



The Gospel in Glass

**The History and Meaning
of Our Stained Glass Windows**

*Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of
Evangelical United Church of Christ*

204 East Lockwood

Webster Groves, Missouri

This booklet is published at the request of those in attendance at the 75th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION of "Sanctuary Sunday," Sunday, September 24, 1995.

For this service both the history and meaning of the stained glass windows were researched by the Reverend Dr. Eugene Wehrli and presented by Dr. Wehrli and other members and staff of Evangelical United Church of Christ.

Here for those who were not able to attend are the messages and the program as they were presented to the honor and glory of God, our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

The Gospel In Glass

Based on Research by Dr. Eugene Wehrli

OUR CENTRAL MYSTERY **The Center Chancel Window**

The dominant reality in our chancel is the central stained glass window. The theme is the redemption of the world through Christ our Saviour. The risen Christ is the Lord of Life. The theme is reflected both in the words, "For the Son of Man Came To Seek and To Save That Which Was Lost" and in the detailed art glass.

The redeeming act of Christ is clearly understood as the work of God, whose hand is above the Christ. It also involves the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire surrounding the Dove crown the window and reminds us of Pentecost. Central, however, is the figure of Christ. There is a hint of the cross behind him on which he is crucified, but more noticeable are the little crosses which he carries over his body. He is the one who saves, redeems, and rescues; and, therefore, he ultimately carries the cross into life for all of us. The rich red color makes clear that this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

His hands are open and in invitation: "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden." He is our Saviour. The arms are disproportionately long, clearly indicating that his reach will include all persons.

Below in the center are the twelve disciples in a full circle, symbolic of the wholeness of the Church. Christ is Lord and rules the church, sending all who believe on his mission. Peter holds the keys of the reign of God, suggesting the church's responsibility in society. The sword of the Spirit suggests the task will be very difficult but that God will equip the church

with the sword of the Spirit, even the Word of God, so that the task can be fulfilled.

At night, when the window is not lighted from the rear, the altar bears the same message of God's saving love in Christ. The small brass cross bears the message at night, but the colors and the diversity of the large window show the message in much richer and intricate diversity, in ways that stretch our imagination.

The dark colors of blues and reds suggest that all that we affirm about the cross is ultimately beyond our comprehension and resides in the mystery and awe of God's presence. Hence, our appropriate action before this window is worship—relationship with the one who mysteriously saves our being. Every time we enter the sanctuary the whole message of the Christian gospel is there: God redeems us in our lostness and makes us agents of that saving love. Every time you enter the sanctuary, pay attention to that window.

(This window was given by Mr. and Mrs. Albert Lischen in memory of their child, Albert C. Lischen.)

THE MYSTERY REVEALED

The Side Panels of the Chancel Window

The theme of the side chancel windows complements and expands the central focus. The message is the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Eight "I am" sayings make it clear that the fullness of God can be seen in Jesus, the Christ. A bold "I am" dominates each window. Other "I am" sayings are more and more hidden, suggesting that God's presence in the risen Christ is in the midst of the world—but that presence is not always easy to discern.

The totality of the revelation, when all the "I am" sayings are gathered together like this, is that God's light in Christ is for the whole world. "I am the light of the world" is the affirmation on the left. So the diverse races are all gathered

in that light. Symbols of God's light include the illuminated orb of the world, the sun, moon, and stars, and the world of sea and land where fishes swim and the scraggly cows of Egypt are remembered. We are surprised to find the telephone in this window. It testifies that there are new forms of communicating the good news in these days.

The second emphasis announces "I am the vine and ye are the branches." The branch is not laid alongside the vine, but as in grafting, cut and bleeding, it is pressed into the vine already cut and bleeding in order to ensure that living union that will mean a new fruitfulness for each of us if we are grafted into Christ. Four human figures show who must be engrafted if God's reign is to come on earth. There is the king, justice; the business person, the world of commerce; there is the worker; and there are all of us bringing forth the purple, crimson, and white grapes in full cluster. We received the fruitfulness from Christ and now offer it as a gift for all. We, the church, are all connected through him, the common vine. He interrelates us with one another. The clusters of grapes catch not only the reality of communion but also our being united by his sacrifice.

The third emphasis, "I am the door," suggests that he is the means through which we are gathered into the presence of God each week. All persons enter through him so there is a white person, a black person, the native American, and the oriental person. There is some humor here as there always is in the medieval cathedral. The white man's temptation to pseudo sophistication is symbolized by his pince-nez. The headdress of the native American ties two panels together, and the cue and garment of the oriental person ties in the lower panel as well. We all belong in this window; that is who we are.

Finally, there is the Good Shepherd with his saving crook and carrying a weakened lamb. Eight sheep suddenly are everywhere, but all are served by the one shepherd. This panel celebrates the union of the Evangelical and the Reformed Church in 1934 and all unions that are to come. We are bound

together in one fold by the one shepherd. The motto of the Evangelical Church was: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; there is One Body and One Spirit, above all and through all and in you all." (Eph. 4:3-6).

In the east front window the message is "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Christ holds a book inscribed *Veritas* (Truth), a person follows in his way learning who he is, and there is the figure of a man coming to another's assistance (Life).

Communion is now carried by Jesus as the Bread of Life. Like the manna in the wilderness or the water bucket at Jacob's well, he gives the basic necessities for fullness of life.

The next emphasis is "I am the Resurrection and the Life." The sacraments are the symbols of the living Christ in baptism (the shell from which flows water), and platters of bread and communion cups. In this way he continues with us and gives us the clues to finding his living presence.

Finally, there is an "I am" saying taken from the book of Revelation. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending," saith the Lord, "which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." In his hands the exalted Lord holds the Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the Omega, the last letter of the Greek alphabet.

It all ends with a word of faith and thanksgiving for the grace that has been experienced by the worshipper: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of Our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."

(The congregation gave the window on the left to recognize the ministry of the Rev. H. H. Lohans (1928-1936), and the one on the right to recognize the ministry of the Rev. A. C. Ernst (1920-1926).)

THE EIGHT WINDOWS ON THE EAST AND WEST SIDES OF THE NAVE

These windows are plain and simple by contrast with the chancel windows. They depict the context in which we live as the congregation. While there is mystery in what God has done for us, there is clarity and light on our role in the world.

On the east side there are four windows that recall the life of Jesus in its very important moments. In the first window there is the manger—the birth of God's Son always proclaimed and remembered.

In the second is the butterfly. For Christians that became a symbol of the Resurrection. The worm that hides itself in the cocoon emerges as a beautiful, transformed creature which nobody could have predicted. We are God's Resurrection people.

The third window is Pentecost with the church being empowered by God's tongues of fire and the Dove.

But the fourth window, way in the back, is an unusual one. It shows the boy Jesus and commemorates all the children in the church. It represents Evangelical Church's commitment to the education and the nurture of its children. The window was presented in part as a memorial to Irma Press, who died in her ninth year, by her parents. Dr. Press was the president of Eden Seminary and active in this congregation. Since she was a member of the church school, the window also was given by the beginner and primary departments of the church school, and by Mr. and Mrs. Ernst Moeller to commemorate all our children now and in the future. Weekly, we are reminded of this commitment when we sit in these pews.

On the west side of the sanctuary there are also four windows. All four celebrate and call Christians to faithfulness in a difficult world. In the rear of the sanctuary is a ship that sails the stormy seas of life. Here in this world so often shaken and battered by human and natural causes, and in the turbu-

lence of human living, we come aboard God's vessel. Like the disciples before us, we need not be threatened by the winds and the storms because God is with us.

The second window from the rear is the cross over the world, celebrating the reign of Christ which is established by his self-giving love. In this symbol we see the familiarity of our United Church of Christ emblem, the Cross Triumphant surmounted by the crown and all atop the orb. It is a reminder that we are to be Christ's disciples to all the world.

The third window is the ark and the rainbow, symbolizing how in all times of darkness the signs of God's presence in the ark and with the rainbow at the time of the flood are repeated. We have nothing to fear if we live by faith.

But where is the fourth window? When this church was built in 1937 we did not have a pipe organ. Instead, a small electronic instrument was used. The theme of that window in the side room is the cross and crown. When the church purchased a pipe organ, that room was needed to house the equipment. This fourth window pictures Jesus' cross and crown. It was in humbling himself that he became the means of life for all people.

The west wall windows suggest that we live in a world which is often threatening and even death-dealing, but we live with the promise of God in the rainbow; the security of God's vessel even in the midst of storms; the Cross of Christ and the crown. God is with us.

ON LEAVING THE SANCTUARY "SENT BY GOD INTO THE WORLD"

When the church was built in 1937, the rear wall was solid and we exited through a side door into the front lobby on Plant Avenue. We did that for 30 years. So as people left they saw the bright windows that made up the rear sanctuary wall.

There were many symbols of Christian life in those

windows.

First were the signs of the four Gospel writers. They had taught us the faith, and as Christians we were now to carry their message to the world.

By the Third Century, evangelists were identifying the four gospels with the four living creatures of Revelations 4:7, even though that is not what the writer had intended. Therefore, we can still see Luke—"The Man"—in the center window. Matthew—"The Lion"—is in the east rear window, and Mark—"The Ox"—is in the west rear window. John—"The Eagle"—was in the bottom center window.

Two additional symbols reinforced the message being carried out of the church and into the world: "The Open Bible" and "The Cross." These were to be our signs in the world. There were also three themes in the windows: Agriculture and Industry; Literature and Music; and Sculpture and Painting. Our faith was to be carried out of this place both into the life of commerce and into the life of art and culture.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that part of the original rear wall was opened as an entrance to the new narthex in 1968, the lower panels containing the symbol of St. John—"The Eagle," "The Cross" and the three areas of concern for the Christian life were removed.

There is still one more window. When all of us used the Plant Avenue entrance we passed it every Sunday as we left worship. It is a very colorful picture of the Good Samaritan reaching out to help. That was the spirit with which we were to leave worship—willing to help everyone and knowing that our help may come from anyone.

Look at it today or sometime soon.

It was given to this church by the Lions Club and the citizens of Webster Groves in honor of Judge Henry W. Ruhe. He had been an outstanding civic leader as well as a devoted member of this congregation from its beginning. The community chose to remember him in this way. He was just one of

many Good Samaritans who have inspired all the members of Evangelical UCC.

MEDITATION IN STONE AND GLASS AND SPIRIT BY DR. LIONEL WHISTON

Stone and Glass and Spirit.

Our church has several entrances. We may enter for worship or for education; to grieve or to celebrate; as individuals or as larger groupings. We enter in different ways for different purposes to express our common needs and mission under God. For seventy-five years we have been doing this—and we intend to continue.

Stone and Glass and Spirit.

Ours is a stone church, built to last, built for strength, built to bear witness to our presence and the presence of Christ reaching out through our church.

The stones blend, giving our church an overall impression and harmony. We are not a mega-church, but we are an unpretentious fellowship bearing the stamp of commitment.

The stones of our church are blended and bonded with a mortar. Sometimes that bonding falls out with time, leaving cracks and crevices. We, the living stones, forget the rock from which we were hewn. We feel shaken emotionally and financially. The time, like now, becomes critical.

There comes the need for self-examination: what causes the leak? . . . the break? What material is needed to restore the bonding? And we set about the acts of restoration and renewal.

We remember houses built on rock and sand which are buffeted by storms and wind. We remember the storms which have beaten upon our church these 75 years and how our foreparents and we have remained faithful to the vision. We treasure each living stone whether 100 years or 100 days in age. Each is bonded and supported by the love of Christ and our

love of one another.

Ours is a stone church built upon rock whose cornerstone is Jesus whom we call Christ.

In Stone and Glass and Spirit.

In Glass and Spirit and Stone.

We know what glass in a church is for: it is to let the light through. It is light that comes from outside. It reminds us that there is a world out there with needs; a world which speaks a different language from ours and with whom we need to communicate. Light and illumination from outside reveal our pettiness and parochiality, our stubbornness and stiff necks. It invites us to self-knowledge and exploration.

In some churches that light is very clear. It may be no accident that a New England meetinghouse or the Concordia Seminary chapel have clear glass windows, for these traditions have sharp and clear understandings of truth, and of right and wrong.

Our glass, like the majority of churches, is opaque. It lets light through, but it does not permit us to see sharply, without ambiguity. It is hard to live with uncertainty. Or, perhaps better, we are called to live by faith.

And remember what we have been saying this morning about our windows. Like a medieval cathedral, our windows are designed for teaching. In the ambiguities of our individual lives or our life as a congregation, our windows offer us the testimony of our faith and its symbols in their mystery and meaning.

The windows also teach us of our history, not only of the church universal, but also of our congregation here. There are names on the windows that are before my time and which it is good for me to hear. And there are names of persons I have known, and I need to have them once again brought into the light.

Glass and Spirit and Stone.

Spirit and Stone and Glass.

You can see stone and glass, but not the Spirit. We experience it, but we do not see it. We see its fruits, but not the Spirit itself. The gender of the Hebrew word for spirit is feminine; of the Greek word is neuter; of the Latin word is masculine; so "spirit" should be sufficiently inclusive language.

There is a stern quality about the working of the Spirit. Actions have consequences and the consequences of some actions include anger, alienation, separation. The Spirit accents the justice which overturns self-righteous complacency. Wherever there is pain and injustice, we can be sure that the prophetic Holy Spirit is commanding: let justice roll down like many waters; justice for the lonely, the weak, the outsider, and the hurting ones.

That same Spirit is a nurturing spirit, comforting the grieving, supporting the weak, encouraging the passive, gentling our speech, disciplining our actions, and elevating our hands to reach out. Justice and mercy, fair-play and nurture, love in its multi-colored splendor: this is the Spirit at work in our midst.

This Spirit entered the church on that first Pentecost; it inspired Evangelicals and Reformed, Congregational and Christian. It has breathed on this congregation, this people of God gathered here, for seventy-five years. We pray for its continuing presence.

Stone and Glass and Spirit. . .

Glass and Spirit and Stone. . .

Spirit and Stone and Glass.

