

**All Saints' Episcopal Church:
"Sacred Space For The People Of God"**

I. Introduction: Sacred Space For A Holy People

Anglicans build parish churches as though they were small cathedrals, miniatures of great churches housing the *cathedras*, the thrones, of the church's overseers, bishops whose apostolic authority derives from those who followed Jesus in first-century Palestine. Church builders of our tradition aspire always to evoke the sense that this is not an ordinary place; that what happens here is extraordinary, so much so that we have a way of talking about "sacred space", to distinguish it from that which is not.

We do believe that all creation is sacred, because it is of God; but human culture doesn't express this belief when we build subway tunnels and office buildings, warehouses and shopping malls. From the very beginning of Judeo-Christian history, however, from the Tent of Meeting to Solomon's Temple and the great churches of Europe and the Americas, the people of God have been called to make space set apart for the Divine-human encounter. Such a place is All Saints' Episcopal Church in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Not a brick has been laid at All Saints' that doesn't contribute to the sense of this church as a place of

Divine-human encounter. From the high vaults of the Nave and the rugged cross suspended above the sanctuary altar to the reflective well in the Oratory of the Good Shepherd; from the nursery and classrooms to the kitchen, the People of God at All Saints' have said, "This is a place where God's work will be done through us" -- the work of worship, prayer, study, nurture, sharing, caring and redemption that God in Christ reveals as the path to the Kingdom of God.

Signs and symbols are vital to expressing what we believe. We deal with signs and symbols every day, because that's how we make sense of our universe. Our very words are symbolic. The word "up" goes far beyond the juxtaposition of two Roman letters. It *means* something to our rational minds (as a direction opposed to "down"); our spatial sense (by degrees the term may reach to the stars); and even our figurative search for truth (as when we "look up" to someone we admire). These two Roman letters symbolize so much for those of us who speak English. How much more complex must be universal symbols like water, fire, bread and the Cross; as well as signs such as wedding rings, candles, vestments.

Symbols tend to be ambiguous, while signs are more clear cut. Symbols by their nature participate in the reality to which they point; for example, bread not only nourishes in particular, but also symbolizes food and life in general. Signs are established by tradition; for example, the significance of the number seven, as a sign of completeness or fulfillment, drawing on the

Christos Pantokrator in the ceiling the fellowship hall.

The architecture of our sacred space expresses a truth of Christian tradition; that whatever seeking there may be, whatever great work, whatever charity, whatever act of sacrifice, whatever joy, whatever fulfillment now and forever takes its meaning from the Eternal One Who Abides -- in our worship and the remembering of Christ; in our deepest yearning for eternal life in the New Jerusalem of God; in our pilgrimage under Christ's gaze toward the deep, inner truth of ourselves; and in our contemplation of Divine Presence by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our sacred space encloses a sacred path whereby we know and are known by God. All else -- all life -- comes from this.

biblical tradition that on the seventh day God rested from creating the universe.

There are of course, numerous symbols and signs in the architecture of All Saints' expressing our sense of the Divine. We believe God is revealed in Christ, and that this Divine principle of Incarnation is at work throughout the creation leading us to deeper faith. God is disclosed by and through material things; otherwise, we would have no knowledge of God.

Christianity, then, is materialistic, taking its lead from the Incarnation of Jesus, whom Christians believe was God in-the-flesh, affirming the goodness of matter. Signs and symbols are material apertures through which we perceive the Holy, sacramental openings through which we perceive God's presence and meaning, whether in the formal Sacraments of the church or the less formal sacramental moments of God's grace, as in the passing of the peace among loving Christian friends.

Our prayer is that the material and symbolic world of our sacred space may be an expression of our Mission Statement: "We are a family committed to deepening our inner lives through experiencing the compelling story of Jesus Christ."

II. Entering: A Gate To The New Jerusalem

Four-sided tiles decorate the exterior stairs leading to the church's main entrance. These figures suggest the four traditional elements of the created order, the

stuff from which, theologically, all things are made - earth, wind, fire and water. It's as though we stand at the moment of creation itself; and spiritually we are moving with all of our fellow creatures - from north, south, east and west -- in the company of our Christian sisters and brothers, toward a realm traditionally called the New Jerusalem, what St. Augustine called in the fourth century, The City of God.

Red doors are a tradition in Anglicanism, symbolizing the presence of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, for which the traditional color is red. The red doors also are the traditional entrance for the Bishop, whose ministry is primarily that of imparting the Holy Spirit through the Church's sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood. Red doors also symbolize and express that the church is a place of sanctuary. In the old Hebrew Tradition God designated places of sanctuary. This was expressed in the Old Testament through which the victimized could flee into complete safety.

Above the red doors of All Saints' is a work in stained glass by Alison Witt, a descending dove, another emblem of the Holy Spirit from gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer.

As we pass, then, from the elements of creation, we are invited by the window above, to ponder the work of the Holy Spirit which brooded over the waters of Genesis, filled Moses and the prophets with the

symbolize the traditions of Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and the Native American traditions.

The large red oak doors of the Chapel open out into these great major world religions in which we now live as modern men and women. Together the doors and the eight circles remind us that we are sent out from this Chapel by our Lord and Master, Jesus, not only to tell the story of his love and work and our relationship to him, but also to respect, care for, and protect all sacred stories which symbolize and express the Spirit's work in the world. We at All Saints' affirm the diversity of the entire human experience of the Divine, as well as the discovery that a unity of Spirit underlies all things sacred upon this earth. This work was executed and donated to All Saints' by Dr. Lynn Bauman, friend of the parish family.

VI. Conclusion: Christ's Mission, Our Purpose

The People of God at All Saints' seek the Center, and within our sacred space, all centers are linked as a sign to us that we shall create our place in time to be a symbol of the Kingdom of God, a place where Love and Peace prevail. A line may be drawn from the High Altar in the shadow of the Cross to the Altar in the Well of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, through the center of the Celtic Cross in the Narthex, through the central petals of the Labyrinth beneath the terrible, loving gaze of

Icons are said to be "windows into Heaven," visual reminders of the saints and Deity depicted, through which we pass beyond the images themselves into the presence of One who sanctifies all and is all in all. Venerating the heroes of our tradition is not worship, but a spiritual reminder that God is revealed through such lives and is, thus, still among us doing the work of sanctification that enables all of us to lead holy lives, lives that reveal Divine Love.

Above the Oratory Doors, as one leaves the Chapel hangs a bas-relief of Christ as Pantokrator, Lord of the Universe. He is seated at the center of the great Tree of Life, which is symbolized throughout the biblical story beginning in Genesis in the Garden, expressed in the Psalms, becoming the great wood of the Cross, and standing multiplied by twelve at the end of the Book of Revelation. This tree is depicted through four seasons, rooted in the depths of the divine ground, reaching toward the heavens and eternal Transcendence in hope, extending itself to include all through time and space, and bearing fruit in its season.

Christ, whom St John calls the eternal Logos, governs the creation as the principle of Holy Wisdom and the Eternal Word - all knowing, seeing all, but creatively taking flesh in St Mary as *Theotokos*, the God-bearer. It is this Word, this principle of Truth, this Logos, which lies at the center of everything that is sacred in our tradition and in each of the great, sacred traditions of the world. These are depicted in seven circles which surround the Logos, and

power of truth, drove Jesus into the wilderness to struggle first-hand with temptation, and animated the apostles of Jesus at Pentecost, giving them a universal message of Joy and salvation.

Upon passing through the doors, worshipers find themselves standing upon the six points of the Star of David, an emblem of Medieval Judaism. A reminder to us that Christian roots are in the Judaism of Jesus, whose ministry was almost entirely to Jews, whose preaching and teaching concerned a radical understanding of Jewish law, and whose death and resurrection were interpreted by the Church through Jewish scripture and tradition. We know Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One, because Jewish tradition said there would be One who would come to restore the Kingdom of God in Heaven and Earth. The floor tiling here and throughout the narthex was designed and executed by Ed & Cornelia Gates.

Traditionally the six pointed star, created by the converging of triangles - one upon the other. The one triangle represents the Divine Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - merging with the human Trinity of Body, Soul and Spirit, forming the pattern of humanity created in the divine image.

From the six-sided star, there are seven steps to the large eight-sided figure in the narthex. The seven steps are emblematic of the holiness of God, to which we are called and invariably attracted. Sevens run through Judeo-Christian tradition as signs of completeness. The seventh day, for example, is the

Sabbath of God, a day of rest from Creation, through which Jews have been called for millennia to imitate the Creator of Heaven and Earth in rest from work to reflect on God's goodness and mercy. Isaiah speaks of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit -- wisdom, understanding, counsel, courage, knowledge, piety and fear of God. Seven churches in the Revelation of John - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea -- represent the whole Church under persecution in hope of deliverance. The Church's moral theology knows Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Holy Virtues and, most central to our corporate life, Seven Sacraments given by God to the Community of Faith whereby the Spirit is imparted by specific acts, not of individual ministers, but of the Body of Christ gathered for power -- Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, Ordination, Healing and Absolution of Sin.

Eight is a number of wholeness, and of humanity completed by the virtues. The four basic elements of human creation of earth, water, wind and fire - are complimented by the four cardinal qualities - prudence, temperance, courage and justice - which are gifts of the Divine. Early Christians spoke of Sunday, the Day of Resurrection, as The Eighth Day of creation. The passage from the church doors, then, suggests a spiritual path empowered by the Spirit of God, passing from the sense of our incompleteness, drawn by the perfect beauty of God's grace in Creation to the complete revelation of human destiny in the resurrection of Jesus.

reflection, meditation and contemplation of the Divine. We encourage those who enter this place to remove their shoes as an expression of their intention to partake of the silence and the Presence.

The architecture thus symbolized that there is a connection between what this community of Christians do at the Altar -- especially in the rites of Baptism - Confirmation and Eucharist -- and the transformation implied in the Labyrinth by the journey to and from the Center. Our participation in the proper sacraments of the Church is contiguous with self-discovery and transformation in the Labyrinth, for all of these are means by which we know God and are loved by God in righteousness and truth.

Above the Good Shepherd Window are three crosses of cedar made by Margaret Bailey, the niece of former West Texas Bishop Scott Field Bailey. These resonate with the Crosses of Golgotha, but also with the Holy Trinity, Christians affirm as the mystery of God and time -- God the Creator of all time, Christ the redeemer of all time and the Holy Spirit, sanctifier of all time.

The Icons of Christ Pantokrator ("Ruler of the Universe") and Theotokos ("God Bearer") resting in the chapel are powerfully expressing perhaps the deepest mystery of Christianity, that in Jesus, God became flesh by the womb of Mary to reveal for all time, eternally, the meaning of Divine Love: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."

Wisdom flows from the kiva, and prayer ascends from there like smoke from the passing of the pipe, or a brazier of burning incense. The ethos of All Saints' Oratory expresses our desire to be close to the natural order, the cosmos, as well as to the roots of our own parish tradition. The floor is of wood removed from the demolition of Mills Hall. Stained glass windows from the Children's Chapel of the old building are hung here.

The Oratory takes its name from the Good Shepherd window hung prominently in the east window. All of the windows speak of the Incarnation as emblems from the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth: The descending dove of the Holy Spirit from Jesus' baptism; the Lamb of God, again from a comment of John the Baptist at Jesus' baptism, a title that finds full expression in the Revelation of John; the Eucharistic images of the Chalice and the fish, which refers to the feeding of the 5,000. (The miracle story was so central to the early Church's understanding of the Eucharist as a sacred meal that Christians used the Greek New Testament term for fish, ἰχθῦς, as an anagram for "Jesus Christ Son of God Savior". [ΙΧΘΥΣ = Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Θεοῦ υἱοῦ Σώτηρ].)

The Altar, set upon a lava rock, is of a single slice of California redwood brought to Corpus Christi by master craftsman Valentine Scott, whose untimely death kept him both from preparing the redwood altar and making the Labyrinth, a project he had embraced with love and zeal. The services of worship within this space tend toward silent prayer,

There is no unessential step along this path. One can not get to the landing of the narthex without climbing the stairway; which, it turns out, is a stairway to Heaven, the New Jerusalem, as expressed in a huge 12-sided Celtic figure with a five-by-five foot Celtic cross in the center. The outer design is of traditional Celtic twining - of time and eternity; of God and humanity in the Incarnation; of life and death; of Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the reconciliation of all of which we believe is God's will for the cosmos; of the New Jerusalem, a heavenly city with twelve foundations and twelve gates, a reconciliation of the twelve tribes of Israel built upon the teachings of Jesus' twelve apostles.

Why Celtic? The Anglican tradition partakes of the very earliest days of Christian missionary activity. When Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine and his companions to the British Isles in the sixth century, the good Augustinian monks found a strong Christian tradition already present among dominant Celts. Tradition suggests that the first Christian martyr on English soil was Alban, a Roman soldier of the early third century, who died rather than betray a Christian priest to Roman persecutors.

We actually know little of early Celtic Christianity, because it was absorbed into Roman Catholic traditions after the pivotal Synod of Whitby in 644. We do know of the Celtic tradition's remarkable artistic expression, so apparently penetrated with deep, reflective spirituality. While Celtic Christianity eventually became politically marginal, it

nevertheless remained a powerful spiritual force in what became Britain, and to this day underlies the Anglicanism of the Christianity of the Anglo-Irish. It is a rich and powerful tradition, especially as it has survived in art and literature.

The Celtic cross is "bi-lateral," having four arms of equal length, which suggests its centrality to Christian understanding of the cosmos -- that there is a cross, the cross of Christ, at the center of history sanctifying all time, past, present, future and all eternity. There is a circular space at the cross' center reminiscent of the mandala, the sacred wheel of all major religions of the world suggesting the balanced workings of the cosmos within the eternity of God. We believe that God's revelation is universal throughout human culture, and that somewhere in the mystery of our diversity as peoples within religious traditions, God is reconciling all to be inhabitants of God's eternal dominion. The circle in the center of the cross also may be seen as the disc of the sun, another early image of Christ, the son of God, who having risen from the dead one day will return as King to reign over God's Kingdom of Heaven, the New Jerusalem.

By entering the church, then, worshipers embark upon an emblematic pilgrimage informed by traditional signs and symbols, as a holy journey through Judeo-Christian tradition and worship, reminding us we are incomplete without God. God, encouraged and sustained by God's Holy Spirit, until

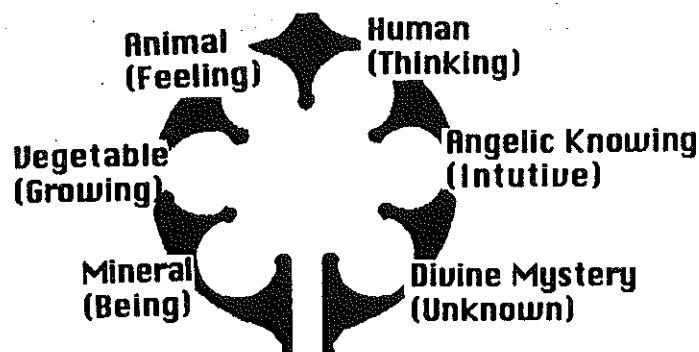
The path *from* the center is as plain as the path to the center of the Labyrinth. It is the same path, but the movement is dramatically different -- ever widening arcs, as our transformed selves seem to encompass more and more of the Labyrinthine cosmos, until we emerge reborn, as in John's gospel, to become, in the words of St Francis of Assisi, instruments of God's peace in the world. "Contemplation," wrote the 20th century mystic Thomas Merton, "means nothing without action. If it does not lead to action, it is not contemplation." The path of union from the center allows us to carry Divine presence into the world.

U. Oratory Of The Good Shepherd: Initiation Into Wisdom

An Oratory is a place of prayer, and like the Labyrinth this place of prayer, conceived as a "kiva" from Southwest indigenous spiritual traditions, is a place of illumination and transformation. On the soil of the American continent kivas functioned as places of initiation, as well as places of spiritual gathering to affirm community values and meaning. The sunken portion of the Oratory is round, like a traditional Baptismal Font, into which we enter to be initiated into the Christian community, and from which we emerge, as an infant from its mother's womb, to begin our transformation into redeemed humanity created -- and creating -- in the image of God. The Oratory, then, is a place of immersion in the Divine, with all the multiple layers of meaning that implies.

The Labyrinth is not a maze, but a single, discrete path. There is nothing puzzling about this uninterrupted path to the center. It is a longer journey than it first appears, but the point of the journey is not that it be timed or measured, only that it be complete in God's own time, eternity. The Labyrinth invites participation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

In Christian spiritual tradition, "the center" is a place of illumination, and "the path" a process of unbinding one's self from whatever blocks one's relationship with God in Christ. As such, "the center" also is a place of illumination and transformation, where in the light of Christ we are shown the truth that will set us free. In the center of the Labyrinth blooms a six petaled rose, traditionally symbolic of love and beauty. The petals embody the stages defined in medieval philosophy as The Great Chain of Being. Each petal represents a stage of becoming and all represent Divine presence.



we arrive upon the holy ground of the Kingdom of God, where the faithful worship in Love and Joy.

III. The Nave: An Ark Of Celebration

The cruciform Nave of All Saints', with its central altar and its great, soaring beams and wooden planks, intentionally evokes the Ark of Noah, that boat by which the righteous man escaped destruction and preserved life that it might continue under a covenant said to have been sealed by the rainbow. The boat was an ark because it contained something precious, just as the Ark of the Covenant carried the tablets of the law and other holy relics of the wandering Hebrews.

The All Saints' "ark" also carries something precious, the people who gather in the power of the Holy Spirit to worship, pray, and in the words of St. Paul, "celebrate the Lord's death until he comes." There can be no mistaking what this sacred space is for -- making Eucharist, giving thanks to God for the gift of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The altar is central, literally in the shadow of a large, rough-hewn, suspended cross, that most profound symbol of Jesus' destiny -- and ours. For we are to take up our cross and follow Jesus, if we are to follow him at all; and we follow him to Golgotha, where ever the Son of God felt forsaken, so we may know deeply the humanity of Jesus, as human as our own, and the promise that as he overcame the sharpness of death, so shall we.

Christians from the beginning have acknowledged this mystery of redemption -- life, death, resurrection -- by celebrating the New Covenant meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he died. At All Saints', it's a family meal as we gather *around* the altar, not *before* it. It's an intimate gathering because no one is very far from the table. The table itself rests upon a rough stone, a sign of faith in Christian tradition -- the faith of Peter, who recognized Jesus as the God of God -- faith especially in the Eucharist, that when the People of God gather for this worship, Christ is in our midst in an especially profound and provocative way, feeding our souls with his life-giving Spirit of Love.

The visual imagery of the Nave, again, makes clear as crystal what is to be done within the four arms of this warm, welcoming ark. Like All Saints' front door, the door into the Nave has above it an image of the descending dove of the Holy Spirit, with tongues of fire, signs of Pentecost and the beginning of the Church's ministry to the world. On the south wall, God Creator is depicted; and on the north, the ministry of God Redeemer, Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Within the sacred mystery of Holy Trinity, then, the people of God gather to partake of the mystery of redemption at the center of time, where the Cross of Jesus stands as a statement of absolute Love, of which there is none greater; and we, his friends for whom we gave his life, and gives his life for all eternity break the bread, bless the cup and pray *maranatha*, "Come, Lord Jesus." Soon.

IV. The Labyrinth: A Sacred Path Of Transformation

The central feature of the east wing of All Saints' is a Labyrinth in the wooden floor, executed by David Darce of Austin. This is a place of walking prayer and meditation, copied from a design recently rediscovered on the floor of Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France. Although its precise meaning has been lost, scholars speculate that it was a means for making spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Land for Christians unable to make the actual journey. The parish family of All Saints' have found the Labyrinth to be a means of spiritual refreshment, a journey within as well as a symbolic walk with the Lord to the center of meaning, toward our destiny and the purpose of God, which is the New Jerusalem; and a journey *from* the center into life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, by which we minister to a world in need of redemption.

Above this large circular path, which partakes of the universal shape of the mandala, or wheel of life, is a stained glass window of Christ the Pantokrator, Christ the Ruler of the Universe, a relic of Mills Hall, which for 45 years housed the parish's Christian Education Department and the Children's Chapel. The placement of this back lighted window is significant. It says that whatever occurs in our walk with God, on the Labyrinth or anywhere else, it is God in Christ, not ourselves, that we proclaim, regardless of the personal intensity of our experience of the Divine; otherwise, our faith is an ego trip.