



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

**“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)**

### WE ARE GRATEFUL: THE MUSIC MINISTRY OF JAMES ROGNER

The summer of 1975 proved to be an eventful one for the music program at First Saint Paul’s with the arrival of James Rogner as its music director. Jim was back in Chicago, where he had graduated from Concordia College-River Forest several years earlier. The First Saint Paul’s choir, in turn, was seeking a new director, and after auditioning with the group that summer Jim became its new director. For the next 20 years Jim touched the lives of many with his gift of music-making as a choral conductor, composer and organist.

The first Christmas Jim was music director set the tone for what became, and still is, a high point for members and the community at large: the annual Christmas concert. Each year’s program offered not only traditional hymns and carols, some of which were musically enhanced by Jim, but also such works as John Rutter’s “Gloria,” Daniel Pinkham’s “Christmas Cantata,” and Benjamin Britten’s “Ceremony of Carols.” A work that became a signature piece for a number of years was a setting of the hymn “Lift Up Your Heads” by the East German composer Rudolph Mauersberger. Composed in 1945, the work had never been published, but Jim acquired the music from the state music library of Dresden in 1986 and transcribed both vocal and instrumental parts into usable scores for singers and instrumentalists. The music of Carl Schalk was also featured on many Christmas programs. One fond memory from several of these programs was that of the choir surrounding the edges of the sanctuary, each member holding a lighted candle, singing Schalk’s “Noel” at the conclusion of the evening.



Jim himself composed more than 20 hymn settings, including one for “Ah Holy Jesus,” which is still frequently used in First Saint Paul’s holy week services. His choral setting of “O Sacred Head,” as well as his original anthems “Give Ear, O Lord, and Visit Me” and “We Are Grateful” were published posthumously. As a gifted organist, Jim presented numerous recitals at First Saint Paul’s over the years, featuring the music of J.S. Bach, Buxtehude, Mendelssohn and Dupré, among others.

While serving as First Saint Paul’s music director, Jim also assumed the directorship of a choral group known as The James Chorale. Because of this relationship, the James Chorale gave frequent concerts at First Saint Paul’s, and some of its singers participated with the First Saint Paul’s choir in the annual Christmas concerts. In the mid-1980s Jim earned a master’s degree in choral conducting from Northwestern University, and he was also a professional member and assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Chorus.



Sadly, on August 13, 1995, almost 20 years to the day when he became music director, Jim passed away at the age of 47. Through his tireless devotion to the highest artistic standards and his persistent exploration of new and old music, Jim touched the lives of First Saint Paul's members and many others during those 20 years. His legacy also lives on in the "Zimbelstern" that was added to the organ, purchased with memorial gifts made in his honor. In the words of his own song, "For all the beauty of life and artistic endeavor, we are grateful." We were blessed by his presence among us.