About the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Seal

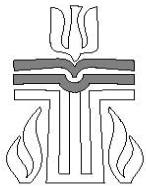
About the Use of the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Seal

About the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Seal

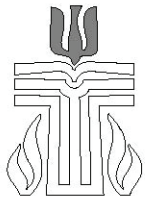
The seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a symbolic statement of the church's heritage, identity, and mission in contemporary form. Its power depends on both its simplicity and complexity, as well as its traditional and enduring qualities.

The seal is designed with a simplicity that enables the viewer to retain the image in the mind's eye. The clean, carefully measured lines and shapes can be readily recognized as a distinctive symbol, even when it is reduced in size. At the same time, the complexity of the seal stimulates the imagination and suggests several levels of meaning. The symbolic and visual qualities remind the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of its identity and call to be the servant of Jesus Christ.

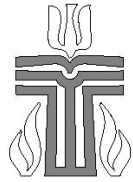
The basic symbols in the seal are the cross, Scripture, the dove, and flames. The dominant structural and theological element in the design is the **cross**—the universal and most ecumenical symbol of the Christian church. The cross represents the incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ, and his passion 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.



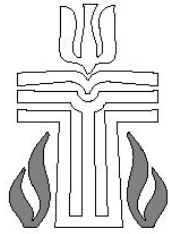
In experimenting with the basic lines and shapes of the cross, the contour of a **book** began to emerge in the horizontal section, and the two center lines of the cross became the representation of an open book. This integration of the horizontal dimensions of the cross with the book motif highlights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



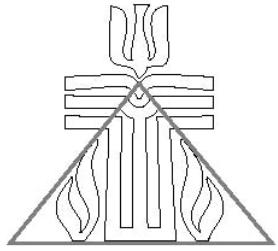
The slightly-flared shape of the Celtic cross also makes possible the transforming of the uppermost section into the shape of a descending **dove**. As a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the dove is intimately tied to the representation of the Bible, affirming the role of the Spirit in both inspiring and interpreting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



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.



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** also suggests the nature of Presbyterian government, with its concern for balance and order, dividing authority between ministers of the Word and laypersons 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.

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).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul described the church as a body with many members, illustrating the pluralism of the church and the many gifts that God gives to its members. So also the seal's individual parts, when taken together, form an encompassing visual and symbolic unity, while not exhausting the richness of possible interpretations.

For more information about the seal design, order the book *Sealed in Christ* by John Mulder, PPC # 18091004, cost $4.95. To order call: 800-227-2872.

About the Use of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Seal

The seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a registered trademark, registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office on the principal register. In addition, the seal is registered with the United States Copyright office. The seal is comprised of the symbol, the basic components of which are cross, Scripture, a descending dove at the upper part of the cross, and flames on either side of the lower part of the cross, and the name of the denomination, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), encircles the symbol.

The seal was approved by the 197th General Assembly (1985). Each congregation and governing body may use the seal without receiving prior permission. Congregations and governing bodies many not license use of the seal to anyone else. All other organizations, groups, and members must receive prior written permission to use the seal from the Office of the General Assembly; 100 Witherspoon Street; Louisville, Kentucky 40202.

While every use of the seal may not provide an opportunity to display the statutory notice (the circle "R", ®) and use of the statutory notice is not mandatory, it is good practice, when practicable, to give public notice of the trademark registration by using one of the following:

- *The letter R enclosed in a circle:* ®
- *Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off.*
- *Registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office*

So, while it is not practical to display the statutory notice on a stained glass window or church sign, it is possible to note it on the reverse of a piece of jewelry or other inconspicuous place.

Trademark protection may be lost through improper use, abandonment, and dilution. To minimize this risk, the symbol should always be used in its entire and original form.

As is the case with the notice of trademark registration, copyright notice is not mandatory, but whenever possible, it is desirable to include some notice of the copyright on the inside cover of publications displaying the seal. The following language is suggested: "The cross and flames seal is the exclusive property of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and is registered in the U.S. Copyright Office. This seal may not be used or reproduced without the prior written permission of the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); 100 Witherspoon Street; Louisville, Kentucky 40202."

In addition, any suspected unauthorized use should be promptly brought to the attention of the Legal Services Office or the Office of the General Assembly by forwarding the name and address of the user as well as a sample of their use of the seal.

Any products marketed in wholesale or retail settings must be specifically licensed by the Office of the General Assembly. An application for use must be filed and a fee must be paid for each design. A sample of the product should be sent to the Office of the General Assembly so approval may be based on the finished product.

For more information or a license to use the seal, contact:

Office of the General Assembly
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202
1-888-728-7228 #8038