

Life around a Church and belonging to a Congregation (an overgrown family) can be complicated, surprising, challenging and a bit touchy at times! Hopefully, these thoughts will help us exist together, with a little less mystery about our “Symbols”.

St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church is steeped in traditions. Some have been passed down from the very early days of our denomination – our Foundational Beliefs and Observances. Others are more contemporary and have begun at a national level, state and area groups, and locally. In this article, I agreed to address a local tradition or “Symbol”.

At the front of our Sanctuary, immediately in front of the elevated Podium, we have a large throne-like chair centered behind the Communion Table. It is known as “The Jesus Chair!” Our Chancel furniture was specifically designed and built with love for use in this facility. If you were ever around years back, when we removed everything for our Christmas programs and worship, you know it is meticulously engineered and solidly built to say the least.

Half a century ago, it was the desire of Church leadership that we be continually reminded that Christ should always be a welcome guest at our functions. This “Jesus Chair” was placed as a visual reminder to us, as we Worship, that He is with us in the form of Holy Spirit. We need to leave room for Him, welcome Him in lives and Celebrations.

Through the years there have been times that, being unfamiliar with local tradition, someone dared to innocently sit in “The Chair”! When I came on staff, I was specifically instructed to never sit in the Jesus Chair – no explanation, though I could pretty much figure it out. I’ve heard some rather humorous stories of how a few individuals were told to “get out” of the “The Chair”. Okay, things happen from time to time; though humorous, these situations have potential to impact relationships.

I have two points to make regarding how we respect and continue traditions. When a person unfamiliar with our local traditions happens to infringe on something special to us, we need to tactfully share the origin of the Symbol - we

shouldn’t freak out! Secondly, we need to remember that in most cases we are talking about pieces of soft material, hardware or furniture. The items have no actual spiritual value in and of themselves – the issue, the tradition, the value is what they represent. That’s what is special and valuable!

We show respect for what something represents by protecting it and caring for it. For example, we wear gloves when handling the brass candlesticks, so that they remain untarnished, beautiful and better enhance our worship. The large center candle “represents” the Light of Christ – He is the light of the world.

What are your “symbols”? We all have them! Years ago my wife gave me a Cross necklace that I wear 24/7. I had wanted one for years, but never found the right one for me. Finally, we found the right one! It’s not very large, it has monetary value, it has characteristics that are especially meaningful to me as a Baptista-Catholic, and it seldom flips outside my clothing on public display. But, each morning when I shave at the mirror, it reminds me of Christ, that I am a Child of the King, and that I need to be a Man of Integrity each day. The cross and chain are worth about \$200.00 as material objects – though significant, that’s not important. To me, they are symbols of how rich I truly am, because of Christ’s Gift of today and eternal life.

What are your Holiday Traditions/Symbols? Have you ever baked a birthday cake for Jesus? It’s a great way to involve young folks and the older ones alike, chatting about the real meaning of December 25th and who we Celebrate. Does your family know the story behind that Angel topper on your Christmas tree? Have you ever had a family Advent Candle centerpiece and talked about it? Create your own family legends and symbols.

In closing, I want to say *Thank You* for a very special Pastor Appreciation Celebration. The cards, gifts, buffet & cake, and table-talk were so much fun. I truly “appreciate” being part of the St. Andrew’s traditions, celebrations, worship, and family. As we enter the busy holiday season, keep Christ at your side – He loves you and so do I ...

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