



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES

Throughout the history of First Saint Paul’s, the congregation has observed milestone anniversaries with celebrations of various kinds. Anniversary observances help church members reflect on God’s faithfulness, come together as a community, and see themselves as part of the great “cloud of witnesses” who have come before. Learning their stories, we see how God has used faithful servants to preserve and extend His church in the city of Chicago.

Major anniversaries have been marked with special worship services, often featuring guest preachers. At the 50th anniversary in 1896, the congregation invited the founding pastor, Rev. August Selle, to return to preach at one of the festival services. For the centennial celebration of 1946, Dr. J. W. Behnken, president of the LCMS, delivered the homily at one of the special services. A 110th anniversary celebration in 1956 featured, as guest preachers, the Rev. Otto H. Schmidt (grandson of longtime pastor Henry Wunder) at the morning service and former pastor Rev.



Louis Grother at the evening vespers. Rev. Dr. George Heider, then president of Concordia University, preached at one of the services of our 150th celebration.

Milestone anniversaries have often been the occasion for publications about the history of the church. The “exhibit area” in the church lounge includes samples of booklets produced by the congregation for the 75th, 100th, 110th, 115th, and 140th celebrations. In words and pictures, these books tell the story of how faithful Lutheran Christians carried out Gospel ministry in Chicago, through changing times and difficult circumstances.

Music and art have played a prominent role in our celebrations, as they do in the life of our congregation. One special event of the 140th anniversary in 1986 was a hymn festival conducted by noted organist and composer Dr. Paul Manz. For the 150th anniversary in 1996, the congregation (under the leadership of music director Paul Nicholson) commissioned four new musical compositions—by Richard Hillert, Richard Wienhorst, John Karl Hirten, and Carl Schalk—that premiered on different Sundays during the anniversary year. On All Saints Sunday of that year, the choir performed Carl Schalk’s new anthem “These Are They Who Have Come Out of the Great Tribulation,” written in memory of James Rogner, who had passed away the previous year. The choir sings that anthem again today, as we remember those who have gone before.

For the 150th anniversary, the congregation also commissioned member Darlene Fahrenkrog, professor of art emerita at Concordia University, to create the banner that now hangs in the narthex. This banner, one of many created for the church by Darlene over the years, reminds us what we have declared for 175 years: “His truth endures to all generations.”

