



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

ORIGINS

This month marks the 175th anniversary of the official founding of First Saint Paul’s as a Lutheran congregation. Today we begin a series of weekly “snapshots” depicting moments in the history of our congregation, all under the theme “*He who promised is faithful.*” In April of 1846, a group of Chicago’s German immigrants called Rev. August Selle from Columbiana County, Ohio to serve as their pastor. This Lutheran pastor arrived in Chicago on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1846. His three-week trip had taken him from Ohio to Detroit, by ship through the Straits of Mackinac to Milwaukee, and finally to Chicago by land. The next day he preached his first sermon on the text, “Christ is risen indeed!”

These German Protestants who called Pastor Selle had been meeting together for services since 1843. Served only by itinerant preachers, they had built a small, 20’ x 60’ church on the southwest corner of Ohio and LaSalle in 1844. The land for this church had been donated by William Butler Ogden and Walter L. Newberry.

The members of this fledgling congregation were not, however, of one mind on all points theological. In 1817, Frederick William III of Prussia had forced Lutheran and Reformed congregations in Germany to combine into a united state church. Some of the early immigrants were hoping for a similarly “unified” German church in Chicago. Rev. Selle had only accepted the call as pastor, however, on the condition that he “could serve the congregation as a Lutheran congregation and in a building suited for Lutheran worship services.” Soon after Rev. Selle’s arrival, the congregation adopted a Lutheran constitution. As a result, we celebrate 1846 (rather than 1843), as the official beginning of our congregation.

The adoption of the Lutheran constitution, however, was done only reluctantly by some of the members, perhaps as a concession to secure a pastor. The theological differences were soon to write the next chapter of the congregation’s history.