




## HOW WELL CAN YOU "READ A CHURCH"?

### WELCOME!

1. Find a Seat
2. Start Discussing this slide with your table-mates
3. Get ready to share! In a little bit we'll discuss as a group!

*Our discussion will be followed by a Presentation on "Understanding Symbols found in Catholic Church Architecture & Art"*

1	2	3	4	5
What Sacrament do these symbols represent?	What Liturgical Season is Fr. Gretz celebrating?	What does the Dove represent?	What does "INRI" mean ( <i>in English</i> )? Where do you see "INRI" written?	What's the main difference between a Cross and a Crucifix?
				
6	7	8		
Scale of 0 - 5. How confident are you in being able to explain the symbols you see in Church?  Have you struggled to explain any Church symbols to your kids?	What's a church symbol your kids have asked you about?  Were you able to explain to them what it was?	Do you have a favorite symbol/icon? What's your favorite symbol for Jesus? What's your favorite symbol for Mary? ...and Why?		

Family Faith Fellowship  
St. Matthew Parish

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1. Eucharist (slide 9)
2. Ordinary (slide 15)
3. Holy Spirit
4. Jesus the Nazorean, King of the Jews
5. A Crucifix has Jesus on it; a Cross doesn't

A symbol I was confused about but didn't realize I was confused is the Chi Rho – I went to St. Pius X as a kid so I thought it was a symbol for St. Pius X since it is a 'P' and 'X'. Only much later in life did I realize it wasn't what I thought it was (*"Why does this church have St. Pius' symbol, too?"*). So there is always something to learn ...and even learn after you think you have learned something!

# **UNDERSTANDING SYMBOLS IN CATHOLIC CHURCH ARCHITECTURE + ART**

*especially those found in All Saints, Holy Spirit, St. Aloysius, St. Bonaventure Churches of St. Matthew Parish*



Holy Spirit

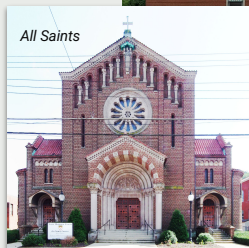
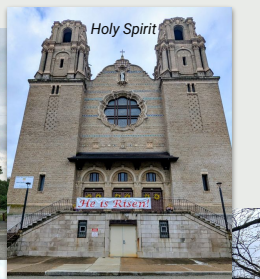
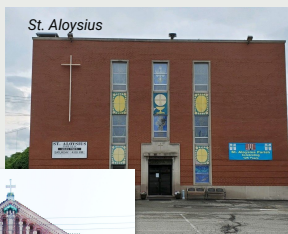
## THE GOAL

Be able to answer the question  
**"WHAT IS THAT?"**  
when your kids ask

...as well as their inevitable follow-up:  
**"WHY?"**



Holy Spirit



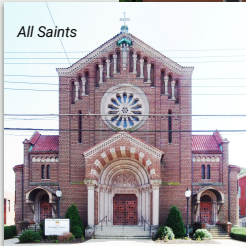
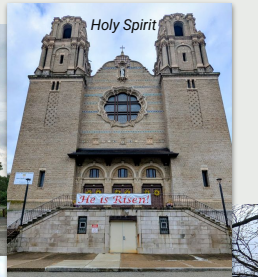
As we can see within our own parish, there are many styles of church buildings – but there is only **one Truth**:

**THE CHURCH IS  
THE HOUSE OF GOD**

and

**A GATHERING PLACE  
FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD  
TO WORSHIP GOD**

*"The visible church is a **symbol** of the Father's house toward which the People of God is journeying" (CCC 1186)*



**CATHOLIC CHURCH BUILDINGS ARE DESIGNED TO...**

- Raise our hearts, minds, and eyes towards **God**
- Communicate **Salvation History** -even to the illiterate

**SACRED ART IS USED TO...**

- Evoke and **glorify**, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of **God** (CCC 2502)
- **Draw man to** adoration, prayer, and to the love of **God**, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier (CCC 2502)

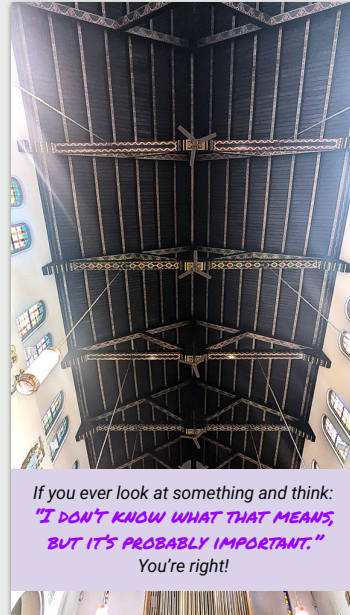
**"The visible church is a **symbol** of the Father's house toward which the People of God is journeying" (CCC 1186)**

**ALMOST EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK  
YOU WILL ENCOUNTER  
SOMETHING WITH DEEPER, HIDDEN MEANING**

**EVERYTHING** is used to reveal deeper truths of the Divine.

- design motifs
- statuary
- murals
- mosaics
- stained glass
- ornamentation
- geometric shapes
- colors
- how many of something there are
- where things are placed

All Saints



If you ever look at something and think:  
**"I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS,  
BUT IT'S PROBABLY IMPORTANT."**  
You're right!

The Architecture & Art/Iconography of Catholic Churches **contain a lot of Symbolism.**

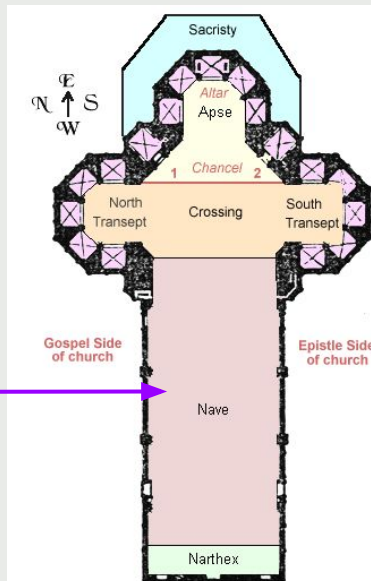
## TRADITIONAL LAYOUT OF CATHOLIC CHURCHES...

A church's orientation holds meaning:

Historically built with altars in the East *"Alert Watchfulness"*: Pre-Vatican II both the priest and the congregation used to face the Altar because Christ will come from the East His Second coming.

The Traditional **Cruciform shape** is meant to evoke the Cross.

The main section of a church is called the **"Nave"** (from Latin 'navis' meaning 'ship')



The altar is in "Liturgical East" even if the church cannot be/isn't built with the altar in the actual East.

Baptismal font in Narthex of church as entry point into Christian life and you proceed to the altar – you journey through life

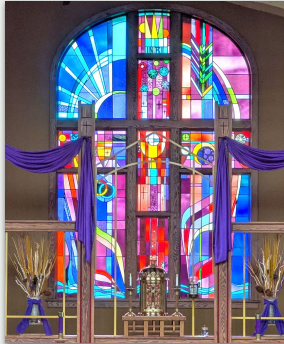
From the perspective of Jesus on the altar Mary shrines are placed on the right; Joseph on the left. Mary is "higher" up than Joseph – so she is at Jesus' right hand. If Jesus is to be displayed in a statue (like in the Sacred Heart) it will be placed to Jesus' right and Mary will either be shifted over so it goes altar-Jesus-Mary or moved to the opposite side of the church). –There are many such rules or guidelines as that when designing a church and placing "items" within it. Basically, just know that there usually is a "rhyme and reason" for why things are where they are.

**YOU SEE THE SIGN.**  
**YOU CONTEMPLATE THE SYMBOL.**  
 (Most things are simultaneously both Sign and Symbol.)



St. Bonaventure

**SIGNS** signify, point to, or indicate a specific **reality** or action.



St. Bonaventure

**SYMBOLS** represent an abstract idea and point to a **deeper, hidden meaning.**

<b>THING</b>	<b>SIGN</b> (what you see; what's on the surface?)	<b>SYMBOL</b> (what you think about; what is its meaning?)
<b>The Crucifix</b>	A representation of Jesus crucified + dead on the Cross	Our Salvation by Jesus - We are saved by His death and Resurrection; <b>the unfathomable love and mercy of God</b>
<b>The <u>Sign</u> of the Cross</b>	Hand/arm movements	A profession of faith / a prayer; Our belief in the Holy Trinity (God as One but 3 Divine Persons); A reminder that "God is a communion of love" (Pope Francis); That we claimed by God through our Baptism
<b>Holy Water</b>	Water (well, technically it's Blessed Water but it looks like regular water)	When we bless ourselves with the blessed water we remember our Baptism and recommit ourselves to living holy lives in fidelity to Christ
<b>Wheat and Grapes</b>	Wheat and Grapes	Body and Blood of Jesus in The Eucharist; <b>the unfathomable love and mercy of God</b>

Sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church to prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and to sanctify different circumstances of our lives (CCC 1677).

*Among sacramentals blessings (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for his gifts. In Christ, Christians are blessed by God the Father "with every spiritual blessing." This is why the Church imparts blessings by invoking the name of Jesus, usually while making the holy sign of the cross of Christ. (CCC 1671)*

## THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

are

### SUPER SPECIAL SIGNS

"An outward [sign](#)  
instituted by Christ to give grace."

The Sacraments are [not symbols](#).

The Sacraments are [efficacious signs](#).  
[efficacious = they produce their intended effect]

They point beyond themselves to  
**the invisible activity of God**

What they point to, God actually does, through them.

- Water in Baptism actually washes away sin
- The Eucharist is actually the Body and Blood of Jesus



St. Bonaventure

"An outward [sign](#) instituted by Christ to give grace." (The Baltimore Catechism) - I once attended a talk where every older person in the room was immediately able to recite this definition by heart – and I was astounded. When asked the definition of a sacrament I had gotten as far as thinking "umm" when they all in unison recited it.

The Sacraments are not Symbols, **but** Symbols are used to represent the Sacraments

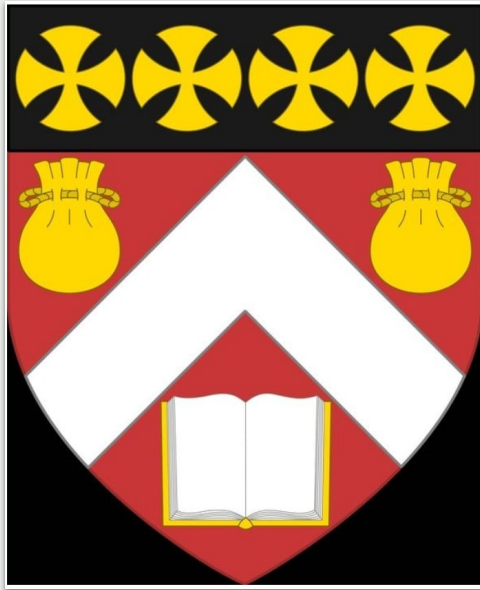


	ANOINTING OF THE SICK (EXTREME UNCTION)	BAPTISM	EUCHARIST (COMMUNION)	CONFIRMATION	HOLY ORDERS	HOLY MATRIMONY (MARRIAGE)	RECONCILIATION (CONFESSION)
THE OUTWARD SIGN	Oil of the Infirmid	Water, oil, candle & white garment	Bread + Wine / Body + Blood	Chrism Oil	Chrism and Laying on of hands	Vows and Rings	Laying on of hands + Words of Absolution
SYMBOL	-jar of oil	-water -scallop shell (sometimes with 3 drops of water for the Holy Trinity)	-grapes -wheat -host -chalice	-Holy Spirit as dove -rays of light -container of oil	-stole (green or white, not purple) -keys of the kingdom/St Peter -Bible	-rings/bands -heart shape	-hands -purple stole -epiclesis (the laying on of hands)

Symbols: Sacraments

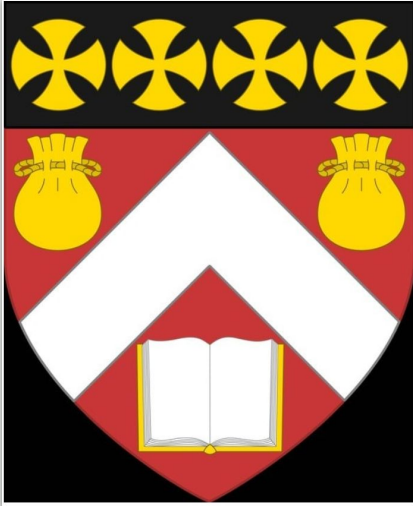
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Sacraments are outward signs – and they have common symbols associated with those outward signs.



Symbols: *Guess the Symbol*

## ST. MATTHEW PARISH COAT OF ARMS



*Did you know?* This was designed by Fr. Alek Schrenk, a Diocese of Pittsburgh priest

### The symbols within the symbol...

- The four crosses are the same style as those for the Diocese of Pittsburgh and represent the **four parish communities**: Etna, Glenshaw, Millvale, and Reserve
- The black and gold colors pay tribute to **Pittsburgh's** "black and gold".
- The two money bags because **St. Matthew** was a tax collector.
- The chevrons represent the hilly **geography** of the four communities.
- The book represents the **Gospel of Matthew**.
- The red background represents the **blood Matthew shed** for the sake of the Gospel.

**ST. MATTHEW PARISH IMAGE**



SIGN	SYMBOL
<p>St. Matthew instructing a child in the Gospel.</p> <p>The child is pointing to the words from Matthew 9:9 - The Calling of St. Matthew:  <i>"As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him."</i></p>	<p>We are all called to be followers of Christ.</p> <p>The importance the Word of God.</p> <p>The importance of teaching others about Jesus -especially children.  <i>"Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." - Matthew 19:14</i></p> <p>The new identity of the new parish.                      The painting of St. Matthew was created when the four separate parishes merged to form the new parish (2021).</p>

**Did you know?**

- Artist: Bernadette Calvino (former All Saints Parish Faith Formation program manager)
- Parishioner Doug Hamilton and his daughter Thea were used as the models.
- On the left page are the Greek letters for "Father Doctor Gretz".

**There are many, many Signs and Symbols within the Church  
used in and for the *LITURGY*.**

<p><b>SANCTUARY</b></p> <p>The area just around the altar; usually placed at a higher level, to bring to mind mountains in Scripture which are places of privileged encounters with God.</p>	<p><b>SANCTUARY LAMP</b></p> <p>This is the candle that burns near the tabernacle, to indicate that Christ in the Eucharist is present within it.</p>	<p><b>STATIONS OF THE CROSS</b></p> <p>The 14 Stations of the Cross in every Catholic church allow us accompany Christ on His path to His Crucifixion, through which He saved the world.</p>
<p><b>STATUES</b></p> <p>Statues remind us that the Saints are praying and interceding for us in Heaven, just as our</p>	<p><b>TABERNACLE</b></p> <p>The vessel in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved outside of Mass. From the</p>	<p><b>RELICS</b></p> <p>An object, usually part of the body or clothes, remaining as a memorial of a</p>



St. Bonaventure



**...UNFORTUNATELY**  
**THERE ARE WAY *TOO MANY* FOR THIS PRESENTATION....**  
**But fortunately lots of other people have written about these things!**



<p>The structure upon which the Mass is celebrated; it recalls the table upon which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, as well as the Cross upon which He was crucified.</p>	<p>Bells are used to draw our attention to the coming of Christ at the Mass, and of His real presence in the Holy Eucharist.</p>	<p>Candles are always used for the celebration of Mass, to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world.</p>
<p><b>CHALICE</b></p> <p>The cup that holds the wine which will soon become the Precious Blood of Christ. It should be noble and beautiful, as it is the vessel which holds the price of the world's salvation, the Precious Blood of Christ</p>	<p><b>CIBORIUM</b></p> <p>The vessel in which the hosts are kept, which will be consecrated at Mass and will become the Body of Christ. Following Mass, the Holy Eucharist, the Body of Christ, is kept in a ciborium, and reserved in the tabernacle.</p>	<p><b>CORPORAL</b></p> <p>The square piece of linen which is unfolded and placed on the altar. The Chalice and the Paten which contain the bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist are placed upon it.</p>

I encourage you to read some books!

## COLORS OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Great questions to ask your kids:

"WHAT COLOR IS THE PRIEST WEARING?"

"DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS?"

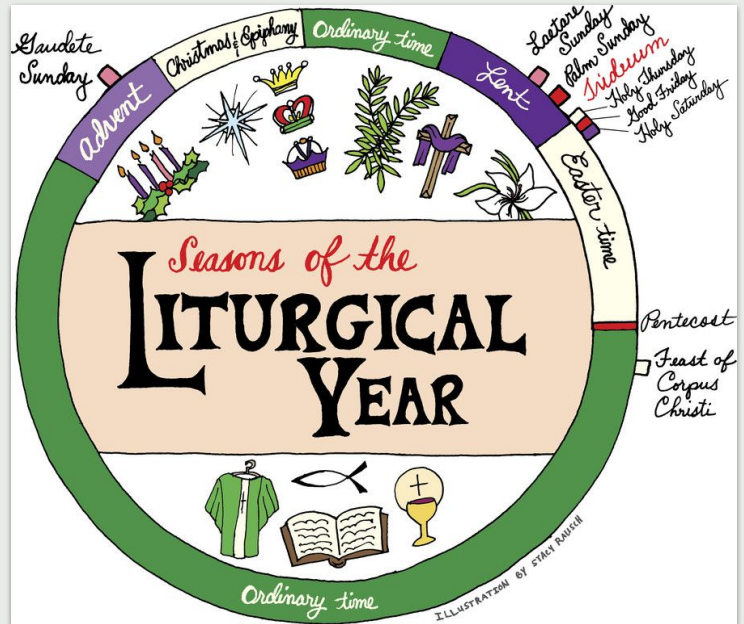
(yes, it's for the season ...but also there is more!!)

—

When a season changes ask:

"NOTICE ANYTHING DIFFERENT?"

"WHAT COLOR DID THE PRIEST WEAR LAST WEEK?"



Symbols: Colors

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I typically resort to this when my kids start to get unruly! It might buy you a minute or two!

**YOU SEE THE LITURGICAL COLORS IN...**

- Vestments worn by the Priest
- Altar Cloth
- Banners and Coverings in the Church



Holy Spirit



COLOR	USED DURING...	DEEPER MEANING
<b>PURPLE/ VIOLET</b>	Advent and Lent	<b>Penance, Waiting, Preparation, Humility</b>
<b>RED</b>	Passion Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost, Feasts of the Apostles and martyrs + Confirmation	<b>Sacrifice, Blood shed for Christ, Fire of Charity</b>
<b>ROSE (Not Pink)</b>	3rd Sunday of Advent, 4th Sunday of Lent	<b>Anticipation, Joy, Love</b>
<b>GREEN</b>	Ordinary Time	<b>Hope, Growth, Life</b>
<b>WHITE/ GOLD</b>	Easter, Christmas, Feasts of the Blessed Mother, angels, and saints who weren't martyred + Weddings, Baptisms	<b>Purity, Joy, Innocence, Glory</b>
<b>BLACK</b>	Funerals (alternative colors: Purple, White)	<b>Death/Mourning</b>



Who knows Fr. Gretz's joke?

Symbols: Colors

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Fr. Gretz wears rose, not pink – because Jesus rose from the dead! He didn't pink from the dead.

Purple meaning penance and waiting is likely familiar to you.

Ordinary time is most of the year – and it is green which is a perfect color for growth - and we are to spend the time growing in our faith.

**SHAPES ARE OFTEN MORE THAN JUST "SHAPES"**

SHAPE	MEANING
Circle	God / Heaven / eternity / perfection (because it has no beginning and no end)
Triangle	Holy Trinity (because 3 equal sides)
Square	The Earth / The People of God (because people thought the earth was flat / it's in contrast to a circle / four angels holding the 4 corners of the Earth (Revelation 7:1))
Diamonds / things with 4 points	The Cross
Fleur de Lis / things with 3 points	Holy Trinity
Plant-like shapes or leaves	Tree of Life, Jesus as vine, Beauty of God's creation

SHAPE	MEANING
Quatrefoil 	The 4 Evangelists / The Word of God (because they interconnect / is part of a larger whole)
Barbed Quatrefoil 	Quatrefoil + Square = Heaven + Earth coming together



Holy Spirit (Doors)

If it looks something like **A CROSS**.. then it's probably meant to represent

**THE CROSS**

## THE NUMBER OF THINGS MATTERS, TOO!

Not just within shapes, but also in  
**how many of something there are.**

Note: This is not an exhaustive list.

But it will help you see more +  
understand more as we look at the  
St. Matthew Parish Churches

NUMBER	MEANING
2	The 2 natures of Jesus - both God and Man / both human and divine
3	The Holy Trinity ( <i>Father, Son, Holy Spirit</i> )
4	The Cross
5	The 5 wounds of the crucified Christ
7	Perfection
8	Jesus ( <i>because an octagon is halfway between a circle (God) and a square (earth) - that is, where heaven and earth meet</i> )
12	The 12 Apostles
14	<i>This is just 7 + 7</i>

Pay special attention to 7! That comes up a lot. And that is not surprising since God is perfect and loves perfectly.

## SYMBOLS CAN HAVE MORE THAN ONE MEANING

(and can even mean multiple things all at the same time)

### Peacock

1. Resurrection
2. Eternal life
3. The beauty and immortality of heaven
4. Christ's triumph over death.
5. Can sometimes be depicted alongside the Tree of Life
6. Can sometimes be drinking from a vase or fountain = a Christian drinking the waters of eternal life.
7. The "multitude of eyes" on the peacock's fan-tail = the all-seeing eye of God / the omniscience of the Church.

All Saints (Confessional)



All Saints (exterior)

### Fleur de Lis - "Flower of the Lily" / Lilies

1. The Holy Spirit (3 petals, 3 sepals)
2. The Virgin Mary
3. Joseph
4. Jesus' Resurrection
5. Purity
6. Virginity
7. Innocence
8. Obedience
9. The virtues of faith, wisdom, and chivalry
10. The virtues of faith, hope, and charity/love
11. Love and beauty (*Song of Solomon*)
12. Resurrection | New life | Eternal Life (*they bloom in the Spring, symbolizing the promise of eternal life in Christianity*)
13. It is an attribute of the Archangel Gabriel as well as several Saints (*like St. Aloysius*)



"Wait, I thought the lily was for St. Joseph." - *You're right.*

"Wait, I thought the lily was for Mary." - *You're right.*

"Wait, I thought the lily was for Jesus." - *You're right.*

"Wait, I thought the lily was for purity." - *You're right.*

"Wait, I thought the lily was for the Resurrection." - *You're right.*

“The relationship of the sign to the signified can be complex. It can arise from historical association, social convention, or mere physical resemblance. Sometimes several of these factors enter the equation. The meaning of symbols is rarely simple. Sometimes a lone symbol stands for a multitude of realities: either the fish or the lamb can represent Jesus, or the individual believer, or the Eucharist that binds the Christian to Christ - or, most likely, it can represent all three at once. Often multiple symbols can stand for the same reality: as the fish, the lamb, and the shepherd all refer to Christ.”

*-Aquilina, Signs and Mysteries: Revealing Ancient Christian Symbols, p21-22*

**SYMBOLS OF JESUS**

In the Church's earliest days, Christians used letters as symbols to stand for Jesus. (Christograms)

This was especially important during times of persecution when they had to hide the fact that they were followers of Christ.



All Saints

Holy Spirit

All Saints

THE ICHTHUS

To simplify it: They all mean "JESUS"

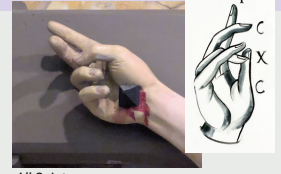
<b>Alpha &amp; Omega / ΑΩ</b>	The Beginning and the End
<b>IHS</b>	Jesus' name in Greek: IHSUS. The first 3 letters: iota (I), eta(H), sigma (S).
<b>INRI</b>	Acronym for "Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum" (in Latin) meaning: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".
<b>IC XC and NIKA</b>	In Greek, first letters of 'Jesus' (IC) and last letters of 'Christ (XC). "NIKA" = "Jesus Christ Conquers"
<b>Chi Rho</b>	X (chi) and P (rho) are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ.
<b>Ω Ω N</b>	"He who is"; usually found in Jesus' halo (and Jesus is the only one whose halo can have it)
<b>Ichthus / ΙΧΘΥΣ</b>	"The Jesus Fish" - Greek for "fish". An acrostic for "Iesous Christos, Theou. Uios, Soter" meaning: "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior"

**The Cross Anchor - Safety and hope**



Holy Spirit

**Hand of God / Hand of Benediction/Blessing**  
 (1) 3 Persons of the Holy Trinity  
 (2) Jesus' 2 Natures: Man + Divine  
 Greek: The fingers are arranged to form the letters I, C, X, and C



All Saints

Symbols: Jesus

Since many early followers of Jesus were fishermen it was easy to "hide" the fact that they were Christians in the anchor since it naturally has a cross at its top.

You will see the hands with 3 fingers, 2 fingers in various forms but it means the same thing - 3 = Holy Trinity, 2 = Jesus as both God and Man.

## SYMBOLS OF JESUS (CONTINUED)

All Saints



**The Good Shepherd**  
Our loving, caring, personal God who protects, guards, takes care of and saves His Sheep

\*Notice the "IHS" in the host



Holy Spirit

**Bread/Wheat, Grapes, Chalice, Host** - The main ingredients of bread and wine and thus The Eucharist – the Body and Blood of Christ.



Holy Spirit

**Sacred Heart of Jesus**  
Represents Christ's love for each of us. He offers his life for us in the crown of thorns, the Cross, his Blood. The fire stands for His burning love for us.



Holy Spirit

**Agnus Dei** - (Latin for "Lamb of God")  
(1) Lamb + Banner for Jesus's sacrifice and triumph.  
\*not pictured here  
(2) Lamb laying on the Book of the Seven Seals - the Lord alone was able to open the book (from the Book of Revelation)



Holy Spirit

**Pelican in her Piety** - Ancient mythology: Pelican mothers would pierce themselves and feed their young ones their own blood in order to keep them alive. Adopted by early Christians to represent Christ's sacrifice for us. Associated with the Eucharist.

Symbols: *Jesus*

....yes, there are even more that I haven't listed here...

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A lot of symbols were "co-opted"/adopted from ancient mythology by the earliest Christians and given Christian meaning. The "Pelican in her piety" was a very surprising symbol to see and I just had to learn more. The picture I use here isn't very easy to see what it is – but it is a pelican mother piercing herself to feed her young – just like Jesus did for us on the Cross. Once you understand what this is it's symbolism is rather clear. Even if I don't know the ancient myth I can understand enough to know now why it is displayed in church symbols and what it is meant to represent.

The Lamb of God on the book was another that I was curious about – and I at first thought if it as it being presented as a sacrifice but in the Holy Spirit clerestory it is very clearly a book – so I searched for that meaning and discovered there is more to the sign than just "Jesus as sacrificial lamb".

## THE APOSTLES AND SAINTS

The Apostles and Saints are depicted in stained glass windows, statues, and murals - typically with items that represent...

**HOW THEY LIVED,**

**HOW THEY DIED, and/or**

**WHAT THEY ARE KNOWN FOR.**

*The best way to learn what the Symbols mean is to read about the particular Saint :: Because symbols can have multiple meanings it is helpful to know what the symbols mean in reference to that particular saint.*

### Did you know?

Saints' feast days are often on the day of their death (aka the date of their "heavenly birthday")

St. Aloysius



### St. Aloysius

Feast Day - June 21

- Black cassock and white surplice (his priestly vestments)
- Gazing at a Crucifix (his love of Christ)
- Lily (his purity, obedience)

St. Bonaventure



\*Notice his right hand

### St. Bonaventure

Feast Day - July 15

- Cardinal's Hat (for his role as Cardinal)
- Books/Scroll (for his writings)
- Communion / Ciborium (the vessel that holds the consecrated host) \*not included in this stained glass

Symbols: *Apostles and Saints*

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There are many resources you can use to learn about the saints and their symbols.

I feel bad for the saints that don't typically get depicted in church art, statues, or stained glass. There are some intriguing saints – like St. Bartholomew who holds his own skin because he was skinned alive. St. Lucy had her eyes plucked out and so holds them on a platter (though I have seen a statue of this)

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Saints\\_and\\_Their\\_Symbols/D\\_aF50Lo8lQC?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Saints_and_Their_Symbols/D_aF50Lo8lQC?hl=en&gbpv=0)

*SYMBOLS IN ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN*  
St. Matthew Parish Churches

## ST. BONAVENTURE CHURCH (GLENSHAW)

The bell tower recalls the city gate of Bagnoregio, the Italian hill town that was home to St. Bonaventure.

Why does the Cross have multiple arms? Because you can see a Cross from every direction – so no matter which direction you are coming from you know that you are being called to worship.



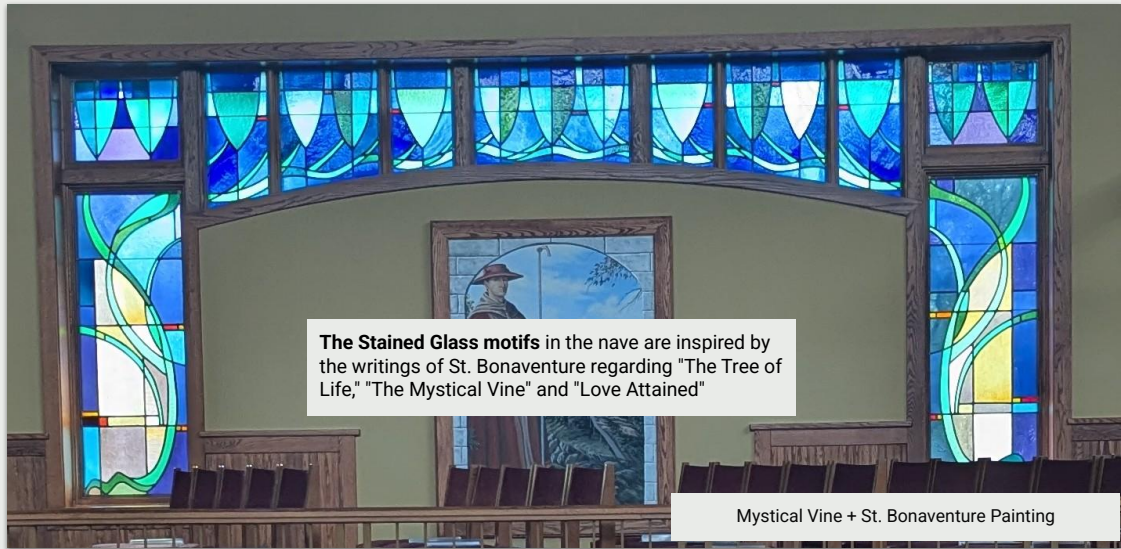
Inside the church all the wooden beams point upwards - raising your eyes towards the Crucifix and onwards up to Heaven / God.

Church: *St. Bonaventure*

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St. Al's had a fancy church and then built a new school-church. But St. Bonnie's built a school-church with hope of making a separate church someday - so they factored that into the design. St. Bonnie's original church became the school gym once the new church was built.

**ST. BONNIE'S NAVE**



**The Stained Glass motifs** in the nave are inspired by the writings of St. Bonaventure regarding "The Tree of Life," "The Mystical Vine" and "Love Attained"

Mystical Vine + St. Bonaventure Painting

Church: *St. Bonaventure*

Once you know that the stained glass are telling a larger story of St. Bonaventure (the saint) and that they relate to the themes of his writing you can maybe see and understand them a bit better. Because they are more “artsy” and symbolic than clear sign, even just know this small detail helps you understand them. Even if you don’t know what St. Bonaventure wrote about you at least could say they relate to his best known works.

## ST. BONAVENTURE PAINTING



St. Bonaventure is depicted holding a model of St. Bonaventure Church with the Holy Spirit (dove) descending upon it.



In the background is the city of Bagnoregio



Two figures are walking along the path – Fr. James Gretz and Fr. George Newmeyer.

### Did you know?

- This was painted by James Guentner, a local artist and member of St. Bonaventure Parish.
- It is customary for artists to paint their benefactors into paintings.

Church: *St. Bonaventure*

26

He is holding the new church building – this shows St Bonaventure’s blessing; that the church is under his care.

Bagnoregio is actually known as “the dying city” because it is built on a mountain that is slowly collapsing with rockslides. The only way in and out is via the one footbridge – and you have to walk it; no cars are allowed.

The two figures were intended to be Fr. Gretz and Fr. Newmeyer, but these can represent any two people traveling along. Perhaps one of those figures is you!

**SANCTUARY WINDOW -  
"LOVE ATTAINED"**

St. Bonaventure wrote:

"These are the seven steps by which the sweetness of love is attained through the reception of the Holy Spirit:

**alert watchfulness,**

**comforting trust,**

**inflaming desire,**

**uplifting rapture,**

**joyful peace,**

**transporting happiness,**

**and perfecting intimacy.**

You must proceed in this order if you wish to attain perfect charity and the love of the Holy Spirit."

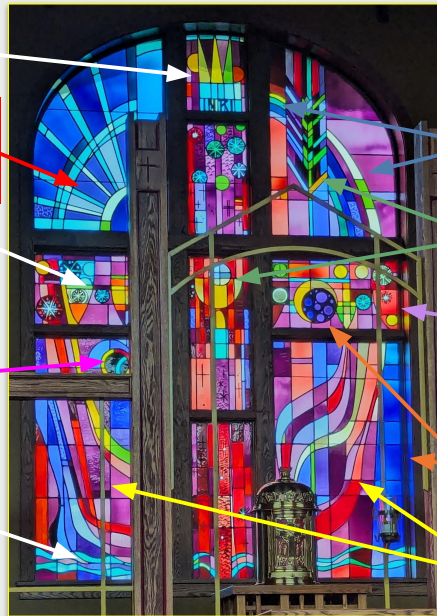
Crown + INRI =  
Jesus, King and  
Prince of Peace

(1)  
Alert  
watchfulness =  
Sunrise

Shields =  
"leaves are  
for medicine"

(7)  
Perfecting  
intimacy =  
Marriage  
Rings

Waters = Baptism;  
the Gospels  
irrigate the whole  
garden of the  
church



The wooden beams of the  
stained glass form a Cross

(5)  
Joyful Peace =  
Rainbow

(4)  
Uplifting rapture =  
Host, Chalice, Wheat

(6)  
Transporting  
happiness =  
Blossoms, Fruit

(2)  
Comforting trust =  
Stars, Moon, Dark  
night

(3)  
Inflaming desire =  
Flames

Church: St. Bonaventure

27

Apologies that this is crazy. They have packed a lot of symbols into this – though a lot of its meaning is hard to see without someone else explaining it.

Pre-Vatican II resources specifically state that church images should not be too symbolic -especially those around the altar. The sign should be clear and then people can see and interpret its symbolism. But St. Bonaventure was built post-Vatican II (in 1999) - the sign of the stained glass is more symbol than clear sign.

It helps to know that this window is called "Love Attained" which is one of St. Bonaventure's writings and each of the 7 things listed in his writing has been reflected somewhere in it – along with a few additional things.

As I was trying to decipher this stained glass my best thought was that it represented the 7 sacraments – I could see Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage. But then I couldn't figure out the rest. Fortunately there was a dedication publication put together for the church and it explained its symbolism.

Shields "leaves are for medicine" is from St. Bonaventure's writings.

*Proving that anything and everything in a Church can contain symbols/symbolism...*



- Crosses
- Quatrefoils
- 4 pointed shapes
- ...a dizzying overlap of shapes and shapes and shapes...

Church: *Guess the Object*

28

The upholstery on the Chapel chairs. Likely very familiar to those with young kids since this is the Cry room / the best room to attend mass in if you have rambunctious toddlers.

OTHER COOL THINGS...

Marian Shrine



"The Three Marys" - These three women were at the foot of the Cross during the Crucifixion.



Church: *St. Bonaventure*

29

The Marian Shrine is on the left side of the church (so to Jesus' right as viewed from the altar). 3 of Mary's symbols are displayed in the stained glass windows - crown, lily, rose.

You may easily be able to tell that the 3 Marys are Marys since the stained glass is clearly labeled with their names – but you may not realize that these 3 women were the ones who stood at the foot of the Cross.

I am uncertain what Mary Cleophas and Mary Magdalene are holding; I have yet to learn this myself. But Mary Magdalene typically is shown with myrrh but it appears she is holding a shell. Mary Cleophas is holding yellow flowers - but I'm not sure if that is correct or what it means; Mary is holding the infant Jesus (which at least is clear).

## OTHER COOL THINGS...

### Church Dedication Window

**Left:** An imagined Coat of Arms for St. Bonaventure:

- **The Hat:** The Galero hat and tassels represent his priesthood.
- **The Motto:** "Soli Deo Honor Et Gloria" (Latin) meaning "To God Alone be Honor and Glory" (taken from one of his works)
- **The Shield:** "Tree of Life" - which is one of St. Bonaventure's writings.

**Center:** Coat of Arms for Pope John Paul II - Pope at the time the parish was founded (in 1957).

**Right** - Bishop Donald Wuerl's Coat of Arms - Bishop when the new St. Bonnie building was built (in 1999).



Church: *St. Bonaventure*

30

### Church Dedication Window

**Left** - A Coat of Arms imagined for St. Bonaventure, the man. He lived before heraldry so doesn't have an official COA, but...

- **The Hat:** The Galero hat and tassels represent his priesthood/he became a Cardinal. (Typically: the more tassels = the higher in the church hierarchy you are)
- **The Motto:** The Latin phrase "Soli Deo Honor Et Gloria" meaning "To God Alone be Honor and Glory" is taken from one of his works.
- **The Shield:** "Tree of Life" is one of St. Bonaventure's writings.

**Center** - Pope John Paul II Coat of Arms - He was pope at the time the parish was founded.

- **The Shield:** The blue field and gold color are traditional, with the cross representing the Redemption.
- **The Letter "M":** Placed in the lower right to signify Mary's involvement in the mystery of Christ's death.
- **The Cross:** Off-centered to make space for the "M".
- **Papal Insignia:** Unlike his successors who used a miter, John Paul II retained the three-tiered papal tiara and crossed keys.
- **Motto:** "Totus Tuus", meaning "Totally Yours", expresses his deep personal devotion to Mary.

**Right** - Bishop Donald Wuerl's Coat of Arms - He was bishop at the time of the new St. Bonnie building.

- **The Tower:** Represents the "City of God" and titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Tower of David, Tower of Ivory*).
- **The Sword:** Derived from the official coat of arms of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

- **The Cross:** With the 5 Holy Wounds of Christ
- **Motto:** "Thy Kingdom Come" (Matthew 6:10) represents his commitment to the building of the kingdom of God

**ALL SAINTS CHURCH (ETNA)**



The carved stone façade shows Jesus on his kingly throne holding a book over the altar while angels worship Him.

The inscription:  
"Venite Adoramus" (Latin) =  
"Come let us adore Him"

The top of the church is adorned with a cross and a statue of the Virgin Mary holding an infant Jesus.

The Church was built in 1915 by architect John T. Comes (a Catholic Pittsburgher).



Church: *All Saints*

31

**"Come let us adore him"** is a fitting message on the outside – welcoming those in to the church to worship

Comes was the architect of many Pittsburgh Catholic churches (as well as in other places). He unfortunately died at the age of 49 but has left behind a legacy that, in many cases, still stands. Two of our parish churches are Comes designs –All Saints and Holy Spirit.

Mary is holding the infant Jesus and lillie (or at least flowers).

ALL SAINTS EXTERIOR



Fleur de Lis Cross

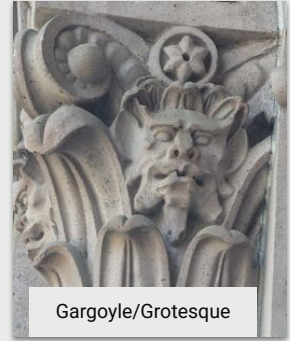
Chi Rho

Fleur de Lis



2 birds with interlocking necks =  
divine + human; body + soul

Peacock



Gargoyle/Grotesque

The fundamental message of Gargoyles is: "**Repent and believe in the gospel**" (Mk 1:15).

Gargoyles, Grotesques, and Chimeras represent the concept of evil and remind the faithful of the perils of sin.

They adorn only the outside of churches.

Church: *All Saints*

The two interlocking birds and peacock were a few symbols I took notice of because they seemed more unusual – and I wasn't sure about them – so I had to read up on these things and found that rich symbolism of the peacock (slide 19) and the meaning of "2" things (slide 18). [There may be more to the two birds but that is the best I have figured out]

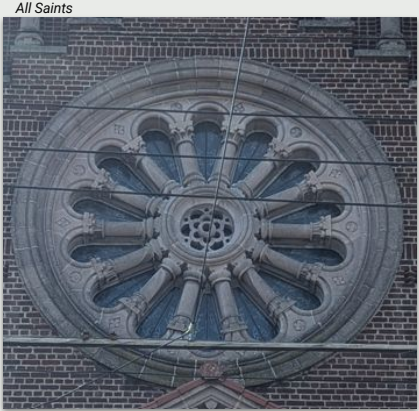
Gargoyles actually have 3 forms (as noted) – but they all represent the sin of the world; inside the church is how we are saved from our sins and avoid the sin of the world. .

**ALL SAINTS EXTERIOR: ROSE WINDOW**

**"VISUAL BIBLES" that represent the "LIGHT OF GOD" flooding the world.**

<b>SIGN</b>	<b>SYMBOL</b>
Biblical Narratives	Divine Light
...The main image is usually centered on Christ or Mary	The Perfection and Eternal-Nature of God (circle)
...The smaller panels depict other Biblical scenes or people	The Virgin Mary (the "Mystical <u>Rose</u> " and her role as Queen of Heaven)
...or they depict virtues (which is done via symbols)	Often broken into 12 divisions –a number that represents the Apostles (All Saints' has 14 (which is 7 x 2))

**Did you know?** Artists use light to show holiness and God's gift of grace.



**WHERE THEY ARE LOCATED IN A CHURCH BUILDING ALSO MATTERS:**

- West: Usually faces the setting sun, often representing the Last Judgment and the end of time.
- North: Associated with the Virgin Mary.
- South: Often focuses on the Church triumphant or Christ in glory.

This is a view outside the church - it's more beautiful inside the church aka "the correct side" to view stained glass windows

## ALL SAINTS DOME



- **Jesus** seated on the Throne, being crowned with the Crown of Victory by **Angels** ministering to Him
- **Halo** with **"WON"** - "O" = "The Existing One" and the first and last letters of "Jesus Christ"
- **Hand of God Hand Gesture** - Holy Trinity; Jesus's Dual Natures
- **The IC XC Monogram**
- **Alpha and Omega** on the Bible/Word of God
- **Gold** in the background confirms that we are looking up into Heaven.
- **16 Apostles + Saints** Ring the bottom, below Christ on His throne (4 are grouped in 2s making 14 separate 'groups')
- **4 Evangelist Symbols** are on the Throne
- **The Holy Spirit as Dove** with 7 tongues of fire (Pentacost; 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit; 7 Sacraments) Note: The dove is above a triangle, inside a circle with a wound on its breast = The Holy Trinity.

Church: *All Saints*

Jesus is in the center. And if you weren't sure you get 4 very clear signs that it is Jesus (hand, alpha omega, halo, IC XC) – as well as the fact his face is depicted as Jesus tends to be depicted in art. He is also robed in red likely for his sacrifice.

## THE FOUR EVANGELISTS

The Gospel writers are known as **The Four Evangelists** because they spread the "Good News" of Jesus - They spread the **Word of God**.

GOSPEL OF...	SYMBOL	WHY?
Matthew	Winged Man	His Gospel begins by tracing our Lord's <b>human origin</b> .
Mark	Lion	He tells of Jesus' <b>kingship</b> ( <i>power and glory</i> ). His Gospel begins by describing St. John the Baptist (Mk 1:3).
Luke	Ox	His Gospel gives a very full account of the <b>sacrificial death</b> of our Lord. Oxen were an important part of the Old Testament laws of sacrifice - just like the calf, Jesus' sacrifice saves us from our enemy ( <i>Satan</i> ).
John	Eagle	His Gospel tells of Christ's <b>divine origin</b> . John begins at the very beginning, " <i>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...</i> "

All Saints Sanctuary Dome - Jesus' Throne



Holy Spirit Sanctuary (over the Altar)



Symbols: *The Four Evangelists*

35

The images on the throne aren't super clear (both in this image and in real life) but if you are familiar with the symbols for the 4 Gospel writers then you can make it out. Holy Spirit has a better depiction in actual statue form.



There are 14 Murals - 7 depict Parables and Biblical Stories + 7 depict the 7 Sorrows of Mary

**Left: Parables and Biblical Stories**

- Simon being renamed Peter
- The Parable of the 10 Virgins
- The Prodigal Son Returns
- Jesus Welcomes the Children
- The Good Samaritan
- Jesus, The Good Shepherd
- The Resurrection

**Right: The 7 Sorrows of Mary**

- The Prophecy of Simeon
- The Flight into Egypt
- The Loss of Jesus for Three Days
- The Carrying of the Cross
- Jesus dies on the Cross
- Jesus Taken Down from the Cross
- Jesus Laid in the Tomb

Church: *All Saints*

36

Once you understand the “theme” it is easier to understand what you are looking at.

At first I didn’t know the right side was depicting the 7 Sorrows of Mary so the “Loss of Jesus for 3 days” mural was very confusing. I could figure out all the other ones, but I was unsure what that mural was – but once I learned it was for the 7 Sorrows I understood it.

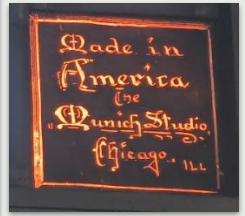
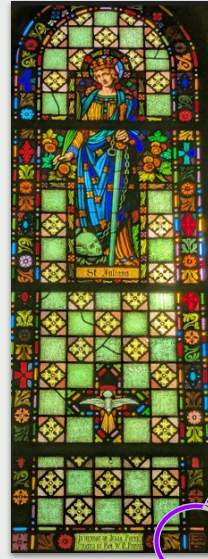
OTHER COOL THINGS...

The Stations of the Cross

Medieval style with German titles



Saint Windows



All Saints was founded by Germans.

The stained glass was made by Munich Studios in Chicago (so a German connection).

## HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH (MILLVALE)



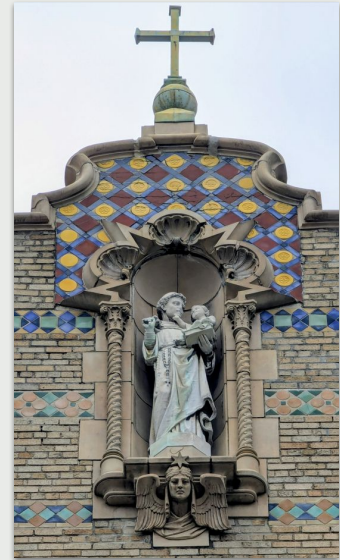
Built 1914 by architect John T. Comes

Why does St. Anthony show up so much at Holy Spirit? Because the church/parish was originally founded as **ST. ANTHONY PARISH**.

Became **HOLY SPIRIT PARISH** in 1994 when St. Anthony and St. Ann merged.

The top of the church is adorned with two bell towers —with 3 bells named *George, Maria, Anton*. (They were donated by Knights of St. George)

There is a marble statue of St. Anthony in the center above the main rose window.

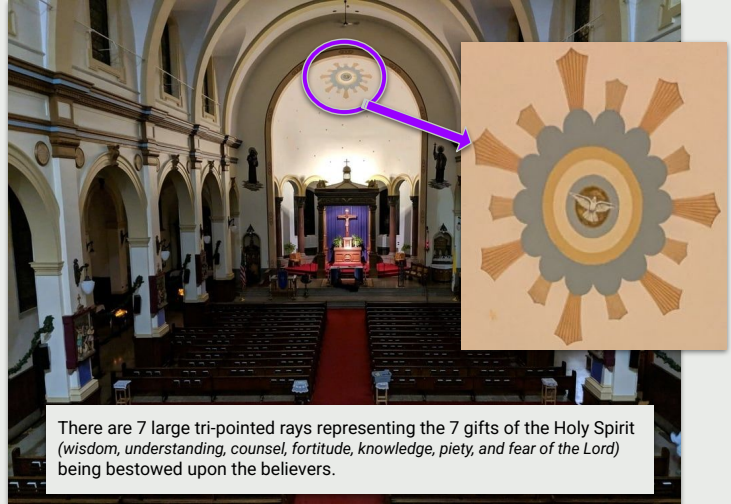


Church: *Holy Spirit*

All Church bells are named after saints and are blessed – there is a special “Blessing of the Church bells” ceremony that takes place where they are blessed before they are ever rung. Then after they are blessed, as part of the Church blessing ceremony, they ring out for the first time.

It is worth zooming in on your phone or getting binoculars and checking out the ornate work and colors at the top of the church. It is hard to see the details from the ground with your eyes: there is a lot hidden in plain sight!

Before you go into the Nave, just in case you need a reminder of what Church is you get an actual sign:



The sign has Holy Spirit and hands praying.

Similar to All Saints, the Holy Spirit Altar Dome (Apse) has a Dove inside circles amidst the cosmos (stars) with rays emanating from the center.

## OTHER COOL THINGS...

### Stained Glass

14 windows in the Nave depict Saints  
(7 on Left + 7 on Right)

10 windows in the Clerestory (see right)

3 windows over the Main Church Doors:  
• Faith + Hope + Charity

2 windows on the altar:  
• Sacred Heart of Jesus  
• Immaculate Heart of Mary

1 window over the Vestibule Center Door:  
• Holy Spirit

### Holy Spirit Rose Window



The rose window is situated over the church organ and contains **4 Main Images**:

- **Top:** Coat of Arms for the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) – *They are the ones who founded the original church/parish*
  - **Center:** St. Cecilia: Patron Saint of Musicians
  - **Left:** King David: Musician
  - **Right:** *(I'm unsure and still need to learn what it is)*
- + additional angels and decorations

### Stained Glass Windows of the Upper Part of the Church (the Clerestory) *Symbols signifying the following:*



Faith



The Spiritan Fathers



Anchor of Hope



The Kingdom of God



Charity



The Trinity



The Eucharist



The Lamb of God



A Bishop



The Pope

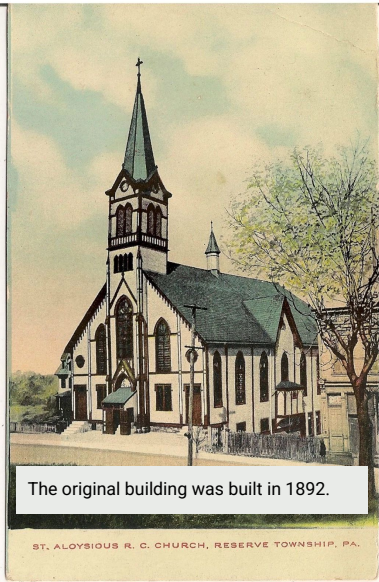
The rose window is fittingly focused on music imagery since it is placed over the organ.

The Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) founded the original parish – and so when St. Ann and St. Anthony merged the name “Holy Spirit” was chosen in honor of the original founders

The Clerestory - barbed quatrefoils - The Spiritan Fathers Coat of Arms, the Pelican in her piety, the eye of God.

These images were from a brochure that Holy Spirit used to hand out on special occasion – but this is the type of thing I think we need! It briefly explained what symbols were and some specific history (like the Crucifix is the original from St. Anthony (from 1896) and the Mary and Joseph shrines are from St. Ann Church.)

*ST. ALOYSIUS CHURCH (RESERVE)*



The original building was built in 1892.

ST. ALOYSIUS R. C. CHURCH, RESERVE TOWNSHIP, PA.



In 1957 the new Church + School was built.  
...The outside is blended into the school building with little ornamentation...

Church: *St. Aloysius*

*WAIT, ST. ALOYSIUS USED TO LOOK LIKE THIS????* 😞

41

I found this image on eBay. And I was skeptical that this was true but then I found an image in the Troy Hill book –confirming it is true.

The 1950s/60s were not a great time for architecture in general – so the new St. Aloysius is reflective of that. But perhaps this is a great example of remembering that Church is the place to worship God – it doesn't really matter what it looks like; the point is to worship.

St. Aloysius started as a mission church for Most Holy Name of Jesus on Troy Hill. Then got big enough to become its own parish. There is a copy of the church's centennial at the History Center that I have yet to go see to learn more about the original church –it would be great to know things like what the stained glass was like.



Church: *St. Aloysius*

Also, someone on eBay is selling a card of what St. Aloysius used to look like on the inside. You see St. Aloysius with his black and white robes, gazing at a crucifix. There is a Mary shrine (left from our vantage point) and Joseph shrine (right of the image). Angels in mural. It was very ornate.

The altar als has a few additional statues – but will need to see if that info exists in the centennial book to know for sure who they are.



When you enter you go down into the Church (which is rather unique)



Church: *St. Aloysius*

**OTHER COOL THINGS...**

**Stained Glass**

3 panels on the front of the church. The center panel has the Holy Spirit as a descending Dove (with 3 rays) + St. Aloysius. Left and right each have 3 panels: 2 wheat + 1 fish



**The Nave Windows** are heavily symbolic ...and also heavy (with concrete)

Keys of St Peter [with chains]  
(The Church)



The Chi Rho + ?



The Holy Spirit  
(dove, flames)

The  
Eucharist,  
The Church



Church: St. Aloysius

Fun Facts: St. Aloysius is home to the SMP Holiday Train Display and the Rummage House

Please visit the holiday train display and for St. Nicholas day there is a fun day of crafts, food, cookie decorating, a picture with Santa, face painting. Fr. Gretz dresses up as St. Nick. It is a really great event! My kids love it.

*A FEW MORE*  
Symbols

I moved this after the end just in case we didn't have time to get to it – but you should have this info, too!

## SYMBOLS OF GOD THE FATHER

**Eye of God** - Often seen in the sanctuary; representing God who is everywhere and sees everything.

**Circle** - Symbol of God's eternity; with no beginning and no end; the unbroken covenant between God and His people.

**Hand of God** - Often in a blessing gesture; indicates the intervention in or approval of affairs on Earth by God. / The thumb and first two fingers are usually extended and the third and fourth fingers closed.

- The thumb and two extended fingers represent the **Holy Trinity**; the two that are closed represent the **two-fold nature of Christ**.
- The Hand can extend out from shining clouds, which are a sign of sanctity.

Holy Spirit



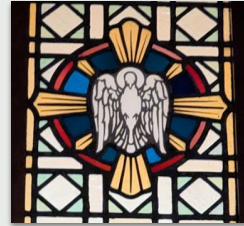
## SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**Dove** - All four Gospels describe the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove. (*Often depicted as descending*)

**Fire / Tongue of Fire** - The Holy Spirit came to the apostles at Pentecost in tongues of fire. Symbolizes zeal - being on fire for Christ.

**Olive Branch** - A symbol for peace and the peace the Holy Spirit brings. *A dove brought back an olive branch to Noah on the Ark.*

Holy Spirit



Symbols: *God the Father, Holy Spirit*

## SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY TRINITY

**Shamrock** - Three separate and distinct petals, but is also just one single leaf.

**Triangle** - Three equal sides but it is one shape.

**Triquetra** - Interlocking symbol of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Shield of the Trinity** - Ancient symbol with 3 parts as 1 whole

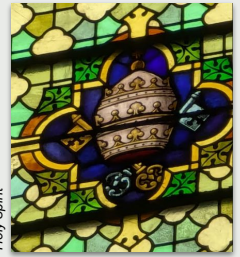


## SYMBOLS OF THE CHURCH

**Keys of Peter** - The keys to the kingdom of heaven entrusted to St. Peter, the first Pope

**Jerusalem Cross / Five-Fold Cross / Crusader's Cross** - On the Papal banner given by Pope Urban II to the knights of the First Crusade in 1095.

**Vine and Grapes** - Christ as the true vine and believers as His branches. Grapes represent the fruit of the Spirit, communion, and the blessings of faith. This imagery calls to mind the Eucharist, sacrifice, and spiritual nourishment.



Holy Spirit

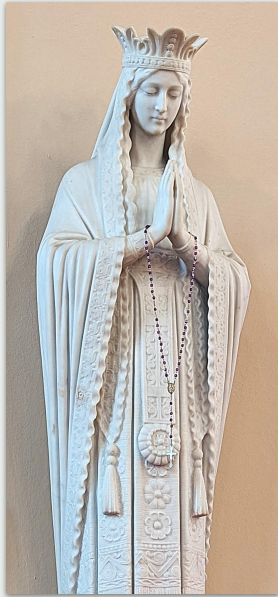


St. Aloysius

## SYMBOLS OF MARY

The church has always **venerated** Mary

- Jesus' Mother
- Our Mother
- The Mother of the Church
- The Queen of Heaven



All Saints

**Rose**  
The "Mystical Rose," symbolizing beauty, purity, and divine love

**Lily / Lilies**  
Mary's purity

**Garden / Enclosed Garden / Closed Gate**  
Mary's perpetual virginity

**Olive Branch**  
Peace and reconciliation



**Crown / Scepter / Throne**  
Mary as Queen of Heaven; her spiritual authority; her exalted place beside Christ

**Seven Swords**  
The Seven Sorrows of Mary

**Ark of the Covenant**  
Mary as the bearer of God (*Jesus*) *Theotokos*

**Tower of David / Ivory Tower**  
Strength and purity (*from Marian litanies*)

**Immaculate Heart**  
Mary's pure love and sorrowful compassion

**Rosary Beads**  
Devotion to Mary through prayer

"Ave Maria" / "AM"  
"Blessed Mother" / "BM"

**Star (Stella Maris / Star of the Sea)**  
Mary as a guide leading people to Christ

**Crown of Twelve Stars**  
Her queenship and connection to the twelve tribes / apostles

**Sun / Radiance**  
Clothed with the sun, symbolizing glory and divine

**Crescent Moon**  
Her role in salvation history (*Book of Revelation*)

**Blue Mantle**  
Purity, heaven, and royalty

**White Garment** Innocence and holiness

The All Saints statue has rose/flower motif.

Our Lady of Guadalupe contains many of her symbols - heavens, moon, stars, nimbus/radiance/sun, blue and white, ark

*IN CONCLUSION*  
Summary

Your main takeaway should be: Churches are full of a lot of signs and symbols with a lot of meaning! And there are many symbols with many meanings!

I encourage you: If you ever are curious about what something is take time to look it up. I only know all the things presented here because I have been curious about them.

When in doubt what something means a good guess is that it represents

**JESUS**

**NO MATTER WHAT IT IS -  
ITS ULTIMATE POINT IS TO  
POINT US TO GOD**

>> To guide us to Him so we can be with Him for all eternity <<

**EVERYTHING** shows us **the importance of The Church**  
- as both the **House of God** + the **People of God**

**EVERYTHING** is meant to call to mind **God** and **Salvation History**

**EVERYTHING** reveals to us...  
**the unfathomable love and mercy of God**  
-in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit



All Saints

No matter what you look at or encounter at Church just understand that it likely has deeper meaning (symbol) than what you see on the surface (sign). Almost everything is both sign and symbol.

Not only does everything reveal God's love for us – but we also should understand that we are all called to be a part of His eternal love story. Being a part of the "People of God" doesn't end at death - as Christians we are called to be with God for all eternity. We start as members of the Church Militant (those living) – then after our physical death we join the Church Triumphant (those in heaven) [...after perhaps some time as part of the Church Suffering (those in purgatory)]. :: Catholic Church buildings and art contain numerous reminders of our identity and our ultimate goal.