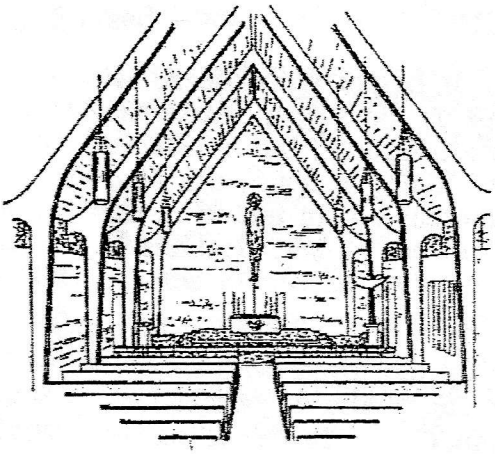

A TOUR OF THE CHURCH

CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOR

NORTH PLATTE, NEBRASKA

†

The Right Reverend Russell Theodore Rauscher, D.D., D.H.L.
The Bishop of Nebraska

The Reverend Samuel Ratliff Boman, Rector

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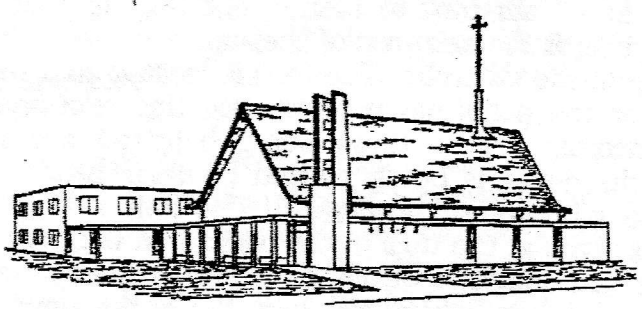

A CHURCH TOUR

The design of the Church of Our Savior began with the Altar. The service of groundbreaking reflected this as the Bishop broke the earth for the altar and the men of the parish outlined the perimeter of the building. The building becomes the "tent" to house the altar as in the Old Testament our forefathers "tabernacled" or tented in the wilderness with the sacred ark of God. Indeed, Robert Rambusch, a prominent ecclesiologist, described our exterior as reminiscent of the tent in the wilderness.

We enter the building off the cloister by the tower with its four cast bronze bells. Each bell is named for one of the writers of Gospels. The large bell, placed at the bottom of the tower, is named for St. Mark whose Gospel forms the base and core of the others. The next, in turn, are St. Matthew and St. Luke whose writings followed in the immediate decades. The smallest bell at the topmost position is named for St. John whose beautiful account of Our Blessed Lord's life came to explain Him in the beginning of the second century to those outside the Hebrew beginnings. This latter bell was originally cast by the Meneely Company at Troy, New York, in 1884, and was placed in the tower of our old building. It was recast and retuned with the new bells by Petit & Fritsen of Aarle-Rixtel, Holland, for the I. T. Verdin Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

East of the entry there is a courtyard reminiscent of the atrium in the buildings in the early Christian period of the Roman Empire and later. Through it we enter the Chapel which contains articles from our former building. The window given by Mrs. Arta Cody Boal in memory of her brother and sister, Orra Maude and Kit Carson Cody, has been kept in part, and framed by glass from the south window in the old choir room. These two children of Col. Wm. F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody died in early childhood, and it is said that the faces were painted from photographs. The altar was carved and given by the Rev. Charles Chapman in 1909. He used pieces of walnut furniture given by members of the parish. The reredoes was also carved by the Rev. Mr. Chapman using wood from the bars of Riphousen's and Whalen's Saloons, one of which was the first finished bar on Front Street. The carved "Christus Rex" is mounted on a new cross, and was carved by Faust Lang of Oberammagau, Germany, from an oak beam of an English sailing vessel, while he was in exile from the Nazi government at Cornwall, England.

The Nave and Sanctuary of the Church are designed on a liturgical axis from font to altar. The font is near the entrance because Baptism is the entrance of the soul into the Body of Christ or membership in the Church. The font is located in a recessed area reminding us of the primitive baptisms we find pictured on the walls of the catacombs where those being baptized are standing in the water as the water is being poured on their heads. (We will not fill the area with water, however.) The font is from the old building and was given at the turn of the century in memory of Louise Gilman Wilcox, the daughter of one of the original members of the congregation. The window behind the font shows the dove in thrust which is the description in the Gospels of the way the Holy Spirit descended upon

Our Blessed Lord as He was baptized of John in the Jordan River.

We now face the Altar which was made by the Studios of Potente in Pietrasanta, Italy, of Paonozzetto Rochetta marble. On the face of the Altar is a Venetian moziac of the Agnus Dei or Lamb of God in repose upon the book which is sealed with the "Seven Seals" as mentioned in the Revelation of St. John the Divine in the New Testament. The pennant signifies the triumph of the true Lamb of God in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Quite appropriately one of those in whose memory the altar is given is Mrs. Susan C. Keith who was one of the founders of the parish, and in whose sitting room in the Union Pacific Hotel, Bishop Randall of Colorado conducted the first Episcopal Church services in North Platte. Shortly after these services, Bishop Tuttle of Utah conducted services in the same room. Bishop Clarkson was next in North Platte and wrote soon thereafter that North Platte might be unique in the Church having its first services conducted by three different Missionary Bishops in almost immediate sequence of visits.

Above the Altar is a 12-foot ribbon bronze figure of Our Savior chosen because of the name of the parish. The cross of wrought iron with torch burned bronze finish is also the processional torch. The matching candle sticks are also processional torches. These are placed in the floor, or in moveable bases, as was a custom in the Church before church buildings came into being. The two flower vases are also pedestals matching the finish of the cross, candles, and the framework of the pulpit, lectern and altar rail.

The Lectern hold the Holy Scriptures and the ceramic plaque has the torch of truth for its symbol. On the front of the pulpit is the two-edged sword of the Word. Above it is a soundboard shaped as an eagle in flight signifying the power and scope of the Gospel.

The altar rail, which liturgically is an extension of the Altar, is capped with the same marble. In the framework are eight symbols of self-sacrifice, death, resurrection and feeding. The pomegranate, a fruit found in warm climates, is a resurrection symbol chosen because it bursts its shell when ripe and produces a multitude of seeds. The loaves and fishes are reminders of our Lord feeding the multitudes. The five wounds of Christ are depicted by bleeding hands, feet, and heart. The Phoenix is a legendary bird which destroyed itself with fire and rose again from its ashes. Legend has it that the pelican faced with necessity would feed its young with its own blood. The scourge reminds us first of our Lord's suffering and secondly of our sins. The wheat and the grapes are the symbols of the bread and wine the Last Supper which He has given us as the Heavenly Food, His Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, which He has commanded that we continue until His coming again.

The window on the south wall depicts the story of Creation, and should be studied with the first three chapters of Genesis in hand. It seems to proceed from the cosmic explosion—"Let there be light!"—to the lifting of the heavens in the creation of the "firmament." According to the artist, this is shown by the loop in the "creation line." From this the line follows the days of Creation through forms show-

ing mountains, fields, stars, moon, sun, animal and vegetable shapes, and finally with Adam and Eve after the Fall.

The north window shows the tongues of fire of Pentecost in seven jets of flame for the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit which are mentioned in the prayer before Confirmation. The "creation line" comes from about the first of these beneath the symbols of the Bishop who, as the successor of the Apostles, is the minister of the Holy Spirit. The mitre or bishop's hat is shaped as a cloven tongue and is complete with two ribbons flowing to each side. Across the mitre is the bishop's staff for his role as a shepherd and the key for his role as keeper or steward of Christ's fold. The line then ends in the "Laying on of Hands" by the Bishop in the bestowal of the Spirit.

Thus, in the worshipping body of the Church we have represented the person of God the Son—in the windows, God the Father and God the Holy Ghost—One God in Three Persons.

On the roof top the cross stands above the Altar to remind those who pass of the riches of Christ that wait within this "tent." The bells peal in the proclamation of the Gospel, and call us to renewal and service in Him and for His sake. Hozanna! Hozanna to God in the Highest! Amen.

