



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

SQUEEZED BY THE CITY—FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION

Urban ministry is never easy. A city like Chicago slowly but constantly evolves, and these changes put pressure on an urban congregation’s ministry. On several occasions in the history of First Saint Paul’s, the “urban squeeze” forced its members into difficult decisions about “staying” or “going.”

In 1910, the congregation’s church building—a rebuilt version of the church that had burned in the Chicago fire—was located at Franklin and Superior. The church was being “squeezed,” however, by factories moving into the area near the church. In addition, the new elevated tracks (precursor to the Brown Line running through our now-trendy River North) were installed so close to the church that the noise of the trains disturbed church services. The congregation needed a better location. They found a new home when they purchased, for \$45,000, a building on the corner of LaSalle and Goethe that had previously been a Jewish synagogue.



Our church building at LaSalle and Goethe Streets as it appeared in pre-World War I days

The centennial booklet of 1946 notes that “it is to the eternal credit of the vision of our fathers that they did not seize the urge of so many other church bodies to leave the downtown area. What blessings have come to thousands because First Saint Paul’s remained faithful to her community and served an ever-changing population.” This building, designed by Dankmar Adler, was re-purposed as a Lutheran church and served the congregation well, although it later experienced its own “squeeze” from the city.



A view of the sanctuary following the 1942 remodel.

In 1940 the city of Chicago widened LaSalle Street, threatening the building. In order to stay, the congregation remodeled the church to relocate the front wall 2 feet, 8 inches back from LaSalle, to the new property line. This remodeling project, celebrated in a 1942 dedication booklet, altered the sanctuary, giving it a new altar, pulpit, and altar rail, as well as a new kitchen, stairway, and Sunday school rooms. Altogether, this building served the congregation for 59 years, from 1910 to 1969, when the next urban “squeeze” forced another momentous decision.