

The Stained Glass Windows
of
First Presbyterian Church
Newport, Rhode Island



125 years of Worship and Service



First Presbyterian Church

Broadway and Everett, Newport, Rhode Island
401-847-1749 www.fpcnewport.org

We do not know exactly how the vision of creating our beautiful church originated, but we do know that the founders wanted to achieve an elegant building worthy of the city and of the denomination. The architectural style has been described as “Romanesque,” with a large circular “rose window” in the front, and equally large stained-glass windows on either side. The interior was designed to seat more than 450 people, with good seating for all, and no provision for a balcony.

The stained glass windows and the organ are two of the signature features of First Presbyterian. To a considerable degree, the church was designed around them. As you approach the church coming up Broadway from Newport, the windows dominate the view of the church. And, as you enter the church, the gleaming tier of organ pipes and the glow from the windows dominate the scene.

In addition to the large Rose Window at the rear of the sanctuary, two large windows provide light and inspiration. On the south wall is the Mary and Martha window (depicting Luke 10:38-42), while the north wall is dominated by the Good Shepherd window (John 10:11-18).

Only a few of the amazing 60 stained glass windows throughout First Presbyterian Church are shown on these pages. A major restoration effort in 2000 recaptured the original beauty of the sanctuary. As so often happens, doing one thing discloses another problem. In this case it was the discovery of the poor condition of all of the stained-glass windows in the sanctuary. The large circular rose window was in the worst shape; it actually sagged by several inches. It was learned that the lead material binding the colored pieces of glass together typically starts to deteriorate after about 80 years. When this happens, the only recourse is to remove and disassemble the window piece by piece and rebuild it with new lead—a very expensive job.

In 2002, the congregation responded to the need once again and raised the money to begin the restoration of all 27 windows in the sanctuary. Currently, a new fundraising campaign is ongoing to restore the remaining 33 windows.



The Good Shepherd



Mary, Martha and Jesus



Jesus knocking at the door



Child at Prayer



Mary, Mother of Jesus

Among the 60 beautiful stained glass windows located throughout the building are eight windows in the sanctuary that illustrate highlights of Presbyterian history and the Protestant Reformation in many countries.

These windows were inspired by 20-foot canvas banner decorations used in 1880 at the Pan-Presbyterian Council in Philadelphia. These are described in more detail on the following pages.

The World Presbyterian Alliance, established in 1875, included 95 independent church groups representing 63 countries. For the Alliance's 1880 meeting in Philadelphia, the Assembly Hall was decorated with 20-foot canvas paintings—banners that represented important religious figures from the member countries.

There is a wide-spread impression that Presbyterianism is basically Scottish/Irish Protestantism. Few know about the strong history of Presbyterianism in England, Wales, France, Holland, Germany, Bohemia, Hungary, Italy and Switzerland—and throughout the world through missionary and evangelistic labors.

Our windows have recreated these banners in glass. As far as possible, each includes seals, mottos, coats-of-arms and commemorative phrases, names and dates.

Reproductions of the original banners and photos of the corresponding windows of First Presbyterian Church of Newport are shown on the following pages. These details of the significance of these windows, and others, are taken from the History of the First Presbyterian Church Windows, Newport, R.I., by Norm Champagne and can be found in the church's history collection.



Scotland

Golden thistles, the floral emblem of Scotland, form the background of the seal. The burning bush, with its inscription “Nec Tamen Consumebatur,” testifies that despite tremendous struggles, the church still stands because of Christ. Five times the Church of Scotland passed through the flames of persecution; its shield displays a dove, representing the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The word “Culdees” refers to a group of monks and nuns who lived in Christian communes until John Knox persuaded them to meet a more demanding role in the world. The words he spoke at his trial for treason included “The truth I speak, impugn it who so list” are displayed on the window.

Another man whose name appears on the window is George Wishart. In 1541 he launched his career as a preacher in Scotland; shortly thereafter he was accused of heresy and fled to Geneva where he was influenced by John Calvin. Returning to Scotland, he met John Knox. He was burned at St. Andrews on the first day of March 1546.

John Knox became chaplain to the cause of Scottish independence. He was taken captive at the siege of St. Andrews castle, and became a galley slave—rowing all day, chained day and night, often beaten. Nineteen months later he was released through the intercession of King Edward VI of the newly Protestant England. When King Edward died, Queen Mary Tudor began persecuting Protestants again. Hundreds perished, and Knox fled to Geneva, Switzerland, where he spent much time consulting with John Calvin. In 1559 he returned to Scotland and led the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. Many believe the Presbyterian system paved the way for the American form of representative government. And, we owe thanks to Scotland for the very word “Presbyterian.” It means “Ruling of the Elders.”



Netherlands

This window features a large shield, commemorative of the Synod of Dort, where the creed of the Dutch church was established. Below this is a bend bearing the Dutch motto, Eendracht Maakt Macht—loosely translated, “In Union there is strength.”

A tablet recognizes William the Silent, under whom the Netherlands achieved her civil and religious independence. The white tablet in the shape of a Maltese cross, shows a lily springing up through thorns, one of the emblems of the Holland Church. The tablet commemorates “100,000 Martyrs, A.D. 1567-1573.”

At the bottom of the banner is a tablet commemorating the establishment of the Dutch Church in America, referred to as New Netherlands (the Dutch name

for New York). Puritan missionaries arrived in 1620.

The Netherlands became Protestant and Prebyterian six years after Luther nailed his 95 Theses on a church door in Wittenburg. Two of his Dutch followers were burned at the stake by the Duke of Alva, commander of the Spanish forces in occupied Holland. However, the influence of Calvin’s doctrines a few years later became dominant in the Netherlands’ Presbyterian Church. Then the Spanish Inquisition tortured and killed 100,00 Protestants in 80 years of war. The Duke of Alva himself boasted that in five years he killed 18,500.

Protestants retaliated, burning and destroying Roman church property, and a vigorous Protestant Presbyterian Church survived the massacres. Wars of independence and a religious war followed. Finally, by 1648, Europe recognized the United Provinces as an independent state. Today the Reformed churches number nearly half the population of Holland.



German

This window represents both the German Reformed Church and the German Reformed Church of America, as well as close ties with Switzerland.

Backed by the colors of Germany and Switzerland, a scroll is inscribed “Heidelberg Catechism, Palatinate, A.D., 1563.” Below this is a plain seal proclaiming, “Freie Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands” (Free Evangelical Church of Germany) and the word, “Presbyterium.”

The large tablet in the middle honors Frederick III, the Pious, under whose auspices the Heidelberg Catechism was prepared. Beneath the inscriptions is the sentence, “Herr, Nach Deinem Wille,” (According to Thy Will, O Lord) which was Frederick’s favorite motto.

The dark red tablet refers to Melancthon, the great theologian, friend and associate of Martin Luther. It also mentions the modification of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1855, to suit the union of the Reformed Germans with the Lutherans, now known as the United Catechism.

Beneath this is the circular seal of the German Reformed Synod of America. It contains symbolism including a clergyman and an Indian with bow and arrow, and references to early missionaries in America in the 1700s. The German Reformed Church was established among the German settlers of America under the auspices and by the support of the great classis of Amsterdam.



France

This window honors the French Huguenots. Their movement began early in the 16th century and was nearly destroyed in the 17th century and reduced to a forbidden sect for 200 years, finally regaining their right of synodical self-government in 1872.

The large shield with a blue field of golden fleur de lis (lilies), the emblem of France, symbolizes the Trinity. In the center of the shield is the seal of the Reformed (Presbyterian) Church of France. The the name Jehovah runs across the burning bush in Hebrew characters. The motto is Flagror non Consumor, (I am burned, but not consumed). The legend is S-Synodi Ecclesia in Gallia Reformate (Seal of the Synod of the Reformed Church in Gall).

Huguenots, the historic name of French Presbyterians, is inscribed in a large band below the shield. Coligni' (name divided by a shield bearing his coat-of-arms), led the armies of the Huguenots and perished at the massacre of St. Bartholome. It was an unparalleled scene of bloodshed, in Paris, in 1572. The Huguenot nobles had assembled to attend the marriage of Prince Henry of Navarre. The king ordered the surprise massacre in which at least 70,000 Huguenots were inhumanly butchered in eight days.

Ivry is the town where Henry led Huguenot forces against the Catholic League forces led by the Duc de Mayenne. Henry so defeated Mayenne that he became undisputed and best loved king of France, Henry IV.

This was the period of the Dragonnades, when Louis XIC revoked the Edict of Nantes and banished great multitudes of his Protestant subjects, many of whom came to this country. A crimson tablet at the bottom says, Synod Reassembled, A.D. 1872, marking the first meeting of the Reformed Synod under Government sanction after two centuries of suppression.



America

This window represents the 1870 ecumenical union of the Presbyterian churches in America. The shield features the stars and stripes, an open Bible, the cross of Christ, and a serpent. The motto of the ecumenical union was: “A voice crying in the wilderness signifies the position of the church as a missionary church in the unsettled wilderness of America.” Beneath the shield is the coat-of-arms of Philadelphia—“Let brotherly love continue.”

The window honors John Witherspoon, first moderator of the General Assembly. (As the Continental Congress hesitated to pass the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon, a lineal descendant of John Knox, stood up. “There is a tide in the

affairs of man,” he said. “We perceive it now before us. To hesitate is to consent to our own slavery. That noble instrument (the Declaration of Independence) should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in this house. Though these gray hairs must soon descend to the grave, I would infinitely rather that they descend quicker by the hand of the executioner than desert at this crisis the sacred cause of my country.” After this statement, everyone signed. When news of these extraordinary proceedings reached England, Horace Walpole said to the British Parliament: “Cousin Americana has run off with a Presbyterian parson.”

More than half the men in the Continental Army were of the Reformed and Presbyterian Faith. Britain actually called the American Revolution the “Presbyterian Rebellion.” It has been estimated that by the time of the Revolution, two-thirds of America’s population were of Presbyterian and Reformed faith.

Ireland



The seal of the Church of Ireland resembles that of Scotland. However, here the burning bush includes the inscription, “Burning, but Flourishing.” Also, the golden shamrocks represent Irish luck as well as an attempt to explain the concept of the Trinity.

The name Patrick AD 372 refers to the famous saint—a devout, humble lad who was kidnapped as a teenager and sold into slavery in Ireland. He escaped and was educated in Roman-occupied Gaul. He became a Christian and returned to Ireland as a missionary. He soon became a man of influential power, establishing churches with a bishop and eight elders, after the Presbyterian order, and noted on the banner as “Ireland’s Primitive

Presbyters.”

St. Columba (AD 563) had killed a man but repented and became a Christian, helping to win over the Irish to the Christian way of life through his preaching, prayers and example.

“Ulster Plantation AD 1605” commemorates the settlement of northern Ireland by the Scottish (then referred to as Scotch) during the reign of James I. Blair and Cunningham were names that figured significantly in the changing landscape of the early 1600s in Northern Island.

The black oath: in 1639 Charles I compelled the Irish people to take an oath to deny all covenants except his own commands. Many refused and were mercilessly persecuted. Then the terrible uprising of the Roman Catholic population threatened the extinction of Protestantism: this is commemorated in the reference to “First Presbytery AD, 1642.

The Act of Toleration in 1723 gave the Irish religious freedom. However, between 1705 and 1775 almost a half million “Scotch-Irish” people came to America because of the famines in Ireland, and they played

England



This window illustrates the rich contributions of the English Presbyterians, originally named the Puritans. We received the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms from the Assembly of Divines in Westminster Abbey, 1643-1647.

On a scarlett field of gold roses, the double-circle seal of the Presbyterian Church of England includes the seal of the Westminster General Assembly and the “Scotch Kirk,” showing that the Church of England was formed by a union of the Scottish Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, and English Presbyterians.

In 1662 the Puritans separated from the Anglican Church. The Puritans of England are different from the Puritans of New England, whose migration to America occurred prior to the Great Civil War Cromwell Era of 1642-1658.

The circular tablet, inscribed “2000 Non-Conforming Presbyterian Divines, commemorates the ministers of the English Church who abandoned their churches and manses during that period, rather than conform to the liturgical requirements of King Charles II.

The tablet with two cherubs holding a banner displays the words, “The Shorter Catechism: Answer—Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

The lower red panel lists several distinguished members of the Westminster Assembly. Bangor and St. Columbanus, mentioned at the bottom, were related in the Christianization of the British Isles as early as 550 A.D.