



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

ANOTHER CONCORDIA MUSICIAN: THE MINISTRY OF CHARLES ORE

With the sudden death of Albert Beck on May 30, 1962, First Saint Paul’s was in an immediate search for an organist and choir director. Who could replace someone who had served the congregation so faithfully for thirty-one years? The leadership turned again to Concordia Teachers College in River Forest, where Dr. Beck had taught. A young and energetic musician, Charles W. Ore, answered the call. Ore, a graduate of Concordia in Seward, had moved to Chicago to study at Northwestern University. While at Northwestern, he was called to fill a faculty position at Concordia, River Forest. In fact, in a strange coincidence, he and his wife lived in the Concordia apartment just above Albert Beck.

The early 1960s were a time of old and new. First Saint Paul’s worshiped in an old building, but one that had been remodeled in the early 1940s. A new organ by a prestigious Canadian builder, Casavant, had been installed in 1951 under Albert Beck’s guidance. However, that organ was designed along older, more romantic, tonal ideas, with plenty of soft and coloristic stops.

Charles related one vivid memory of the old building: The interior of the sanctuary was all wood, and the choir was located in the front of the church, above the altar. Three flights of wooden stairs in an open staircase on one side led to the choir loft. On the other side, the stairs were dwarfed by a behemoth of the boiler. While the choir could be seen by the congregation when they were singing, the choir members weren’t able to see the chancel area. During one Christmas season, extra candles had been placed close to the wreaths. Imagine the concern of the choir to hear a bit of a commotion, and then to see smoke rising up to the choir area. Charles said that the choir never headed for the stairs more quickly!



Charles Ore at the organ console in the new church.

Charles Ore served First Saint Paul’s for four years, from 1962 to 1966. He undoubtedly would have stayed longer, but he accepted a call to Concordia in Seward, Nebraska. Having enjoyed an outstanding career as a composer and performer, he has returned to play at First Saint Paul’s on several occasions. In a recent conversation, he related that—in his time of service—he appreciated the emphasis that First Saint Paul’s placed on the importance of church music, noting how well the congregation supported music through time and resources. Thankfully, that emphasis continues today.