

6. Wheat, representing bread, and Christ's body broken for our salvation.
7. Grapes, representing wine, and Christ's blood shed for our salvation.
8. A cross and crown, representing the victory and kingship of Christ. This design also reminds us of Revelation 2:10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."
9. INRI, the initial letters of the Latin words "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", the inscription that was mockingly written in three languages on Jesus' cross when he was crucified.
10. An anchor, a symbol of hope, based on Hebrews 6:19, "we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine."
11. A fig tree or olive tree, both mentioned in the teachings of Jesus; notice its sturdy root system.
12. Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet.
13. Omega, the last letter of the Greek alphabet. These letters refer to the words of the enthroned Christ in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."
14. Whips with multiple thongs, by which Jesus was scourged prior to his crucifixion.

In 1970 a major cleaning and re-painting of the sanctuary was undertaken and the Schanbacher Company was hired to do the work. Someone on the redecorating crew apparently decided that rather than clean all of the original stenciled symbols and other designs, it would be simpler just to cover them up by repainting all the tiles a uniform neutral tan. Fortunately they only made it as far as the first three transverse rows of rectangles on the west end when several people discovered what was happening. A loud protest erupted and the trustees then insisted that Schanbacher make new stencils and restore all the designs that had painted over. Two bits of evidence that this happened are still visible if you look closely. First, the color of the three western-most rows of rectangles is slightly lighter than that of the rest of the ceiling. Second, the position of symbols #1 (16-petal flower) and #14 (whips) on the west end of the ceiling are interchanged from their original position. That is why those numbers are out of sequence in the diagrams!

While church décor has changed over the ages, we can be thankful that these symbols are still with us to "voice the spiritual" in architectural design.



Sanctuary Ceiling Symbolism

Compiled and written by Rev. Robert A. Schilling
Retired Director of Music




3808 North Meridian Street, Indianapolis IN 46208
www.northchurchindy.com 317-924-2612















Sanctuary Ceiling








The casual observer entering the sanctuary is not likely to notice the ceiling detail. It is too high up and too far away to study comfortably; the designs are too small and dark to see clearly with the naked eye; and they appear to be nothing more than meaningless geometric patterns anyway – perhaps with decorative, but not symbolic, value. Only on closer observation do we discover that the designs contain “more than meets the eye”.

Under the direction of the church’s architect, Mr. Charles H. Hopson of Atlanta, Georgia, the stenciling of the ceiling tiles was done by the G. H. Schanbacher and Son company of Springfield, Illinois and was part of the dedication of the building in 1931.

There are three ways to observe the tiles closely: (1) go up to the balcony (2) use binoculars; or (3) take pictures with a camera equipped with a telephoto lens. Whatever method you choose, here is the story and history of what you’ll observe. This gets a bit technical from here.

Let’s take time out to define three designs which occur many times on the ceiling. A Greek Cross is a cross in which all four arms are the same length, like a plus sign.  A fleur-de-lis is a stylized iris  blossom (it is French for “iris”), in which the three petals are a symbol for the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A St. Andrew’s cross is shaped like the letter “x”, ; it “x”, ; it is so named because Jesus’ disciple Andrew, who also died by crucifixion, requested that his cross be turned sideways, feeling he was not worthy to die in the same position as Christ. Furthermore, the fact that the ceiling has seven main sections is intended to remind us of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Revelation 5:12: power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and

Now look at the diagram again. The central symbol in each of the rectangles marked “” is a large Greek cross with a fleur-de-lis  above and below it, and those eight rectangles are themselves laid out in the pattern of a Greek cross. The central symbol in each of the rectangles marked “” is a fleur-de-lis. The central symbol in each of the rectangles marked “” is a St. Andrew’s cross superimposed on a Greek cross. This pattern of ’s, ’s, and ’s is repeated in all 14 main sections of the ceiling.

The next diagrams can help you locate, by number, all 14 of the designs listed above. Stand in the north aisle facing south to observe the south half of the ceiling, or in the south aisle facing north to observe the north half. Remember to look in the four corner rectangles of each 18-rectangle grid. The top line of each diagram represents the ridgepole, and the remaining lines represent the blue-painted stripes.

South Half East

14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

South Half West

North Half West

14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

North Half East

The greatest variety of symbols occurs in the four corner rectangles of each grid (those left blank in the diagram). There is just one main design in the center of each of the corner rectangles, but 14 different designs in all, each of which occurs only four time over the entire ceiling. They are as follows:

1. A 16-petal flower, perhaps representing a rose, and Isaiah’s prophecy, “The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1 KJV).
2. A crown of thorns and nails, representing Christ’s crucifixion.
3. A covered chalice, representing Christ’s shed blood and Holy Communion.
4. A chalice and wafer, again representing Christ’s sacrifice and Holy Communion.
5. A scales or balance, representing the justice of God.