

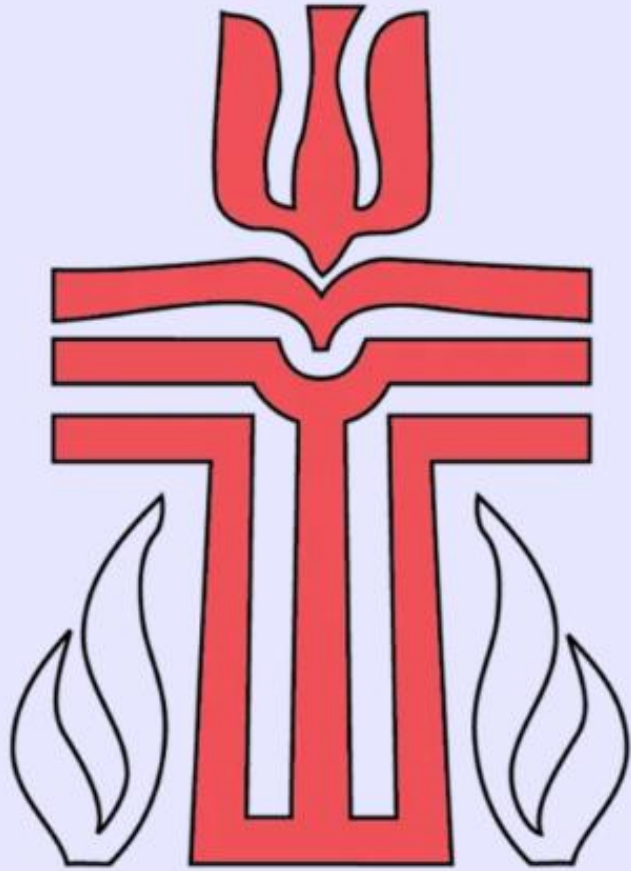
The PC(USA)
Seal



The seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a symbolic statement of the church's heritage, identity, and mission in contemporary form. It was approved by the 197th General Assembly in 1985.

A Brief Statement of Faith, one of 12 confessions in the church's official Book of Confessions, was written in 1983 for the reunification of the two largest Presbyterian denominations in the United States: the Presbyterian Church in the United States—primarily found in the south—and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America—primarily found in the north.

The Cross



The basic symbols in the seal are the cross, Scripture, the dove, and flames. The dominant structural and theological element in the design is the cross — the universal and most ecumenical symbol of the Christian church. The cross represents the incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ and his passion and resurrection. Because of its association with Presbyterian history, the Celtic cross was chosen as a model for this contemporary rendering of the ancient symbol.

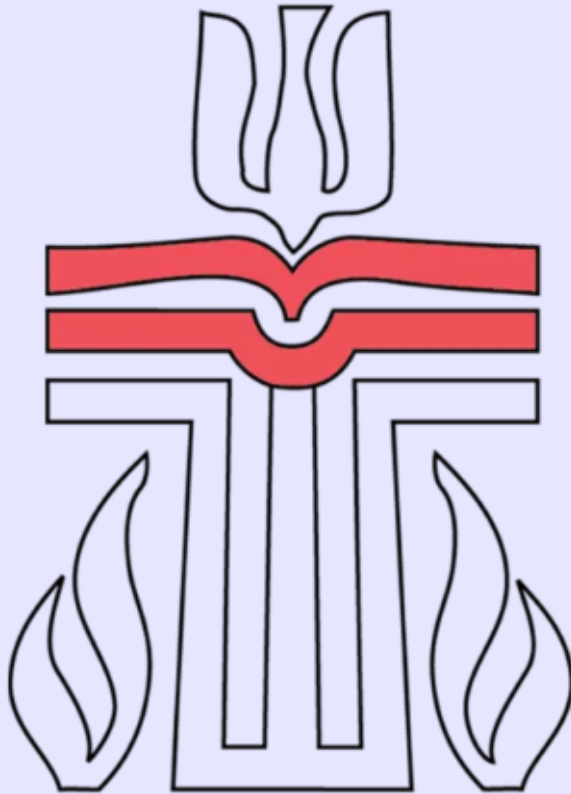
The Cross/Jesus (Brief Statement of Faith)

- Presbyterians believe first and foremost in the saving grace of Jesus, who was both fully human and fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal.

The Cross/God (Brief Statement of Faith)

- We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father. In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all families of the earth. Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage. Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.

The Open Book



In experimenting with the basic lines and shapes of the cross, the contour of a book began to emerge in the horizontal section, and the two center lines of the cross became the representation of an open book. This integration of the horizontal dimensions of the cross with the book motif highlights the emphasis that the Reformed tradition has placed on the role of Scripture as a means of knowing God's word.

The Open Book/Bible

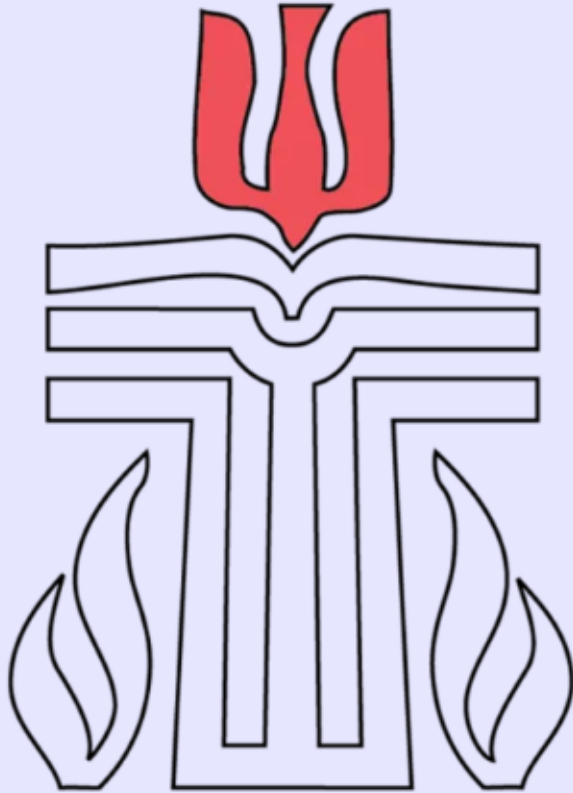
- Throughout its long history, Christianity has called the Bible the “Word of God.” To speak of the Bible as the “Word of God” means that it is a vehicle, a means, of communing with God. It is divine not in its origin, but in its purpose and function. It is a means whereby the Spirit of God continues to speak to us.
- We best understand the Bible when we set its texts in their ancient contexts and when we are attentive to their metaphorical meanings—that is, their more-than-literal, more-than-factual, more-than-historical meanings. The Bible tells Christians how our spiritual ancestors (the people of ancient Israel and early Christianity) saw things. It includes their wisdom, insight, and convictions. It also includes their limitations, blind spots, and misapprehensions. Reading the Bible attentively, carefully, and historically makes this clear.

- Presbyterians take the Bible seriously. And while we always begin with the plain sense of the text, we recognize the diverse forms and content found within many passages of Scripture have the ability to generate a broad range of interpretations. Each book of the Bible was written in an original language, in a particular genre, by a particular person, at a particular time, for particular readers, to provide particular information, that addressed particular concerns. As a result, Presbyterians always seek to read scripture in its historic and literary contexts as well as within the broader biblical context. We approach our interpretations with humility and respect, open to other points of view. With all of our interpretations, we put them to the test according to the “Way of Christ” and the “Rule of Love,” the call to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

The “Three C’s” of Bible Reading

- As Presbyterians, we believe we should always read the Bible In COMMUNITY, in CONTEXT, and in CHRIST. We should always read the Bible in COMMUNITY, especially with people who are different than us, to hear different perspectives. We should always read the Bible in CONTEXT--we should understand its historical context, its literary context, and the larger Biblical context. We should always read the Bible in the light of CHRIST. As it says in Hebrews 1:1-3: *“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.”*

The Dove

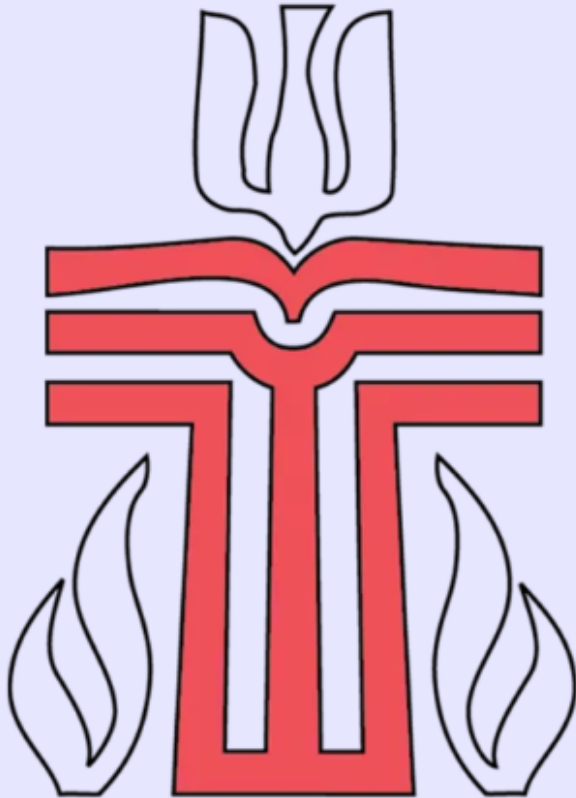


The slightly flared shape of the Celtic cross also makes possible the transforming of the uppermost section into the shape of a descending dove. As a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the dove is intimately tied to the representation of the Bible, affirming the role of the Spirit in both inspiring and interpreting Scripture in the life of the church. The dove also symbolizes Christ's baptism by John and the peace and wholeness which his death and resurrection bring to a broken world.

The Dove/Holy Spirit (Brief Statement of Faith)

- We trust in God the Holy Spirit everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

The Lectern



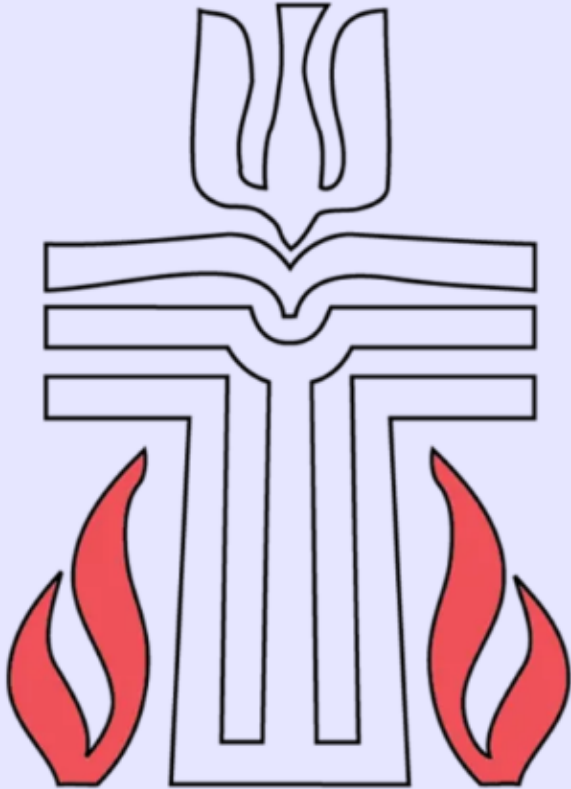
Beneath the image of the book is the suggestion of a lectern or pulpit, which captures the important role of preaching in the history of Presbyterian worship.

The Role of Preaching

The church confesses the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship. The session shall ensure that in public worship, the Scripture is read and proclaimed regularly in the common language(s) of the particular church.

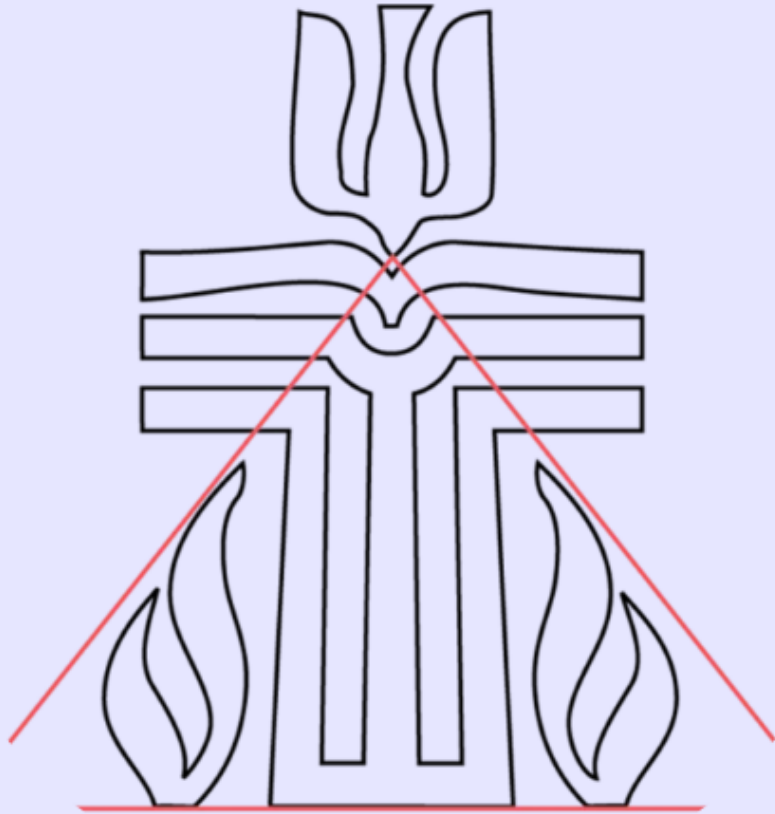
According to the Book of Order, the Word proclaimed shall be based on the Word written in Scripture. Preaching diligence and discernment in the study of Scripture, listening for the voice of God....The sermon will present the gospel with clarity and simplicity, in language that all can understand.

The Flames



Integrated into the lower part of the design are flames that form an implied triangle, a traditional symbol of the Trinity. The flames themselves convey a double meaning: a symbol of revelation in the Old Testament when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and a suggestion of the beginning of the Christian church when Christ manifested himself to his apostles at Pentecost and charged them to be messengers of the good news of God's love.

The Triangle

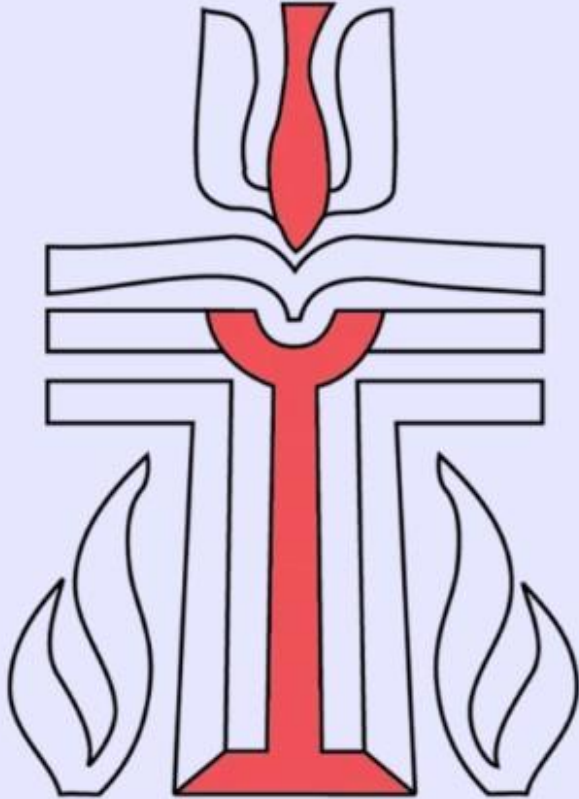


The triangle also suggests the nature of Presbyterian government, with its concern for balance and order, dividing authority between ministers of the Word and laypeople and between different governing bodies. This understanding of the church was based in part on an important idea in Reformed theology, the covenant, which God establishes with people to affirm God's enduring love and to call us to faith and obedience to Jesus Christ.

The Covenant

A promissory relationship established by God with God's chosen people. Based on God's grace and faithfulness and calling for obedience and service, covenant in the biblical sense must be distinguished from a legal "contract" agreed upon by equal partners. God's covenant with Israel is summarized in the promise, "I will be your God and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22). Scripture describes various covenants of God with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant that will be written not on tablets of stone but on human hearts (31:31ff.). Jesus describes his sacrificial death as "the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25).

Other Theological Symbols



Looking more closely at some of the visual components of the design, viewers may discover elements that seem to fuse with some of the more obvious theological symbols. In the shape of the descending dove, for example, one might also discern in the body of the bird, the form of a fish, an early Christian sign for Christ, recalling his ministry to those who hunger. For some, the overall design evokes the calligraphy of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Others have seen a baptismal font or a communion chalice (cup).

The Sacraments

Where the Roman Catholic Church has 7 sacraments, the Reformed tradition has only two. There are two criteria that must be met for a sacred act to reach sacramental status in the Presbyterian Church (USA). They must have been instituted by Christ and commended by Christ. The two are Baptism and The Lord's Supper.

Baptism is a ritual washing. The word baptism comes from the Greek word which means "to immerse" and is connected to the Jewish tradition of (mikveh), a Jewish ritual bath used for traditional rites of purification. It was instituted in Matthew 3, in Jesus' own baptism, and commended in Matt. 28, when Jesus tells his disciples to go into the world to make disciples, baptizing them.

The Lord's Supper is a ritual meal of bread and wine traditionally served during a service of worship that re enacts and represents the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples according to the gospels. It was instituted and commended in Luke 22, when Jesus celebrated it with his disciples and told them to do it in remembrance of him.

The Sacraments are MEANS OF GRACE through which GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS are communicated to us.

Sacraments are both GRACIOUS ACTS OF GOD and HUMAN RESPONSES to God's grace.

Presbyterians believe the sacraments are SIGNS of God's gracious promises and SEALS of God's life-giving Word.

