

Grace Centennial

The Grand Choir Window of Grace Episcopal Church

By Mary Ann Burkhalter and David Aldrete

We, the faithful, kneel at the altar to receive the sacrament of Holy

head of Christ are “rays...which emanate

in all directions as a reminder of the omnipresence of God.”

Communion. As we rise, turn, and walk to our pews, we are bathed in golden light. Soaring over us is the stained glass Grand Window of Grace Episcopal Church.

Above the choir loft, sunlight pours through this masterpiece created not only of glass and metal, but also of inspiration, artistry, and love. Surely, for each person who has come to the altar, it is an additional blessing.

The architecture of Grace Church reflects the mid-20th-Century aesthetic; yet it succeeds in being timeless. It is clean of line and pure of form. The perfect complement to the A-frame construction of the building is this glorious work of art. It presents a concept of the risen Jesus, who stands, victorious, before the cross. He is Christ the King, alive, vibrant and eternal.

Flanking it are the two narthex windows, which are dramatic, abstract checkerboards of clear and colored leaded glass. The original chapel window repeated this theme; later it was replaced by the Last Supper tableau.

The design of the Grand Window is unique and superb. Each element of the composition has sacred symbolism. The risen Savior stands triumphant before the cross. His outstretched hands represent welcome, comfort, and blessing. He wears a chasuble-like robe in rich blue, signifying his status as our High Priest. Above the Savior is the descending Dove—the Holy Spirit. Surrounding the

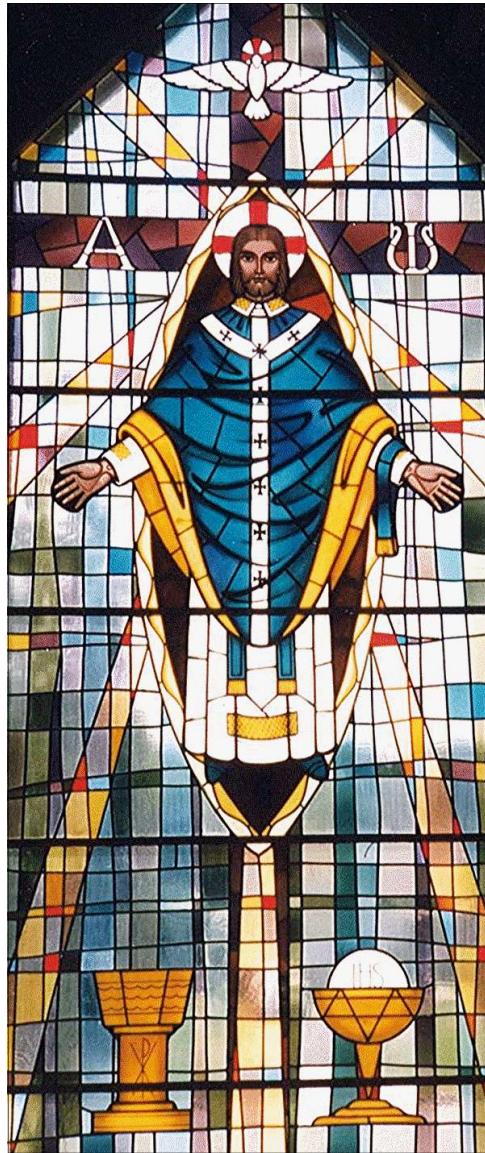
On the left and right sides of the Christ figure are the symbols of Alpha and Omega, “the beginning and the end.” Beneath Him are representations of blessed sacraments. The baptismal font includes the initials IHS (Jesus). The chalice and host, representing the Holy Communion, include the Chi Rho – (these are the “X and P” – also early symbols of Christianity).

The Grand Window, along with its companion pieces, were given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of Howard E. Stevens, by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Weber. All were created by the Wallis-Wiley Studio of Pasadena (now Wallis Studio of Sierra Madre). The accomplished artists of this firm worked closely with the benefactors to achieve their goal of a profound and inspiring memorial.

A visit to the studio by members of your Centennial Committee revealed a wealth of information about the creation of the windows. We learned more about their construction and installation when Ms. Susan Wallis, daughter of John Wallis, the studio’s founder, came to Grace recently. She examined the windows and

recommended maintenance and repairs to the Grand Window which are necessary for its preservation.

The assemblage includes two supports which run from the top to the bottom of the artwork. The craftsmen incorporated these elements into the design so skillfully that they do not compromise the integrity of the artist’s design. However, this affected the stability of the window to a degree.



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(The Grand Choir Window, Continued from page 2.)

After fifty-five years, because of the slight instability of design, the leaded glass which forms the head of the Figure is bowing slightly. Repairs are in progress and reinforcements are in place to implement the full restoration of the window. Work should be completed early in the New Year.

A letter from the Wallis-Wiley Studios, dated October 15, 1956, states:

These windows are designed to portray, in the rich and brilliant light of stained glass, the Triune God and the two Sacraments necessary to salvation. The [grand] window is devoted to the Trinity. At the top, God the Father is represented by the Sun, ancient symbol of deity.

The symbols in these windows are carried out mainly in brilliant golds and rich, vivid rubies. These two colors have, by tradition, symbolic meanings which give added significance to the entire plan. Gold represents the goodness of God and ruby is the color of divine love, and it is through His goodness and His love that man may have eternal life.

The initial sketch of the Grand Window includes remarks about the depiction of Christ. "The benefactors have requested that He have a 'gentle' face." The face of Christ in this window is indeed gentle, but also seems to express strength, comfort, and love. It is welcoming. And it is forgiving.

Mr. and Mrs. Weber were quite specific about the design, dimensions, and placement of the brass plaque identifying this memorial to their beloved father. We see it, affixed to the bricks, as we exit the sanctuary and enter the narthex. As we do so, it seems appropriate to send a prayer of thanks to God for these faithful people who added immeasurable beauty and character to our church.

