

## INSPIRED: Churches of Seattle

### INTRODUCTION

Let's start with the Big Question: are there more churches in Seattle or Starbucks?

Starbucks? Makes sense. When you think of Seattle, you think of Starbucks and the coffee culture it spawned where the worship of java has been taken to a spiritual level. In fact, Starbucks in Seattle seems to possess the 3 Omni's that theologians have historically attributed to God—omnipotence (unlimited influence), omniscience (overseeing everything), and of course omnipresence.

Contrast this with how churches in Seattle are often seen. Relative to other areas of the country, we in Seattle and the Northwest are considered the unchurched, the nones (not nuns), the latter referring to the fact that more people claim none when asked about religious identification than any other section of the United States. Spirituality in Seattle is considered cool enough, but when it comes to church attendance/membership or other indicators of church commitment we seem skittish, preferring what has been called a “flexodoxy” or “boutique spirituality” approach.

On top of this, we have what might be called the irony of topography. Surrounded by the towering presence of the Olympics and the Cascades, we somehow feel a sense of respect and awe and sometimes intimidation. But with all this grandeur we don't necessarily know whether to attribute it to nature or nature's God.

So is Seattle really God's Country that isn't? An ecclesiastical wasteland embracing only some kind of secular spirituality? Hardly. Churches in Seattle are an integral part of the current and historical culture of Seattle, affecting and contributing to all elements of the society.....

.....So enjoy. Like a good cup a coffee, we hope this book on the architecture and heritage of Seattle's churches will both warm you and get you pumped about an indispensable aspect of Seattle's rich culture.

### CHAPTER ONE—HISTORY

“Charity, my friends, charity.”

As itinerant Catholic priest Father Modeste Demers invoked this phrase several times to a ragtag assemblage of sinners and saints in the cookhouse of Henry Yesler's lumber mill in 1853, we are left to wonder what inspired this homiletic choice. Perhaps the good father (who had just canoed into the area) found out he was preaching the first sermon in this backwater town of Seattle and wanted the universal theme of love (charity) to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Or perhaps Father Demers tapped into a prophecy of another sort, a foretelling of how this small group's microcosm of denominational

togetherness based on love would become a theme of Seattle's churches in the years to come.

### Mark Matthews: Dynamic Pastor

In the spring of 1903 a whirlwind from Macon, Georgia descended on the First Presbyterian Church of Seattle. His name was Mark Matthews, and his 38-year ministry was a dynamic combination of preaching and living the social gospel.

The 6:5 reed-thin Matthews could fire and brimstone with the best of them, using hair-curdling invective against both lazy Christians and corrupt politicians. A strong advocate of Progressive reforms and the "social gospel," Matthews wanted to make Seattle a righteous community through addressing its ills (drinking, prostitution, gambling) and addressing its needs (with an abundance of community work, including work with hospitals, orphanages, libraries, day nurseries, and an unemployment bureau). He immersed himself in the political controversies of the day, and famously feuded with Mayor Hiram Gill of whom he had secretly investigated for corruption.