary supply

The youngest minister to come to Union was James Stark Bailey (27 years, 1 month); the oldest was Thomas Elim Davis (59 years). The average age has been 41½ years.

The youngest minister to leave Union was James Stark Bailey at 32 years, 11 months; the oldest was George Attmore Sparrow at 77 years; the average leaving age was 47 years, 4 months.

The longest pastorate was with George Attmore Sparrow for 28 years, 8 months; the shortest was with Thomas Elim Davis, 1 year and 10 months.

Two of Union's ministers, Rev. Joseph O'Daniel and Rev. William B. Corbett, were also medical doctors.

Four of our ministers hold a Doctor of Divinity degree: Rev. Joseph O'Daniel, Rev. Wanda Neely, Rev. Joan Martin, and Rev. Jack Davidson. Two of our supplies held doctorates: Joseph B. Overmyer, Doctor of Divinity, and Joe Eugene Stowe, Sr., Doctor of Ministry.

The Union has ordained two men: Rev. Andrew Leslie Thompson and Rev. W.T. Ratchford.

Each name represents more than a tenure; it is a chapter in the story of pastoral faithfulness. Their sermons, baptisms, and prayers mark the passing of generations, weaving continuity through changing times.



Other Faithful Servants

Beneath the cross and within the walls of Union have labored many others whose names may not appear in official records but whose contributions endure: Elders, Deacons, Sunday school teachers who taught generations of children; organists and choir leaders who filled the sanctuary with song; clerks who kept the minutes that now form the written memory of the church; and countless volunteers who tended the grounds and opened the doors.

2025 Memories

Getting out of Their Shell

I was young, but I have such fun memories of the skits we used to do at Bethelwoods. There are so many funny memories of seeing people getting out of their shells and entertaining everyone else! My family watches our videos from these trips to get a good laugh! I will never forget “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.” “She thinks my tractors are sexy,” and can’t touch this being performed

— Anonymous

Christmas Ornaments

I have several essential memories about Union. In 2001, my husband, Al, had already been in the hospital for nine months with no end in sight. Union had a Holiday Auction in late November.

Chris, Amanda, and I went and enjoyed the evening very much (at a time when I had very little joy in our lives). Chris bid and won a few items. I decided to bid on one of five hand-painted Christmas ornaments. The ornaments were last to be auctioned. As each ornament was offered for auction, I was outbid. I was willing to bid \$10 tops! One by one, each ornament was taken... until all five were gone.

I didn’t get an ornament, but we had a wonderful evening. When I got in the car to go home, Chris told me to look in the bag on the front seat median. In the bag were ALL FIVE ORNAMENTS! Billy Wilson had purchased them all for me and my family. Unbeknownst to us, that auction was held in our name! Several days later, Sally handed me an envelope containing nearly \$ 2,000 —the auction proceeds.

I’ll never forget that day and the kindness and compassion of my Union family!

— Claire Cabrell

Great Fun

I remember a little from 2016 to 2017, when we had a huge spring kickoff beside the playground involving waterslides, games, food, and more. I can very specifically remember Pastor James’s famous elephant ears and other amazing foods he’s made, like his great pancakes for his St Patrick’s Day pancake dinners. I love every memory made here, but these were my favorites.

— Carter McSwain

Fond memories of Union Presbyterian church

The Jimmy Thompson family grew up in the Union Presbyterian church. If the doors were open, we were there.... I was somewhat of a “tomboy” growing up on a farm. We did everything a farmer’s daughter was supposed to do on a farm, especially “going barefoot” all summer. Well, you can only imagine what my feet looked like.. I always seemed to have had “stubbled toes”; therefore, my nickname at church became “Charlie sore toe.” As the years went by, my name was shortened to just Charlie. This name carried over into adulthood, especially among Price Ratchford and George Ratchford. I’m not certain, but I doubt they even knew my real name!! Love these memories as a child!! God is so Good!! Blessings to all!!

— Susie Thompson McCurry Taylor

Wonderful Friends

Lauren D. Bryson—One of my favorite memories was having Melody Caldwell as my Sunday School Teacher! She was always so lovely and soft-spoken.

Mollie D. Rudisill – Oh so many memories – from Lytle Latchford covering my toes at Vacation Bible School so the clowns wouldn’t get them (I was 4!); playing kickball and volleyball) with the Jordans, burning my mouth with hot chocolate at Camp Grier, going to the yearly Halloween Carnivals & hayrides in the graveyard, and going to Malawi, Africa on a mission trip. I have wonderful memories growing up at Union.

— Ann Dameron

Bob Currence and I were married on August 6, 1966, at First Baptist Church, Clover. Early on, Rev. Dick Shaw visited us, and we decided that I would transfer my membership to Union. On the very Sunday that Rev. Shaw announced that I would become a member, he resigned as our pastor. He was a wonderful pastor and was very much loved by his congregation.

— Janice Currence Meek

Union Church is My Family

Union is home to many of my fondest memories. I grew up at Union, and the people here truly feel like family. The foundation of my relationship with Jesus was built during my early years in Sunday School and Youth Group. One of my favorite memories from that time was traveling to Montreat with our youth group and worshiping alongside hundreds of other Christians—especially during the candlelight service around the lake. I also cherish the retreats we shared at Camp Grier and Bethelwoods. The fellowship, laughter, and lasting friendships that grew during those times together will always hold a special place in my heart.

The most memorable moment that took place within the walls of Union was the day Eric and I were married. It was truly the most special day of my life—the beginning of our family and a beautiful reminder of God’s presence in our journey together.

The last memory I will share is one filled with both grief and gratitude—the day of my dad’s funeral, May 10th, 2003. I will never forget pulling up to our church and seeing it filled with people we love so dearly, all gathered to grieve with us, support us, and surround us with love. In that moment, I felt the true meaning of church family. I will forever be grateful for this congregation and how they helped us weather the storm of grief together during that tragic time.

— Jennifer Nelson

Halloween

One of my favorite stories from church is when Pappy (Billy Jordan) dressed up as a werewolf for Halloween at Trunk or Treat. I can still remember how, at first, I was terrified, but then we laughed so much—he stayed in character the whole time, growling and pretending to scare everyone, but we all knew it was just his silly way of making the night extra special. It’s a memory that still makes me smile every Halloween. I miss Pappy.

— Emma Kate Nelson

Christmas Plays and Games

One of my favorite memories from church is participating in the children’s Christmas plays each year. I always loved having solos and speaking parts—it made me feel special to share the story of Jesus’ birth in a fun and joyful way. The excitement of practicing, dressing up, and performing with my friends is something I’ll always cherish.

My other favorite memory is playing in a Bocce Ball tournament with Brayden and winning. We played several games and won them all to become the ultimate champions. I love it when we get together and have fun, but I like competition too!

— Wyatt Nelson

Snacks and Singing!

My favorite things at church are the snacks and singing at Vacation Bible School!

— Ella Nelson

Stunned by God's Work

During COVID, Union held worship services outside the front parking lot every Sunday. We brought chairs, and some elected to listen from inside their cars. In December 2020, I had just spent a week in the hospital following complications with surgery for six hernias. My first day back to church was January 3, 2021, which happened to be Epiphany Sunday.

As the service began, Pastor James explained that this was not something we usually do, but since it was Epiphany and a time for giving gifts, he thought it would be appropriate. He announced that since Janice had been in the hospital, some people would like to do something for her. My first thought was that there are many people we should do something for instead of me. Janice, he said, would you come up, please? I was stunned. Then he added, The gift is a little heavy ... can you pick up anything heavy yet? Of course, I answered no. Could Larry come up with you? Oh yeah, whatever! As we were walking toward Pastor James, he stepped inside and brought out a giant white box trimmed in gold. As he handed it to Larry, I could tell it might be heavy. At that time, Larry put the box down and barely peeked inside. Then, he got down on one knee, took a ring from the box, and said, "Janice Faris Currence, would you like to add Meek to your last name?" I was speechless. Pastor James asked, "Was that a yes?" My reply, "I would be absolutely crazy not to marry this man." (By the way, Larry phoned Sally on Saturday night and asked her to video the service because Pastor James asked him to be a part of the service.' No one else knew what was about to happen! It's wonderful to have this recorded.)

We were happily married on September 4, 2021, and I almost can't believe it has been over four years. I have many testimonies of God working in my life; this certainly is one for which I am thankful and don't question. God is so good. Want to know what was in the heavy box? Two five-pound weights. Larry is full of surprises.

— Janice Faris Currence ... Meek

Food and Music

One of my favorite memories at Union was the 5th Sunday Family Night. We all returned to church, and everyone brought delicious casseroles, salads, and fabulous desserts. My favorite was my Granny's (Lucy Ratchford) Damson tarts. I couldn't wait to get one of those yummy tarts. It also meant we kids got to hang out one more time before school week. Sometimes, after eating, we would sing with Doris on the piano. Good times! Excellent food and great memories.

— Ann Dameron

Tragedy and Blessings

The wedding of Janice Currence and Larry Meek was planned for September 2021, right in the middle of COVID. The initial plan was to hold the ceremony at Jan's church, Bethel Presbyterian, and the Reception at Union, Larry's church. Plans were made to include ministers from both churches, and we received excellent counseling from both. Sally McGinnis agreed to direct our wedding, and the plans went smoothly with everyone involved.

However, on the day of rehearsal, Larry got a call from his son, Scott, saying the grandkids had come down with Covid, and they had all been together at a ball game in Charlotte a few days earlier. Therefore, they would not be able to attend the wedding. With only a few hours before the wedding, replacing the Best Man, the Register Attendant, and the person lighting the Memory Candle for Judy would be necessary. One Bridesmaid and one Usher could not be replaced.

However, another tragedy was yet to come. The rehearsal was on Friday evening, and we had dinner together at Amberjacks. After returning home from Amberjacks, about 10:00, the best friend of Jan's brother, Ron, came to her house with the shocking news that her brother Ron had died just a few hours earlier. As it happened, Ron's two children, Alicia and Ron Jr., were with her. Being faced with the sudden death of Alicia's dad and Jan's brother was almost too much to bear. Alicia was Jan's Maid of Honor. Many people said, "You will have to postpone the wedding," but we knew that was impossible. Sally, Susan, and many members of Union's Youth were involved in the Reception, which had been moved to Bethel due to COVID-related issues.

The two pastors discussed how to handle the two unexpected emergencies. At the beginning of the service, Pastor James explained the situations. With a few gasps in the congregation, we are eternally grateful for his wisdom in explaining what had happened in the past two days.

Following Larry's 51-year marriage to Judy and Jan's almost 50-year marriage to Bob, there is no doubt about God's divine plan for our lives.

— Larry and Jan Meek

Remembering Wanda and Bill Neely

Roger and I always enjoyed sharing the veggies we grew with you and Bill.
We truly loved those visits!

— Love, Kathy Pope

Youth Group and Car Washes

My heart is FULL of beautiful Union memories! In the early 1970s, we had a booming Youth group—about 30 members! We were a very close group, going on trips to Camp Grier, Lees-McRae, and Montreat World Missions Conferences — to name a few! We hosted fall carnivals—including haunted houses... We went on hay rides... Wow – so much “togetherness”!! We sang together all the time, with my mama, Alice Thompson, directing, and Doris Huffstetler, Lisa Lawson's mama, accompanying us! What fabulous times we spent praising the Lord!!! One of my most cherished memories is CAR WASHES!!! Many, many car washes!!! The owner of a gas station at the corner of Union Road and Garrison Boulevard (where the new Bojangles is

currently) allowed us to use his gas station for the car washes, charging us nothing, even though we used a LOT of water! We had a dream—to buy a church bus—so we got busy and raised the money one car at a time—and bought a “used” school bus!!! Much work went into restoring it, both inside and out—but we had lots of fun and fellowship along the way—and, of course, we reached our goal! We had amazing times together with amazing Christian friends. That bus carried us, together, to many events, but we SANG and sang and sang through all of those years—praising God for His goodness, kindness, blessings, power and mercy, and gift—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! In my heart, there still rings a melody, there rings a melody of His love...

— Sally Thompson Kendrick McGinnis

My Future Husband at Union

In the early 1950s, a young Belmont girl was invited to sing at an exceptional revival service at Union by the choir director/accompanist, Laurice Whisonant, and her husband, Fulton. They happened to be the parents of my good friends, Joy Whisonant (Sparrow) and Jean Whisonant (Gaston). Oddly enough, on the drive to the church that evening, Mr. Whisonant told me I would meet my future husband that night! How strange!! At the end of a beautiful service, a young man named Jimmy Thompson asked me if I would go for a milkshake with Jean and Clark Riddle, and then he would drive me home. Jimmy made sure I was in the front seat beside him. A year or so later, Jimmy and I arrived in the church parking lot for church, but were greeted by many members rushing out to congratulate us on our engagement! Funny thing, though, Jimmy had not “popped the question” yet! His mother, Susan Sparrow Thompson, had shared the exciting news with a “few” friends. Jimmy then asked me to marry him—and the rest is history! We started our family and had three girls, Page, Sally, and Susie—all baptized at Union. What a special place Union and its family are. I have many cherished memories that I often ponder in my heart....

— Alice Page Thompson

Tragedy and Grace

On May 7, 2003, tragedy struck my family with the death of my husband, Bill Kendrick. We had stopped after Leslie’s soccer playoff game to assist a disabled vehicle. Bill was struck and killed by an impaired driver—a hit-and-run, no less. Much of the following days have blurred with time, but I will never forget the love and support we received from our church family at Union. There were days and days of food provided, unnumbered visits and condolences expressed, house cleaning, yard mowing, trash carried away, to name a few of the beautiful expressions of love.... The care and love for my children, Robert aged 19, Jennifer aged 17, and Leslie aged 15, shown by the church’s young people, resonate loudly within my soul. Those young people spent days at our home AND nights sleeping on our floors—never wanting to leave my children’s

side. What a genuine expression of love that leaves me speechless even to this day... During that time, I learned to look into the eyes of those who come to comfort you, because it is THERE that you will see the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior! Thank you, my precious church family, for all the smiles, hugs, kisses, and expressions of love you shared with my family during that difficult time. You definitely made a huge difference in our lives. Hopefully, all four of us have learned to "take our mess and make it our message..."

A message of hope and love, the love of Christ and the salvation He freely gives each of us if only we believe in Him and confess our sins! I hope you have asked and have received His gift!

— Sally Thompson Kendrick McGinnis

Once upon a time, there were two *beautiful* young girls and one handsome little boy who always attended every Friday night dinner at church. The adults always socialized and left the children to their own devices. The kids socialized in their own way. Some did this and some did that, but these two beautiful little girls and a handsome little boy were always looking for a new adventure. So on one particular night, they ventured into the Miss Pearl Henderson building and proceeded upstairs, where there was a nice window at the top. The window led to the church roof, where they had a walkabout. After their exploring, they climbed back through the window, returned to their parents, and went safely home. It was only by the grace of God that they didn't fall off the roof!!! Is this a fairy tale or a true story??? They never dared tell their parents. Can you guess who this story is about? two *beautiful* little girls and a handsome little boy. Yes, these two beautiful little girls and the handsome little boy are still seeking new adventures today.

Beautiful Nancy Glenn Gardner shares this exciting remembrance with her beautiful friend, Libby Ann Thompson, and handsome young man, Gene Ratchford.

—Nancy Gardner

The Faith of Union Church Endures

The Bell and the Light

Evening settles slowly across the churchyard. The last rays of sunlight touch the old brick and weathered stones, warming their faces before slipping into shadow. Inside the sanctuary, the windows glow with the setting sun's colors of amber, blue, and rose. The bell tower stands quietly for a moment, then the familiar sound marks the worship hours for generations. Its tone rolls over the fields and fades into the trees.

Those who first heard that church bell are gone, yet their faith remains. The same ground that received their footsteps still bears the weight of those who gather here today. Between the past and the present stretches a single unbroken story, written in the language of devotion and endurance.

Union Church has endured war and peace, seasons of want and plenty. It has welcomed the laughter of children and the tears of farewell. Every prayer offered within its walls has added one more thread to the tapestry of its history. To walk through its doors is to enter a living memory, a place where the faith and courage of those who came before still lend strength to those who follow.

The church endures because its memorial stones are strong and its people have been faithful. Faith has carried them through the passing of centuries, binding them together as surely as the timbers that hold the roof above. In every age, the call has been the same: to worship, to serve, to love one another, and to trust in the promise of God's presence.

A Benediction for the Generations

As Union Church marks 175 years, it does so as a monument and a testament to what continues. Each new baptism, each hymn sung by young voices, and each act of kindness extended beyond its doors renewed the covenant that began in on a sunny hilltop in 1842.

The congregation that gathers here today stands among a great cloud of witnesses. They look upon the same hills, hear the same bell, and hold the same hope that the faith of Union Church will endure through whatever years may come. In this hope lies the accurate measure of the church's life.

The faith of Union endures.



This booklet is published in thanksgiving for one hundred seventy-five years of ministry by Union Community Church (ECO).

It accompanies the historical volume *Liberty and Union: A Story of Faith, Freedom, and the Ties that Bind a Nation* by Gary L. McGinnis.

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Authors Note: Every effort has been made in good faith to present the historical record with accuracy and respect; should any error be discovered, I would be grateful to be informed so that future editions may set the record right.

Members of Union Community Church will receive the full limited special edition book when it becomes available in the future date.

If you are not a member of Union Church and want a copy, please send me a message to get on the list. Email your name and address to: gary.l.mcginnis@gmail.com

