

## THE SANCTUARY

Though a modern church, Good Shepherd is not void of symbolism. The following symbols are meant as teaching tools and represent only a few examples that direct our attention toward God and draw us closer to God.

### The Pews

The angling of the pews represents the unity of the people of God throughout all the world. If you took an imaginary trip following the angle of the pews, you would eventually end up back where you started, having made a huge circle. This circle symbolizes the world and God's encompassing love for all God's people through Jesus Christ.

### The Chancel Furniture

The baptismal font, is located near a door symbolizing one's entrance into the care and keeping of Christ's people. On the font is a descending dove reminding us of the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus Christ like a descending dove.

The pulpit contains a symbol of a lamp of oil, reminding us that "Thy word as a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." The reading and the preaching of God's Word from the pulpit guides us in our living and directs our spiritual path.

The communion table or altar serves both purposes. It is a communion table because the pastor can stand behind it and face the people, and hence we can gather around the Lord's table. When the pastor stands with his/her back to the congregation and faces the table, it becomes an altar from which we ask God's forgiveness and upon which we place our sacrifices symbolized by our offerings. The symbols include a chalice, a clump of grapes and wheat chaffs or wheat heads and denotes the Holy Communion: the grapes become the wine put in the chalice, and the kernels of wheat become the bread which we break for the communion.

All the symbols in the chancel furniture imbedded are made of slate. This was done purposely to connect the life of the church with the local life of the slate-mining industry reminding people in the future of the closeness of our everyday living with our faith life.

## THE SYMBOLIC WORK

AT

## GOOD SHEPHERD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



## **Paraments**

The Paraments (colored cloths covering the altar and pulpit) represent the church year which begins with the first Sunday of Advent. The color for Advent is blue, reminding us of God's faithfulness in sending us a Messiah as we prepare for the birth of Jesus Christ. White is the color used for the seasons of Christmas and Easter as well as specific days [Epiphany, Transfiguration Sunday, Ascension Thursday, Trinity Sunday and Christ the King Sunday] set aside to remind us of the life of Christ with white symbolizing the purity of Jesus Christ. The seasons of Epiphany and Pentecost are represented by the color of green denoting growth and life. Purple is the color of Lent (the forty days prior to Easter beginning on Ash Wednesday) and reminds us of penitence and self-reflection. Black is used for Good Friday and gives a sense of mourning as we grieve the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Red is the color for Pentecost Sunday and Reformation Day, along with special days in the life of the Saints, such as anniversaries, installations and ordinations. Red depicts both the flame of the Holy Spirit as well as the blood of the martyrs. And finally, for Ascension Day, four colors are used including purple (royalty) and gold (kingship) denoting Christ as Lord; and white (purity) and red (sacrifice) denoting Christ as Savior.

## **Appointments**

The appointments (candle holders, bible stand, Christ candle and flower vase) are made of brass and fine metal, an expression that God is precious to us. To keep these items from becoming tarnished or losing their polish they are handled with gloves. This also reminds us how important God is in our lives that we should handle our relationship with God with special care. The candles symbolize the light of Christ. The bases on the candle holders, vase and bible stand have three steps or tiers, symbolic of the scriptural passage from I Corinthians 13, "Three things remain – faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love." Faith is the base, hope is the center, love is the ultimate or the highest of the three tiers of the base. The open Bible reminds us that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. The flowers remind us of the beauty of God's creation and that all we have and all we are are gifts from God.

## **The Ceiling**

The sanctuary was built with a higher ceiling so that when you walk into the sanctuary your spirit is uplifted and your thoughts are directed to heavenly things and your attention is drawn to the immenseness of God. In addition, the design of the ceiling is that of an inverted hull of a ship. The ship represents the Church which carries the faith of Christ into the future. It is the ark which contains the Spirit of Christ that brings salvation to the world.

## **The Cross**

The wooden cross that hangs on the front wall was hand-made by Kenny Rice, and has no screws or nails in it, except for the anchors that hold it to the wall. The cross itself is one piece, not held together by any mechanical means, but is all solid wood glued together. It has a hemfir core and a cedar outside. The empty cross reminds us of Jesus' sacrificial love and the fulfillment of Christ's resurrection from the dead and the hope in the promise to us for eternal life.

## **The Light Tunnel**

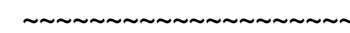
A more obscure symbol is the light tunnel at the upper rear of the sanctuary. When you look at that light tunnel from inside the sanctuary, you see the darkened cross in the center of it, the backdrop at any time during the day is a nice bright light. This of course is another symbol for Christ, the light of the world ~ a light which floods not only the church but also our spiritual and emotional lives making us a community of faith and part of God's holy family.

## **The Shepherd's Staff**

The Shepherd's Staff placed withing the chancel area reminds us that Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd as we, the Church, are his sheep. The **X** on the staff is the Greek letter chi and the shape of the staff in the shape of a **P** reminds us of the Greek letter rho. These make up the first three letters in Christ.

## **The United Church of Christ Emblem**

The symbol of the United Church of Christ comprises a crown, cross and orb enclosed within a double oval bearing the name of the church and the prayer of Jesus, "That they may all be one" (John 17:21). It is based on an ancient Christian symbol called the "Cross of Victory" or the "Cross Triumphant." The crown symbolizes the sovereignty of Christ. The cross recalls the suffering of Christ—his arms outstretched on the wood of the cross—for the salvation of humanity. The orb, divided into three parts, reminds us of Jesus' command to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The verse from Scripture reflects our historic commitment to the restoration of unity among the separated churches of Jesus Christ.



## THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

We begin the tour of the stain glass windows to the right-hand side facing the chancel area in the front of the sanctuary. In this window is depicted the **four candles of Advent**. The Advent candles represent the four Sundays prior to Christmas and remind us of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The candles represent hope, love, joy, and peace.

We walk to the left side of the chancel where we see depicted the **Holy Family at the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ**. Kneeling and holding the baby Jesus is his mother, Mary; standing next to her is Joseph, Jesus' earthly father.

The window next to the organ depicts what is called the **Epiphany Star** which symbolizes the season of Epiphany. This season begins when the magi (or wise men) follow the star to the place where Jesus was born and reminds us that Christ died for all peoples - not just the Hebrew nation. This good news is first revealed to the magi.

We walk across the sanctuary where we see the **descending dove**. This symbol denotes Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and refers to the scripture, "and the spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove." This event marks the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry.

We move to the organ side of the nave or church once again to the second window on the west wall. Here we see a **symbolic cross in the center with a glow around it and it is encased by the crossed palms**. This symbolizes Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem with people placing palms before him to honor the king for whom they longed. This begins Holy Week and recalls Jesus' Passion and Death on the Cross.

We move back on the west wall of the church to the third symbol where there is a **table with the tiny symbol Chi Rho** (the first two letters in Greek for the word Christ - XP). With the bread and chalice along with the Chi Rho mark this as the Lord's Table and reminds us of the Last Supper of our Lord with his disciples before his death.

We now move to the east wall of the sanctuary to the second symbol above the door. In this symbol we see the **bare wooden cross** which remind us of the crucifixion of our Lord. On either side of the cross is a **rooster** reminding us of Peter's denial of Jesus three times before the cock crowed, and a **money bag** reminding us of Judas' betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

We move to the third window on the east wall of the sanctuary and in this window we see the **crown of thorns and three spikes**. The crown of thorns reminds us how the soldiers mocked Christ and placed a crown of thorns on his brow as "king of the Jews" and the three spikes remind us that Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the cross because of his love for us.

The last window on the east wall of the sanctuary shows a very traditional looking Easter Cross, that is, a **cross superimposed upon a lily** or vice versa. The lily has long been associated with Easter because of its whiteness reminding us of Christ's purity and the flower is shaped like a trumpet which proclaims the good news that Christ conquered death.

We move back to the west wall of the nave to see the symbol of a **chariot wheel on fire**. It depicts in the Hebrew text the chariot that came for Elijah and carried him into heaven. In New Testament symbolism it reminds us of Christ ascension into heaven which occurred 40 days following Easter, thus ending Jesus Christ's ministry from birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Through the symbols of stained glass we end the Christian year that tells the story of Jesus Christ on earth and we move to the windows between the Narthex and the Sanctuary telling of the life of the Christian Church resting in the Holy Spirit.

As you exit the main passage into the Narthex you will notice the symbols **ih̄s** (on the left) and **x̄p** (on the right). These are the first three letters in the Greek for Jesus and Christ. Symbolically it reminds us that we leave worship in the name of Jesus Christ.

As we move to the left we come across the symbol of an **open book with Roman numerals totaling 10 imposed on a woven cross** reminding us of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Next to that is the **cross with four open books** in the four corners of the cross symbolizing the four Gospels and spreading the Word of God made incarnate in the life of Christ to the four corners of the world.

Next to that window is a symbol of a **fish pointing to the sky**. This ancient symbol was used by early Christians to secretly reveal themselves to other Christians. The word for fish in Greek is ichtus which became an anagram for the sentence, 'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior.'

And the last window on the left of the Narthex wall is a reminder of our call to proclaim the empty tomb symbolized by **two angels with trumpets** heralding the good news of Christ's resurrection from death to life.

As we move to the right of the entrance on the Narthex wall we come to the symbol of **two fish and five loaves of bread** reminding us of Jesus' miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes and also reminding us that we too will be multiplied through Christ.

The next window represents a **ship** symbolizing the Church which has carried the faith down through the ages and continues to be the body of Christ.

The next window is a **flame with the Greek letters alpha and omega** which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This symbolizes that Jesus Christ is the light of the world and is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. And the final window on the Narthex wall is the **butterfly** again symbolizing the good news of the resurrection. That is if we were baptized into a death like Christ we will surely be raised in a new life like Christ. A message of hope and salvation.

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### THE WROUGHT IRON SCULPTURE

The wrought iron sculpture on the front of the church building is a representation of Jesus Christ holding a lamb and incorporating the ideals of the congregation - working, worshiping, and growing together in the love of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

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### THE MEDITATION GARDEN

The **garden** is elevated reminding us that heaven is on a different plane than earth and allows us a new perspective on life and eternity.

The **stone wall** surrounding the garden reminds us that God calls us to be the living stones ~ the church. The wall begins at the far end as a rough hedge row chaotic and somewhat disorganized and gradually wraps around becoming more interlocked and purposefully placed ~ how the congregation of God's people fit together as the Church.

The **fountain** created out of field stone symbolizes the altar where sacrifices were made in the Hebrew testament days and from which gifts poured forth as seen in the cool flowing water - reminiscent of the waters that flowed from the rock after Moses struck it while the Israelites journeyed through the desert.

**Two fern embellished benches** symbolize the two natures of Christ ~ human and divine.

The **three Japonica plants** remind us of the Trinity ~ the Creator (Father), the Redeemer (Son), and the Comforter (Holy Ghost/Spirit).

The **Four trees** were chosen to represent the four gospels: Dogwood - Mark; Red Bud - John; Japanese Maple - Matthew; Cherry - Luke.

The **seven azaleas** symbolize the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit ~ peace, love, joy, self-control, gentleness, generosity, humbleness ~ the colors of red and white reminding us of Pentecostal fire and wind.

The **twelve lilacs** represent the twelve disciples and create an arch or asp as in a cathedral as a backdrop for the fountain/altar. They are various shades from deep purple, lavender, and white reminding us of the differences we all have as individuals and yet are one as followers of Jesus Christ.

