

# The Sanctuary at St. Paul's

## Some Things Never Change

The current sanctuary at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lockport was consecrated to the Lord and all to His glory on Sunday, August 9, 2015. Of interest is the fact that it was the third such dedication on this site. The first took place 50 years earlier on December 12, 1965, after the original construction of facilities on this site. No one could have imagined that thirteen years later, on April 30, 1978, dedication ceremonies would be held again for yet another new sanctuary after a devastating fire claimed the first one.

The Sanctuary at St. Paul's now wonderfully blends both the old and the new which this booklet will go on to explain. However, what is important to note is that what has never changed since this congregation's formation on June 11, 1871, is what takes place in our sanctuary... on this holy ground... in this sacred space. It was and still is set aside for the worship of our Lord – the preaching of His Word in its truth and entirety and the administration of the Sacraments according to His bidding. All that has been done, re-done, kept and added to in our sanctuary is for this purpose.

## The Altar Crosses

On the altar, you will find a gold cross with the corpus of Christ. It was put into service by the people of St. Paul's in 1943. Suspended above the altar is a cross with the depiction of our crucified Lord which is a wonderful new addition to our sanctuary. The corpus was hand carved in Oberammergau, Germany, by two men (a father and son) who use old-world skills and modern technology to produce truly masterful works of art. It is made of Linden wood which is preferred by carvers and is lightweight in comparison to other woods. The detail work on the corpus is amazing both in the carving and also in the painting of the piece which was done by a woman who works closely with the carvers. It is worth noting that these carvers also made the

corpus on our processional cross which has adorned our sanctuary since 1999. The suspended cross itself was constructed by our head elder, Ross Wardenburg, specifically for the corpus and is made of red oak, the same type of wood that he used in building the altar, pulpit, lectern and other pieces in our new chancel.

The cross and corpus hanging above our altar was specifically chosen because it is one that properly and fully depicts the Christian faith and our Lutheran doctrine. What does that mean? It all goes back to God's Holy Word. In the New Testament it is no accident that all of the references to the cross that you will find relate to Christ and His crucifixion. The fact of the matter is, the cross without the connection to Christ's crucifixion is just a cross. The key focus here is on what happened on the cross and the fact that our Lord suffered and died for us on it... there paying the full penalty for our sins... there saving us from sin, death and the devil... there sparing us from eternal death in hell and guaranteeing for us eternal life in heaven. Our Lord said it all when, with his last few breaths on the cross He declared, "It is finished." (*John 19:30*)

So it is that the Christian Church has always rightly considered the cross with Christ hanging there upon it as the true "victory cross." Christians down throughout the centuries have looked back to this one scene in time, one point in time, to Good Friday, as the defining moment in all of history. Without Good Friday, there would be no Easter Sunday. We look back to see, to consider, to marvel at and give thanks for our Lord dying on the cross "for us men and for our salvation." The Apostle Paul states perfectly what the true Christian Church then and now continues to do, namely "we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." (*1 Corinthians 1:23*)

Sadly, "Christ crucified" continues to be a stumbling block for many, including some who have done their best to sanitize and minimize our Lord's passion. They want an "unbloody" cross. But this flies right in the face of God's Word which clearly states that, "without the

shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (*Hebrews 9:22*)  
Seeing Christ on the cross is not something they like or want to do.  
Thus, they opt for having a plain cross which now, in many churches,  
has given way to having no cross at all because it is considered to be  
“too offensive.”

Granted, we all look at the image of our dear Lord on this cross and it  
rightly saddens us knowing what He did all out of love for us. Looking  
at this cross, we vividly see His suffering with the nails driven into His  
hands and feet, with the crown of thorns crushing into His head, with  
the wound on His side where He was pierced, with His knees bruised  
from having stumbled carrying His cross, with His gaunt body and the  
hollowed rib cage, the tension in His fingers and toes, His arms and  
legs.

In addition to Christ’s suffering, we remember His holy death and this  
too is depicted on the corpus, the eyes specifically carved to be  
lifeless eyes. The very Son of God truly died for us! We cannot get  
enough of hearing this and seeing this. It is simultaneously a terrible  
sight and the most glorious of sights; something which the faithful in  
Christ truly understand, appreciate and hold so dear. And we do! Just  
as did Martin Luther and all of our Lutheran forefathers. This is  
evidenced in our Confessions. It is evidenced in the fact that  
practically no Lutheran Church for centuries would have ever  
considered having a major sanctuary cross without the corpus of  
Christ. We also see this in Lutheran artwork such as that of the  
famous artists Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) and Lucas Cranach  
(1472-1553). Even more so, our Lutheran liturgy and hymnody,  
practically all that we say, sing and chant in each divine service  
declares “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Consider the following  
hymns that we love to sing: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, *In  
the Cross of Christ I Glory*, and *Upon the Cross Extended* with these  
two poignant verses:

*See, world, your Lord suspended.  
Your Savior yields His breath.*

*The Prince of Life from heaven  
Himself has freely given  
To shame and blows and bitter death.*

*Come, see these things and ponder,  
Your soul will fill with wonder  
As blood streams from each pore.  
Through grief beyond all knowing  
From His great heart came flowing  
Sighs welling from its deepest core.*

One more important point needs to be mentioned. This new cross and corpus are not something that we worship. God forbids the worship of any image and it is something that we would never consider doing. Rather, we worship God, our Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So it is that when we bow or kneel before any cross, we are reverencing not the cross, but the One who suffered and died upon it for our salvation, namely Jesus Christ. To Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all glory and honor.

### **The Altar, the Pulpit and the Lectern**

All three of these important furnishings are new. You will notice that the curved lines built into their design complement that of the beautiful ceiling and support beams, the new pews, the communion rail and chancel configuration.

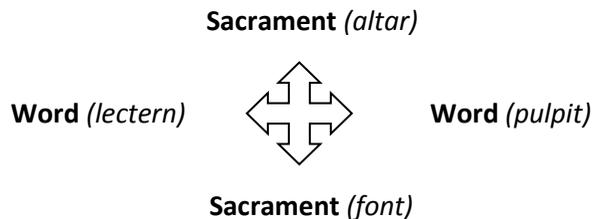
### **The Baptismal Font and Paschal Candle**

Dedicated in 1902, we do not know how many precious souls over the past 113 years have been baptized at this beautiful marble font. Its new location in the nave is fitting as the candidate for baptism is surrounded not only by family and friends, but also our church family. A special wooden brace has been built to keep the font securely in place.

Fittingly located next to our baptismal font is another new addition to our sanctuary – the paschal candle (from the Greek *pascha* meaning Easter). This candle dates back to the fourth and fifth centuries and symbolizes our resurrection victory over the darkness of sin and death. It is first lit on the Vigil of Easter and remains in weekly use until Pentecost. It is also lit for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as well as at Christian funerals.

### **The Chancel Layout**

We as Lutherans confess and hold to the fact that the “true marks” of the church have been and always will be Word and Sacrament. That is why divine worship revolves around these two components. It is also portrayed in our chancel design. We have the Word of God proclaimed from the lectern and pulpit and the Sacraments rightly administered at the font and altar. All of this forms a beautiful cross:



### **Seating of Worshippers**

The renovation of our sanctuary gave us the perfect opportunity to, more than ever, focus everything on Jesus Christ. This has been achieved in such simple things as making our new pews semi-circular so that no matter where you sit, you have in view the baptismal font, pulpit, lectern, altar and, of course, the cross and corpus of Christ suspended above the altar.

To make our sanctuary as practical and functional as possible, we now have a combination of pews and pew chairs. Having a number of pew chairs allows for greater versatility in our celebration of Christmas, Easter and other special feasts, also at weddings, funeral services and various sacred events. There are 274 seats in the new sanctuary and ample space to accommodate dear brothers and sisters with special physical challenges.

### **The Distribution of the Lord's Supper**

Our new communion rail was designed so that parishioners coming to receive the Sacrament simply have to kneel at the rail. There are no longer steps to negotiate.

### **The Lighting of God's House**

Quite a few changes have taken place to the lights in the nave and chancel areas with three objectives in mind: to provide greater ease of reading for parishioners; to properly accentuate key items and aspects connected to our worship of the Lord; and have lights that are far more cost effective and can be dimmed and used in different ways for different liturgical settings.

### **The Playing and Singing of Sacred Music**

St. Paul's is blessed to have Cantor Dennis Zimmer directing and guiding the sacred music that is such an important part of each and every divine worship service at St. Paul's. We have both an adult and children's choir as well as a bell choir. Ample space was reserved in the back of our sanctuary for our choirs and instrumentalists along with our organ, a practice piano and a beautiful Steinway grand piano.

### **The Picture of Christ the Good Shepherd**

In the back of the sanctuary over the main doors, you will find a magnificent picture of our Shepherd, Christ Jesus. It was painted by a

former member of our congregation, Howard Bezold (son of one of our beloved pastors, the Rev. Walter Bezold -1920 to 1954). Our Lord tenderly holding one of His precious lambs is a comforting image for all as we leave the sanctuary in joy and peace.