



URBAN CURRENT

50 years

From down and dirty Humboldt Park where our alderman was convicted on federal charges for schemes including arson for profit, to the sedate green streets of Irving Park for a temporary stay, to wild and wooly Logan Square of the 80s, the church has moved three times using 15 different locations for services, classes, and office space. From tiny storefront to towering temple, from gritty side street to grand boulevard, from neighborhood church to congregation with worldwide outreach.

AGAINST THE TIDE

Through arguably 50 of the most tumultuous years of American urban life, Armitage Baptist fought community decay, marched through swamps of political corruption, persisted through tsunamis of street violence with one non-stop mission — serve the city in the name of Jesus. During the years when countless urban churches were dying or moving to the suburbs, the congregation soldiered on. From the revolutionary 60s into the tumultuous 70s, from the crazy 80s into the heady 90s, surging into the dizzying years this side of Y2K, trudging onward from the economic meltdown of 2008.

SURVIVE TO THRIVE

Armitage determined to survive to thrive. Becoming a multifaceted, metropolitan ministry, the cross-cultural congregation of several thousand constituents has aggressively met waves of urban challenges with a message of hope and transformation. We continue today with a reach from ghetto to Gold Coast.

We have never cancelled a service. Heat waves and blizzards, Superbowls and rainstorms, television blockbuster movies and political upheavals, anti-Armitage demonstrations and street festivals, Bulls celebrations and carnivals, holidays and riots, recessions and terrorist attacks ... nothing has ever stopped a crowd from gathering for scheduled services.

On the occasion of the church's 35th anniversary, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley wrote, "... you have turned ABC from a small community of the faithful into one of our city's most influential churches."

This year Armitage celebrates 50 years of serving the city as a local body of Christ. In the face of our humanity, frailty, failures, and mistakes, God has dramatically demonstrated His faithfulness, showing His strength through our weakness. It has been my astonishing privilege to shepherd this flock for 39 of these 50 years.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

The cavernous ballroom wears its years like a wino wears his face. Yellow plastic folding chairs scrape a badly worn, neglected dance floor in the decrepit Masonic Temple. Gospel proclaimed. Invitation extended. People respond. Minutes later, the invitation respondees stand across the front of the makeshift auditorium as members of the church family come by to greet and encourage them. Suddenly, two gang rivals are face to face. The first is standing in the line of invitation respondees, hard-looking, tattooed, scarred. The second is one of the church family. The welcomer saw the former enemy standing at the front. The respondee is now staring into the face not only of a rival gang member, but someone he has a vivid memory of standing on a street three blocks away, arm extended, shooting at him! Former enemies, now brothers. They embrace in tears. This is how we battle the stronghold of street violence. This is the kind of drama I like in church. Knocks the socks off skits.

On the same stage from which Ghandi spoke, Benny Goodman, Li'l Richard, and Jimmy Hendrix sang and played, now sits a baptistery. Professional lighting dances off the moving water. The renovated ballroom is wall to wall with 40 nationalities. All eyes are riveted on a Panamanian senior couple emerging from the water, followed by their 20-something daughter.

Within minutes, a Russian, an African-American woman, a young Hispanic transplant from Texas, an Anglo Chicago native, and a young man who arrived at our church high school angry, troubled, and lost all rise from the baptismal waters.

"Walk with me, Lord, walk with me." A melody with a Mississippi dirt-road feel rises and falls between each immersion, gathering momentum and rising to a crescendo as the last person rises from the pool. The congregation is on its feet, praising God.

The exploits of this congregation have been chronicled in secular and religious media — international, national, and local. The BBC, *The Economist*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Chicago Sun Times* have all referenced the work of Armitage. The likes of Charles Osgood, Harry Smith, John Leo, and Neil Cavuto have reported the good works of this urban faith community.

The tall guy overseeing our outside welcome crew on Sunday runs the Chicago 911 Center ... a line forms on the sidewalk waiting for Thursday food pantry ... a loving caretaker rocks the newborn of a 15-year-old mother in the Babies and Ones department ... a young man arrives with his hat cocked sideways, in church for the first time ... media vans park in front of the building ... the man leading in prayer before Jesus had a \$1,000 a week cocaine habit ... guys who statistics say don't have a chance in life, playing basketball, then sitting in a circle for Bible study and prayer ... a group of artists plan a project together ... three award-winning Chicago public school principals, all church members, huddle, planning women's ministry...

God is glorified in His church ... in this great city!

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