



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

The mission statement of First Saint Paul’s declares that, “We preach Law and Gospel and administer the sacraments as Christ commanded.” This includes administering the sacrament of Holy Baptism, which has always been a vital part of the church’s ministry. In the waters of Baptism, we are washed and reborn as children of God and inheritors of eternal life.

Our sanctuary is actually graced with two baptismal fonts. Today we perform baptisms at a polished, red granite font at the front of the sanctuary. Its simple geometric form corresponds to the modernist aesthetic of the Edward Dart-designed church. At the back of sanctuary stands the font used in the previous church, which was demolished in 1969 to make way for our present building. A few of our oldest members were baptized at this historic font. Clearly visible as we enter and exit worship, this font connects us to our church’s history. Its placement also reminds us of the centrality of baptism in bringing us into the kingdom of God.



The baptism records of our congregation also help tell the story of our church’s ministry. Early church records were one of the two things (along with the angel statue) saved by Pastor Wunder when the fourth church was destroyed by the Chicago fire. Microfilms of these records—now at the Newberry Library—have provided useful information for many people researching the history of their families in 19th-century Chicago.



These baptism records give us a glimpse into the life of the congregation at various times. When large numbers of German immigrants came to Chicago and started families in the 19th century, baptisms were common occurrences. For example, seven baptisms took place on Christmas Day, December 25, 1864. One week later, on New Year’s Day, seven more baptisms were recorded. At times, Pastor Wunder seemed to baptize children on an almost daily basis.

In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, when First Saint Paul’s made major outreach efforts to the unchurched in the community, baptisms of entire families were quite common. Church records indicate that Pastor James Manz baptized 24 individuals on March 11, 1956. During the 1950’s, the annual number of baptisms ranged from 34 to 52, reaching a high of 99 in 1961.

Next to the baptism record of Tammie Lynn Roth on September 6, 1970 is the note: “first baptism in the new structure.” Since that day, we have continued to bring people into the new life in Christ through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. In doing so, we carry out our Lord’s commission to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”