

[Opinion](#)

'The nucleus of a great city'

Pioneer Press

Updated: 06/17/2009 07:23:52 PM CDT

Majestic domes of church and state mark the hill overlooking downtown Saint Paul. We take them for granted until we are reminded of their historic and spiritual resonance. Both came to mind with the announcement of a new honor for the Cathedral of Saint Paul.

The Cathedral, home to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, has been named a national shrine to the Apostle Paul. He was the man after whom our first humble church, and the settlement around it, were named. The designation by the Roman Catholic Church is a way of increasing devotion to Paul as the church celebrates the 2,000th anniversary of his birth, called "the Year of St. Paul."

Saul of Tarsus is how he was known when he was among the persecutors of the new, small Christian sect in the years after the death of Jesus Christ. He underwent a conversion on the famed "road to Damascus" and became, as Paul, the first great salesman of Christianity. His epistles are part of the New Testament, and he is believed to have been martyred in Rome.

In 1841, a French missionary priest, Rev. Lucien Galtier, ministered to a small flock at the Church of St. Peter in Mendota. He later wrote of the building of the first church at a humble village down the river. It was, he said, a log building "so poor that it would well remind one of the stable at Bethlehem. It was destined, however, to be the nucleus of a great city. On the 1st day of November, in the same year, I blessed the new basilica, and dedicated it to 'Saint Paul, apostle of nations.' "

Galtier's request that the settlement take the same name was granted. "I had previously fixed my residence at Saint Peter's (meaning Mendota), and the name of Paul is generally connected with that of Peter," he wrote. "The name Saint Paul, applied to a town or city, seemed appropriate. The monosyllable is short, sounds well, and is understood by all denominations of Christians. ..."

We're eternally grateful that the Rev wasn't fond of Saints Felicitas and Perpetua, which wouldn't sound well.

From Saul-Paul to Rev. Galtier, the city of St. Paul owes a lot to its namesake. It is fitting that the Cathedral, the majestic successor to the log-cabin church, would be a place for Paul's North American admirers to come and pay their respects.

For believers, the Cathedral of St. Paul is a direct link to the origins of Christianity and a reminder of what people of faith can accomplish. For the historical-minded, the Cathedral is a link to the city's pioneer past and to the expansive vision of those first settlers.