

THE STORY... THROUGH DESIGN AND SYMBOLS

The design of the Sanctuary of Crestwood Christian Church and the symbolism of the Stained Glass windows is a story worth telling and remembering. Byron F. Romanowitz, the architect who designed this Sanctuary facility, made the following statement relative to the intent and concept of the design:

“History tells us that the traditional nave with seating on either side of a central aisle symbolizes, among other things, a ship. [The part of the Sanctuary where pews, pulpit, chancel, altar, etc. are located is the “nave.” It’s so named because nave is derived from the Latin “navis,” meaning ship] The worshipers on either side of the aisle are positioned as slaves in a galley. Consider that in the early Christian era, the only possible device in which large groups of persons could be transported together was a ship, and we begin to see how this association was formed.”

The windows represent the openings where the oars were placed into the water. The skylight or opening above suggests that there was need for light to enter the vessel to give illumination to things beneath. Thus, the skylight lets in God’s illumination from above.

“As a matter of fact,” says the architect, “the visual thrust of the front design depends on this association being felt and understood subconsciously. The concrete wall around the front planting area is literally a symbolic ship’s bow.”

Thus, it was the intent and design that the Sanctuary be thought of as a ship: with its long, slender hull... its openings on the sides for the oars to move it through the water... its opening above to let in light and fresh air... and the bow on the exterior front to divide the water and assist its movement through the sea. *(Parenthetically, the bow of the symbolic ship has been unintentionally covered up with shrubbery [or submerged as it were]. Removal of the plantings would reactivate the symbolism of the church as a ship.)*

With thoughts of a ship and sea in mind, one can notice the patterns and movement of colors at the top and bottom of each window. In addition to the predominance of soft blues and purples, there are also streaks of white resembling breakers in the lower portions and lavender across the tops. Each suggests different patterns of the sea at varying distances.

Next one notices the sweeping lines formed by the epoxy in the glass panels. With the amount of weight per square foot caused by the thick pieces of glass, it is necessary to hold all that together. The epoxy, however, serves more than the function of a mere catalyst. More importantly, the epoxy itself is part of the design. Keep in mind that our Sanctuary was designed as symbolizing a ship... that which provides safety and protection through the storms of life. Keep in mind also that our vessel rides upon the waves of the sea... keeping in touch with but not being overcome by the volume of that over which God gave dominion to human beings. Moreover, keep in mind that in biblical days fishing was a very common trade. And again, keep in mind that some of our Lord’s richest parabolic images have to do with throwing out the net and bringing into the ship all kinds of fish. With those images and designs in mind, one can more readily appreciate the dual purpose of the epoxy lines. They hold together the glass...

but moreover, each expresses the function and presence of the fishing net. Rather than look beyond or even apologize for the lines, they are inherent to that which ties each window to the next.

The nineteen windows in Crestwood's Sanctuary are thus all part of a common design and concept. And yet, each window is separate and distinct. Each one portrays a different symbol suggesting a separate concept of the Christian faith. Unlike the background symbolism of the windows where the color patterns and movements all blend together, there is no particular pattern or arrangement of the prominent symbolism of the windows. One can stand at any place in the Sanctuary and see a different symbol, recognizing that one does not depend upon another. The windows are centered around three themes: [1] God's Creative Work through Christ, [2] The Faith and the Church, and [3] The Growth & Witness of the Christian Faith.

WINDOW 1 — HAND OF GOD

Consider the creative power of God and Christ in their combined work of Creation. The window toward the left rear of the Sanctuary is the HAND OF GOD extending earthward as if to touch and effect all that is below... including the Sun, the Moon and the Earth. Integral to our consideration of all the created order of things: the heavens, the seas, the earth and all living creatures both in the sea and on land, is the story of Genesis and the underlying awareness that God's creative power brought into being the whole creation. Furthermore, the Gospel of John states the eternal nature of the Christ and declares that the living Word (the Christ) was part of that beginning. He attests that the Living Word was in the beginning with God and without both the eternal God and the living Word, nothing was made that has been made. Thus, the Christian faith (as depicted in our windows) affirms the unity of both God and Christ.

WINDOW 2 — STAR AND THE MANGER

The second window is the STAR AND THE MANGER. It is one of the most obvious symbols of the Christian faith. It represents the birth of Jesus, born in that Bethlehem manger. As the rays of the Star fall on the Manger below, it symbolizes the combining of the divine and the human in this unique child of Bethlehem. Furthermore, the scripture from II Corinthians speaks about coming to recognize Jesus no longer from a human point of view. For he was, indeed, part of the new message of creation as God took the initiative to reconcile the world back into a full relationship with the Almighty. The wisdom and the glory of the heavens and the knowledge and simplicity of the earth came together in Jesus of Nazareth.

WINDOW 3 — LAMB WITH THE BANNER

The third window is the LAMB WITH THE BANNER. From the days of the first century, Jesus' followers have literally and figuratively taken up the banner of their crucified Lord. The message of faith, hope and love has been the chief ingredient of the Christian banner through the ages. But prior to his calling of the twelve... prior to his teaching in the synagogue... prior to his confrontations with the established religious leaders... prior to his acts of caring for and ministering to the needs of all kinds of

people... prior to his parting words to his companions in the upper room... prior to his mock trial before Pilate... prior to his death on the cross... and prior to his resurrection from the dead — Jesus was identified by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God. It was this role which symbolized the direction of his ministry; that is, he accepted his lot as being a sacrificial lamb in a system which required that before there was granted life, there must be a death. In addition to that, he also was identified as one who cared for those who were overlooked, forgotten, and ignored. His parable taught to seek for the one stray sheep when there were ninety-nine already safe in the fold. He told Peter beside the Sea of Tiberias to feed his sheep and tend his lambs. He was identified as the Good Shepherd. Throughout Christian history he has been known as the *“Lamb of God... who takes away the sin of the world.”*

WINDOW 4 — SCALLOP SHELL

The fourth window is that of the SCALLOP SHELL. Initially its symbolism escapes us as we search our minds for its intent. The fact is, however, Christian tradition says Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by the Baptist who used a shell to pour water on him in the act of fulfilling righteousness. Thus, the Shell symbolizes Jesus’ baptism. While the Shell appropriately stands for this sacramental act of even our Lord Jesus submitting his life to the rite of baptism, nevertheless, it says more. It was by the sea that Jesus called his first disciples. It was on the sea, that Jesus astonished his disciples in displaying mastery over the winds and the waves. It was on the sea one night when Jesus taught one of his greatest lessons on faith as he approached his disciples walking on the water. And it was on the seashore when Jesus made a post-resurrection appearance to his disciples and demonstrated the uniqueness of his resurrection body by eating fish in their presence. Indeed, some of the most memorable occasions in his ministry were done when Jesus and his followers were by the seashore. The Shell is a fitting symbol to highlight some of the occurrences which took place between Jesus and his disciples.

WINDOW 5 — CROSSES ON A HILL

The fifth window is the CROSSES ON A HILL. Through the centuries there have been many great teachers... many humanitarians... many skilled in the art of rallying people around a cause... many physicians who brought healing and wholeness to those sick and wounded. But one of the principal things that makes Jesus stand out above all the rest is his willingness to devote every ounce of energy — mentally, physically, spiritually — to his task of telling the story of God’s love. And he did it to the end. There is no greater single symbol of the Christian faith than the Cross. There is no more easily identifiable thing that represents those who wish to let others know of their allegiance to their Lord (whether it appears as costume jewelry or as a landmark on top of a church) than the Cross of Jesus Christ. One of the most beloved hymns of Christian hymnody is Fanny Crosby’s, “The Old Rugged Cross.” The scene of Crosses on a Hill symbolizes the instrument of the crucifixion of our Lord. But at the same time, the Cross stands as the sentinel demonstration of the love of Almighty God.

WINDOW 6 — BUTTERFLY

The sixth window is the BUTTERFLY. The butterfly symbolizes change on three levels. To begin with, the lesson of transformation is seen vividly in small insects which change from caterpillars to butterflies. But then on a grander scale, the transforming power of new life — even the new creation — is seen in the lives of those who give themselves to Jesus Christ and have a new beginning (a metamorphosis, if you please). Those who become followers of the Christ often leave others in disbelief over the way such persons have changed or been transformed by the presence of a higher power in their lives. And yet the supreme change and the primary reason for the Butterfly being a Christian symbol, comes from the transforming act of Resurrection as Jesus arose from the dead. The cross stands as a symbol of death and sacrifice... but it's the tomb or the butterfly that stands as a symbol of resurrection.

St. Paul wrote: *“If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”* (II Cor 5:17) Add to that the words of the prologue to John's Gospel: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* (John 1:1) From the outset there has been an identity between God and Christ that is unparalleled in any other association ever known.

WINDOW 7 — OAK LEAF

On the left side of the Sanctuary is the OAK LEAF window. The Oak Leaf symbolizes Faith. Faith is one of the strongest aspects of a person's total being. There are many kinds of faith... there are many ways to express trust in one's self... or confidence in other people. No kind, however, is as basic as one's faith in the presence and power of God in our lives. Isaiah (44:14) mentions how the oak grows strong in the forest. The acorn, which grows into one of the tallest trees in the forest, is also like what Jesus said about the mustard seed which grows from the smallest to the greatest of proportions. Matthew, Mark and Luke all convey the truth of it's symbolism. The possibility of growth from something small to something very large signifies the element of faith in each of us.

In the recital of events in Hebrews 11, one listens to descriptions in the Faith chapter of the Bible. In reading or hearing such a list, one's mind wanders to the sibling rivalry of Abel and Cain... or to Enoch and his sons and daughters... to Noah and the days of the flood... or to Abraham and how he became known as “Father of the Faithful.” None of us starts out on our Christian journey fully mature... fully wise... fully strong. But as St. Paul says about another kind of seed, we may do the planting... and another may do the watering... but it is God who gives the growth and the increase. (I Cor. 3:6) We are nurtured by the development of our faith in Almighty God.

WINDOW 8 — OPEN BIBLE

The forward most window on the right depicts the OPEN BIBLE. The references in scripture to the Word of God are too numerous to recite. But the association of the Bible itself as conveying God's word... God's will... God's love... to those who believe, is well documented. The Bible isn't simply the Word of God which has been revealed and written on the pages of what we refer to as holy scripture. The Bible also conveys the reality and authenticity that Jesus of Nazareth, who was acclaimed as Son of God, is also the living presence of the Word of God.

The words of the 19th Psalm are so articulate and eloquent regarding the thoughts of the Psalmist in relation to the Word of God. While the Psalmist uses several phrases to describe this thought, nevertheless, it's the same concept. Listen again to what the Psalmist said...

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

WINDOW 9 — CROWN AND CROSS

The ninth window correspondingly is the most forward window on the left. It's the CROWN AND CROSS window. This symbol — like others — offers more than one point of emphasis. As much as anything else it is a fitting symbol for one who was of the royal household of King David... thus, it provides him with both a Crown and a Scepter. But it's more than that. Throughout the history of the Christian faith, the church has acclaimed Jesus as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Even though it was intended as a piece of mockery... as a slab of slander... and as a tribute in ridicule... the inscription which was nailed to the cross above Jesus at the time of his crucifixion stated this truth clearly in three languages: King of the Jews. The writing in 1 Peter continues this theme in recognizing all who are his followers as belonging to a royal priesthood. Moreover, the life and teachings and ministry of Jesus have all contributed to the fact that for the past two thousand years he has reigned in the hearts of millions of people.

WINDOWS 10 & 11 — SHIP AND ANCHOR

The tenth and eleventh windows, second and third from the front on the right, are the SHIP and the ANCHOR windows, respectively. In addressing the design of the church, we've already attempted to identify some of the symbolism in these pieces of Christian art. To begin with, "Old Ship Zion" is the phrase often referred to when desiring to speak of the place both of God's dwelling and the church's security. The ship was the instrument which provided safe passage not simply through stormy times, but also when travel by foot was either impossible or inadvisable. Thus, tradition has acknowledged God's presence in the midst of the church's stormy life providing safety and security in very much the same way that a ship offered security to its passengers. Furthermore, the Anchor gives a sense of stability and undergirding to the people of God as they make their journey through their pilgrimage of faith. When it is necessary or merely desirable to pause in the journey, the anchor keeps the vessel from drifting or moving off course. In the same manner, the Christian faith becomes the bulwark or foundation needed in all our lives as we face the cares and concerns of our daily sojourn. The anchor is simply another way of expressing or symbolizing the truth of the words of the 16th century monk, Martin Luther, who wrote that great hymn of the church, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." This foundation of the Christian faith is that which is addressed in Matthew's gospel. Peter's declaration is the basis of Christianity. Peter's divine words (which were not revealed to him by flesh and blood) declare Jesus to be the Christ... the

Son of the living God. We call it the Good Confession. It's that kind of security and stability which the ship and anchor offer to us all.

WINDOW 12 — HARP

The twelfth window is the symbol of the HARP. Obviously, as a musical instrument, the harp represents an appreciation for melody and harmony and all aspects of music. The book of Psalms in our Bible was the hymnal of the Hebrew people. Throughout the Psalms, the harp is mentioned as that which accompanies the singing and assists in making melodies as praise and adoration are offered to God. Thus, the harp is an instrument of praise... inspiration... and beauty. It represents the many ways we offer thanks to God.

WINDOW 13 — OLIVE BRANCH

The next window is the one depicting the OLIVE BRANCH. It's fair to say that most of the symbols which are part of the Christian art in our windows are meaningful and symbolic truth only to those of the Christian faith. After all, some symbols have to do with matters of belief and faith... elements of conviction not shared by all persons. The Olive Branch, however, just might be the exception to that principle. After all, even an organization such as the United Nations recognizes the significance of the olive branch. As you know, the symbol stands for peace and harmony and tranquility in the lives of all individuals. It comes from an old story. The story in Genesis 8 of the olive leaf is the story of what happened after the great flood. Because of sin and chaos in the lives of God's people... because of the confusion and disorder among those who confessed to represent God's family... because of the bedlam and turmoil that existed so long ago... the record states that God determined to destroy the created order of things and start over again. As the flood waters covered all that God had created, even so did they do away with all the disarray and clutter and disorientation that existed. At the end of the flood, Noah sent out a dove and when it returned with an olive leaf in its beak... he knew that calm and tranquility had been restored to God's creation.

The Olive Branch symbolizes the need for and the recognition of peace in our lives. Peace, however, is more than the mere absence of discord... it's more than the elimination of confusion. Peace is that sense of God's Shalom... that inner, communal, and global sense of harmony within each person and also among all the peoples of the world.

The first grouping of windows took a look at the six centered on God's Creative Work Through Christ. The second grouping of windows focused on the seven encompassing the theme of The Faith of the Church. The final grouping of windows highlights the six which develop the concept of The Growth and Witness of the Christian Faith.

WINDOW 14 — CHI RHO

The next window is THE CHI RHO window. The Chi Rho symbol is made from the first two Greek letters in the word Χριστός... "Christ." The first letter is an "X", and the other one is sort of a "P".

Obviously, they represent the name of Christ. Very quickly, each youth in the church recognizes these Chi and Rho letters as the name of our youth fellowship for those in Junior High or Middle School grades. Again, the Chi Rho symbol is one of the universal signs for the Living Christ. The symbol appears on standards which have been used in church assemblies... it has been used as one of the symbols appearing on pulpit or lectern scarves. The Chi Rho symbol has always been one of the ways used to identify the presence of the living Christ.

WINDOW 15 — LAMP

Our next window is the symbol of THE LAMP. The lamp has long been recognized as an instrument of giving off light. Its steady and even burning wick has provided ample illumination in areas of shadows and darkness. Even before the candle, there was the lamp. In Christian tradition the burning lamp, or its equivalent the candle, has been a symbol of learning and guidance and enlightenment for the people of God. Psalm 119:105 gives us one of the oldest statements relative to the value and significance of the lamp:

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

A most poignant statement made by our Lord Jesus comes from the Sermon on the Mount. Just after talking to his disciples about being the salt of the earth, he said:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (MT 6:12-13)

Furthermore, the lamp represents guidance from above... it gives advice, it points one in the proper direction. The Lamp of God gives counsel for all who desire to call upon the Lord to provide light for the journey. As such, the Light of God shines as a beacon... and as Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount says, it cannot be hid. Additionally, John’s Gospel makes reference to Christ as the Light which gives light to everyone in the world. The symbol of light in the burning lamp or the burning candle is one of the oldest symbols of the Christian faith.

WINDOW 16 — RAINBOW

The next window is that of THE RAINBOW. Two times already we’ve mentioned the Genesis account in referring to other windows in our symbolic composite. But beyond the creative work of God and that of the olive branch after the flood, the account says that God set the Rainbow in the clouds as a reminder — both to God and to the rest of creation — that there was a covenant which promised God’s watch care and provision for all living things. Instead of the earth ever again being the recipient of God’s anger and destruction... from that time forth and forever more, the rainbow would stand as the symbol of God’s covenant. It says clearly that though there be rains... and though there be storms... and though there be heat and cold and all kinds of hostile acts of the environment of the cosmic order of things, God made a promise that it is not because of any divine intention that such things occur. When there are personal or global tragedies, no longer do we have to question our relationship to the Almighty... no

longer do we have to probe the innermost recesses of our beings... no longer do we have to wonder if God is responding to us because of our sin and our failures of faithful living.

In essence, the Rainbow stands as a reminder both to God and to us that God repented of whatever divine involvement there was in the destruction of the ancient flood. Furthermore, it seems to me that the bright and beautiful colors of the Rainbow also serve to remind us that God looked at the world and decided that nothing could be known simply in “black and white.” Nothing would be either all one way or all another. Either extreme cannot allow for the beauty of variations and styles and diversities so necessary to the whole picture of life. The Rainbow symbolizes for us, therefore, the necessity of a plurality over against a solitary existence.

WINDOW 17 — CHALICE

Our next window study is that of THE CHALICE. The Chalice carries a double symbolism for members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The passage from 1 Corinthians 11 speaks directly to the practice of how the church at Corinth observed the Lord’s Supper. The Apostle was quite deliberate in giving instructions about how they should and should not regard their observance of this sacrament. After all, since they came out of a pagan background, they were comfortable in coming there to have a feast... get drunk... and go home. Paul said to do so was to eat and drink to their spiritual death. Moreover, when it comes to the act of Communion, perhaps the oldest phrase in the church is that of the words of our Lord, “Do this in remembrance of me.” (v24) In addition, St. Paul says further:

“In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:25-26)

Most importantly, the Chalice represents the central place of the Lord’s Supper in the life of the whole church. There are many names... there are many styles of ministry... there are many methods of interpreting scriptures... and there are differing practices and disciplines within the many components of the body of Christ. And yet, regardless of our differences the Church of Jesus Christ stands united upon the centrality of the Eucharist in worship. For at the Table of our Lord, we renew the promise of forgiveness for our part in dividing the body of Christ.

In recent years, The Chalice with St. Andrew’s Cross has become the logo for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). You remember it’s significance. “The St. Andrew’s Cross, national cross of Scotland, focuses attention on the Scottish Presbyterian roots of the church. Thomas and Alexander Campbell both studied in Scotland and were Presbyterians, drawing many of their ideas from developments taking place in that country. St. Andrew, too, has been identified with the laity and evangelism, prominent emphases of the Disciples over the years.” (Disciples Yearbook)

Thus, the symbol of the Chalice with the Cross of St. Andrew has great meaning for those who are part of this particular religious tradition. It both speaks to our oneness with all Christians in our efforts to seek the unity of the Body of Christ... and it speaks of the witness of our particular church in attempting to witness to all persons of our faith in Jesus the Christ.

WINDOW 18 — CROSS AND ORB

Next we focus on the window, THE CROSS AND ORB. Probably more than any other single symbol, the symbol of the Cross and the Orb stands for the growth and witness of the Christian Faith. The symbol depicts the Cross atop the Globe, and as such, it represents the worldwide evangelization efforts of Christianity. Some religions are more or less for purposes of “maintenance.” They seem to be virtually static in relation to the rest of the world. Some religions have offered their secrets and their wisdom to merely a select few. Christianity, on the other hand, has always been known for its evangelistic efforts. The central message of such a gospel is simple: “Whosoever will, may come.” The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for the least, the last, and the lost. The image of the Cross and the Orb clearly expresses the desire of Christianity to be inclusive of all people. We participate in the ecumenical thrust of sharing in the proclamation of the message of God’s love and acceptance for everyone. And that’s what Christianity is all about.

WINDOW 19 — ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

The last in our study of our nineteen windows is that of THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA. The two characters A and Ω are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Every other letter which is used to formulate any word in the language fits between these two letters. Thus, these two are the beginning and the ending of the alphabet. The symbolism of the Alpha and the Omega for the Christian Faith is obvious. The revelation came to the exiled John on the Isle of Patmos, and in Jesus’ words, he is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. It’s a fitting way to end not only the Book of Revelation, but the New Testament itself.

The words speak for all time: Christ is the Alpha and the Omega the superscription and the subscription of the universe. It’s about the most dramatic way possible of expressing the eternal nature of Jesus Christ: there was nothing that took priority over him in the Beginning... and there is nothing that will take precedence over him in the End. He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Jesus is The Alpha and The Omega of the Christian Faith.

Our building... our windows... through art and design and symbols, tell the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE HAND OF GOD... symbolizing God’s Creative Power.

THE STAR AND THE MANGER... symbolizing the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

THE LAMB WITH THE BANNER... symbolizing Jesus as the Lamb of God.

THE SCALLOP SHELL... symbolizing Baptism, particularly its significance for Jesus.

THE CROSSES ON A HILL.. symbolizing the Crucifixion of Christ.

THE BUTTERFLY... symbolizing the Resurrection of Christ.

THE OAK LEAF... symbolizing the growing nature of Faith.

THE OPEN BIBLE... symbolizing the importance of the Word of God.

THE CROWN AND CROSS... symbolizing the Royal and Kingly nature of Christ.

THE SHIP... symbolizing the Security of the Church.

THE ANCHOR... symbolizing the Stability and Foundation of faith in our lives.

THE HARP... symbolizing appreciation for Music, Praise, Inspiration, and Beauty.

THE OLIVE BRANCH... symbolizing the desire and search for Peace in our world.

THE CHI RHO... symbolizing the name of Christ.

THE LAMP... symbolizing Learning and Guidance and Enlightenment.

THE RAINBOW... symbolizing God's everlasting Covenant.

THE CHALICE... symbolizing the Sacrament of Communion, and its importance for Disciples of Christ.

THE CROSS AND ORB... symbolizing the Growth and Witness of the Christian Faith.

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA... symbolizing Jesus to be the First & Last, the Beginning & End.

The building of Crestwood Christian Church... the windows... and the people all tell the story of the of the association of the faith and the church and how it represents the commitment of time, talent, treasure, and energy to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

(Excerpts from sermons preached at Crestwood Christian Church, August, 1991)

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