



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

LARGE SHOES TO FILL: PASTORS BAUMGAERTNER AND KOWERT

The 62-year pastorate of Rev. Henry Wunder (1851-1913) left an indelible mark on First Saint Paul's. Following in his footsteps would have been a daunting task. Rev. John Baumgaertner, Wunder's immediate successor, had the advantage of serving as Wunder's assistant for 17 years before taking over as senior pastor. However, he perhaps experienced the added “pressure” of being Pastor Wunder's son-in-law.

Pastor Baumgaertner was called to be Wunder's assistant in 1896. The centennial anniversary booklet notes that he “is remembered as a faithful pastor and a kind person who worked in blessed harmony with his illustrious father-in-law.” When Pastor Wunder died in 1913, Pastor Baumgaertner assumed the role of pastor, and the congregation no doubt expected him to have a long ministry among them. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that “the new pastor's health was not rugged.” After a long illness, he was called to his eternal rest on January 19, 1918, at the age of 44, only four years after assuming the role of senior pastor.



Rev. John Baumgaertner



Rev. Henry Kowert

During Pastor Baumgaertner's final illness, the congregation called Rev. Henry Kowert to serve as their fourth pastor. Pastor Kowert, the son of a missionary, had been born in New Zealand. He was installed in September of 1917 and served the church for 27 years. He is lauded in the centennial booklet for “his wonderful ability as an English orator.” The first English-language services occur during his tenure, and his ministry initiates the congregation's gradual shift from German to English.

In January of 1944, it became clear that Pastor Kowert's health was failing, and the congregation gave him a leave of absence. He went to the Lutheran Wheat Ridge institution in Colorado in an attempt to regain his health, but he passed away there on August 18, 1944, at the age of 58. Pastors Baumgaertner and Kowert were not granted the long earthly life of their predecessor, Pastor Wunder, but each served faithfully to his dying day, proclaiming the same Gospel while also moving First Saint Paul's into new areas of ministry.