



## 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

### FIRST SAINT PAUL’S: MOTHER CHURCH OF CHICAGO LUTHERANISM

The 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of First Saint Paul’s is not just a milestone for our own congregation. It marks the beginning of Lutheran ministry in Chicago: the planting of a tree that branched out in many directions. In the late nineteenth century, as members of our congregation spread out to different neighborhoods, they established “daughter” congregations. Many of these gave birth to other churches, which produced still others. In all, 21 Lutheran congregations—some of them our “great-granddaughters”—could trace their roots to First Saint Paul’s.

The drawing on the reverse page accompanied a 1996 essay in the *Northern Light*, written by NID archivist Herb Ebert, on the occasion of our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It illustrates how congregations “branched out” from the “trunk” of First Saint Paul’s in different geographical direction. In 1854, only eight years after our founding, a group of members living southwest of downtown asked to be released from membership so they could form a congregation closer to home. Thus began First Immanuel Lutheran Church, located since 1888 on Ashland near Roosevelt. In 1871, a group of First Immanuel members formed Saint Matthew Lutheran Church—our “granddaughter congregation” at 2108 W. 21<sup>st</sup>—which is still a member of our NID “circuit.”

Another “branch” of Chicago Lutheranism reached northward. The first “northern” branch began as many of the new congregations did—as a Lutheran school. Members who lived in Old Town and Lincoln Park began a school at Willow and Burling, with services conducted on Wednesday evenings. This eventually led to the formation in 1869 of Saint James Lutheran Church (also in our “circuit”), now at Fremont and Dickens. By 1884, members of Saint James had branched out to form St. Luke’s on Belmont; by 1893, members of St. Luke’s had left to form St. Philip. A westward branch, also begun as a school, led to the founding of First Saint John’s in 1867. In 1871 members of First Saint John formed a school on Paulina near Milwaukee, which led to the establishment of First Bethlehem (another of our “circuit” congregations), which this year celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Over time, some of these “daughter” congregations far outgrew the “mother” church. According to the synod’s 1896 statistical yearbook, First Bethlehem was then the largest church in the LCMS, with 5,600 baptized members. St. Matthew numbered 4,440 baptized members, and First Immanuel had 2,600 baptized members. Through the work of the Spirit and the witness of committed pastors and laypeople, God’s church spread from First Saint Paul’s throughout Chicagoland, carrying the Gospel message of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

