



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

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

### A MODERN CHURCH FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Fifty-one years ago tomorrow, on October 18, 1970, members of First Saint Paul’s gathered in celebration to dedicate our current church building, an elegant modernist structure designed by renowned church architect Edward Dart. In two morning services—and a third at 4:00 p.m.—parishioners heard guest preacher Rev. Dr. Walter Wangerin, of Concordia, River Forest, preach on the theme, “St. Paul’s Good News Now.” They joined the choir to sing Paul Bunjes’s setting of “Built on a Rock the Church Doth Stand,” and they prayed together a dedication collect that included the petition, “Make the beauty of our lives, and the fervency of our witness, even greater than the appeal of this noble new building.”



Since that day in 1970, our members have striven to live up to that calling. The church leaders of 1970—who dared to demolish an old church and build a new one—believed that the new structure would inspire our members and also draw newcomers to our church and community. The sanctuary was designed to emphasize the Lutheran emphasis on Word and Sacrament. The chancel contains four main elements: a central steel cross (symbol of salvation), the red granite pulpit and font (symbols of the Word and Baptism), and the wooden table (symbol of Holy Communion).

The pews are made of the same material as the table, emphasizing the relationship between the congregation and the Sacrament in which they participate. The center aisle leads directly to the table. The staggered orientation of the pews—and the absence of any barrier between chancel and nave—bring worshippers close together as participants in the service (not spectators) and as members of a family. The hidden clerestory windows let light spill into the entire sanctuary, highlighting the perforated curved brick wall, which further inspires contemplation and a sense of peace. The hard surfaces of the sanctuary also result in perfect acoustics for the sacred music that plays such a prominent role in our worship of God.

Edward Dart designed First Saint Paul’s as a “working church,” not simply a showpiece. A working church, of course, needs more than just a sanctuary. Upon entering the front door, the visitor enters a low-ceilinged narthex, an intimate space for gathering and conversation; this contrasts sharply with the dramatic height of the sanctuary. At the other end of the building, a lounge and a flexible fellowship hall allow spaces for the “work of the church” to take place, whether that be fellowship for the members, Sunday school for children, community meals for the hungry, or events for the community.

A half-century since the dedication, in a church that still seems new, we can thank God for this great blessing and echo words spoken in prayer that day: “Make us all living stones in the structure of Thy eternal church, built into a greater spiritual house.”

