

Encountering the Art & Architecture of the Sanctuary



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"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." – Marcel Proust

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

How to Use this Guide

Everyone using this guide should begin by reading the introduction for its important orientation to engaging with our art-full sanctuary.

- * You can best prepare to enter our sanctuary with a fresh eye and open heart by reading the Introduction and the guidance provided in the Experiencing and Reflective sections. Wait to reflect on the questions until you have entered our sanctuary and are ready to take in the art in its totality. Suspend your current thoughts and impressions to allow new reflections to emerge.
- * This devotional can be used individually or with a small group who might wish to engage together. It is recommended that no more than 4 people engage together in order to allow for individual reflection and sharing.
- * It is most effective to use this devotional when you are physically in the sanctuary and when there is relative quiet with minimal distractions. Consider coming early to the 9:15 worship or remaining after 11:00 worship or coming into the sanctuary at a time when you might be in the building. Time during worship may also provide a different perspective for your observations and reflections. If you are on livestream, you can use this devotional during the preparation for worship time and being aware of the space as the livestream moves around the room.
- * Bring with you an open heart and mind as you seek to experience our chancel and art-full sanctuary in a way that may increase your appreciation of the space, growing your faith as you do so.
- * If you would like to experience this with a small group and a facilitator/leader, please contact Noel Werner (noel@nassauchurch.org) or Kim Kleasen (kjklesen@comcast.net).

Chancel Text Working Group, September 2025



Introduction

In her book, *Redeeming Vision: A Christian Guide to Looking at and Learning from Art*, Elissa Yukiko Weichbrodt puts forth the belief that while God delights in both art and artists, it is not just the maker or creator of art who is the artist. Certainly, we would all agree that those who create, whether that be in sculpture, painting, music or the myriad of other creative arts, are indeed artists. And we often fall into the trap of thinking that it is “they” who are artists and not “me.” Yet, we should understand that we are all creators, created by our God. The creation, the making, the seeing and the experiencing and engaging with art forms is one of the core foundations of our Art of Faithfulness™ work.

Dr. Weichbrodt believes that it is also the viewer who is a maker of art. After all, any art form rests in isolation until someone looks at it, hears it, experiences it. Imagine Bach without listeners or the statue of David without viewers – hard to do. As Christians, every one of us, individually and collectively, brings our own experiences, faith, spirituality and worship to art, keeping it alive and generative. Each of us has experienced the moment when art brings us closer to our God, brings us to tears in awe, expresses our laments, and grows our love for God and brings us closer to each other in community.

And age-old contemplative practice, Visio Divina (or literally divine seeing) derived from Lectio Divina (divine reading), is a way of praying through seeing and therefore growing our faith. The practice often uses art and asks the individual to gaze upon the art for quite a while before reflecting on its meaning relative to one’s faith. Some of our Art of Faithfulness™ small groups have used Visio Divina or Musica Divina to explore the intersection of art, faith and reflection, distinctly different from the “evaluative” response to art.

Dr. Weichbrodt believes that by engaging with art in ways similar to loving God, self and neighbor, we should expect to be changed in the process. She lays out a model for “contemplative looking” that is distinctly different from an “objectified gaze.” Her process, as well as that of Visio Divina are incorporated into this guide so that you might look at our transformed sanctuary with new eyes, allowing yourself to be further moved by faith and transformed yourself. Yes, the guide will have you consider the art in the chancel but also to consider the sanctuary in its totality as it is an art-full space. The interplay of architecture, light, color, shadows, textures and more will be woven into this guide. And, most significantly, the interaction with our new texts.

It is the hope and prayer that this devotional brings forth new reflections, makes you one of the makers of art in our sanctuary and opens the door for deepening of faith and love of God and neighbor.

Experiencing our Art-Full Sanctuary

Find some uninterrupted time to be in the sanctuary (or view it on a livestream) to engage with this process.

Prepare your heart and mind to take in the totality of the sanctuary, the chancel art and the space. Put aside some of your natural tendencies to jump to conclusions or evaluations; rather look at the space with new eyes.

- I. Facing the chancel, stand or sit toward the middle of the room and slowly turn 360 degrees, pausing several times to look contemplatively until your eyes return to the chancel.
 - i. What grabbed you? What did your eye naturally gravitate toward?
 - ii. What did you see or feel that you haven't before?
 - iii. What did you notice about these elements:
 - a. Light
 - b. Shadow
 - c. Colors
 - d. Texture
 - e. Architecture
 - f. Others...
 - iv. How did these elements change as you turned around in the room?
 - v. What did you see in the chancel as a result? Did your view of the chancel transform or change during this time?
- II. Move around the sanctuary in any way that you like. You might want to circle the room, walk up and down or side to side, walk up close and move away or go to the balcony. How does being in different locations and perspectives change what you noticed before? (Note: please do not touch the art in the chancel as oils and residue from our hands can alter the paint and gold leaf)

- III. Find a comfortable or favorite place and sit down, take several deep breaths and look to the chancel.
 - i. What do you notice that you hadn't noticed before?
 - ii. How does the chancel reflect our sanctuary in new ways?
 - iii. How does the chancel reflect our community of faith in new ways?
 - iv. What speaks to you? What touches your heart?
 - v. Take in the elements you have been noticing and think about what is new, what are you seeing for the first time, what are you seeing differently?
- IV. Final reflection question:
 - i. How do the texts and art interact and what does it tell you?

Reflecting on Your Faith and Our Community

You may choose to write down some of your reflections or you may choose to hold them in your thoughts – either is OK.

Questions to consider:

- I. Does the beauty of the chancel and our sanctuary touch your faith? How?
- II. How can responding to our entire sanctuary help us live into the texts and the mission of Nassau Presbyterian Church?
- III. Finally, we see and experience our sanctuary regularly. Has it been transformed for you? How might that transformation evolve your faith? How might that transformation evolve our community, now and in the future?
- IV. Offer your own prayer to our God.

Reflections

Prayers

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