



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

URBAN RENEWAL – RENEWAL FOR CHRIST

Current residents of the Near North Side might have difficulty imagining the neighborhood around our church being described as “blighted” or in need of “urban renewal.” Such was the case, however, in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. First Saint Paul’s found itself in a declining neighborhood of crowded rooming houses and substandard housing. When the city of Chicago’s Department of Urban Renewal decided to raze the neighborhood to make way for Sandburg Village, the leaders of the church faced difficult decisions. They responded with their own kind of renewal, which they called “Renewal for Christ.”



This 1961 photograph shows our former church building on the corner of a barren landscape, with most of the neighborhood demolished around it. Church leaders debated whether to renovate the old church or to build a new one. One architectural sketch depicted how the old church might be “modernized” to match the high-rises going up nearby. Another photo from some time later shows the old church in the shadow of the newly-constructed Sandburg towers. By the time of the congregation’s 120th anniversary in 1966, church leaders had prepared a booklet with preliminary drawings for a new church building. The Building Committee, chaired by Paul Fahrenkrog, had finally determined that “it would be more expensive to renovate our present structure than to build anew” (according to a January 30, 1966 bulletin).



In the face of “urban renewal,” church leaders proposed a plan called “Renewal for Christ.” They engaged in an intensive fund-raising campaign. They created a logo, designed by Robert Kresin, in which the arms and head of the cross are surrounded by leaf-like structures, as if the cross itself is blossoming into new life. The church, they declared, would experience its own renewal. This emblem continues as the church logo to this day. Pastor Manz argued that the new church would be “a more suitable place for the preaching and teaching of the Gospel.” The church building itself, Manz stated, “will increase our outreach to the many people of our cosmopolitan area who have no faith and no church home.” The congregation made a leap of faith—and a leap of mission.



RENEWAL FOR CHRIST

On February 23, 1969, the last service was held in the old sanctuary. Demolition began on April 21, and the congregation began holding services at the McCormick YWCA at 1001 N. Dearborn. The May *Messenger* notes that “officers, leaders, members, and friends too numerous to mention have contributed an unusual amount of volunteer work which saved the congregation many thousands of dollars” during the relocation efforts. The transition would not be easy, but all were committed to the vision. Everyone believed, as our anniversary motto declares, that “He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). They trusted God to bless and renew His church.