

# The Art and Architecture of Christ the King

The images most often associated with our congregation are photographic or graphic representations of the eponymous sculpture that has hung in the chancel of Christ the King since the building was constructed in the mid 1950's. Photographs of the wooden carving are found on our website and Facebook page. Our signage, letterhead, advertising and bulletin covers have used this image as our visual mark for many years. I began writing this series of articles so our members might gain some knowledge about this particular work of art.

The sculpture was created by the liturgical artist Ernst Schwidder, then known as Ernest C. Schwidder, specifically for the new church designed by Robert Chervenak. Raised in the Northwest and the son of the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Seattle, Schwidder attended Concordia High School in Portland, and earned the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees from the University of Washington. Although he had already achieved acclaim in Seattle as a painter and had moved into liturgical art with his Master's thesis and works in several Northwest churches, Schwidder found a confluence of his interest in music, drama, architecture, religion, theology and the visual arts when he became the first head of the Valparaiso University Department of Art in 1958. There he met Charles Stade, the campus architect and designer of the Chapel of the Resurrection which was under construction at that time. His work at Valparaiso and subsequently with Stade on many Chicago-area church designs focused his lifelong career. In 1964, he returned to the Pacific Northwest, continuing to work with Stade from here while teaching art and serving as head of the art department at Seattle Pacific University and at Pacific Lutheran University from 1967 until his retirement in 1992. His work can be seen in over 90 churches in Washington State and over 300 from Alaska to North Carolina, Massachusetts to California.

In 2011, through the work of Schwidder's pastor, Richard Tietjen, and others including former Christ the King member and church architect Byron Perdue, the Brauer Museum of Art at Valparaiso University became home to the Schwidder Archive, a collection made up of architectural drawings and sketches, files, records, photos and slides. With the exception of one carved mahogany crucifix, the actual artworks themselves remain where they were originally installed in worship spaces across the country. To see more of his work, go the web site *The Ernst Schwidder Project* at <http://schwidderart.org>.

His mahogany wood sculpting is easily recognizable for its long, lean, flowing lines, which were not intended to be lifelike but rather to visually represent theological truth appropriate to the church settings and ministry for which they had been commissioned. The sculpture in our chancel is an example, with its depiction of the risen Christ the King. The words of the sculptor himself, reprinted below, were included in the worship folder for the dedication of our church on April 15, 1956, and appear with his drawing of the original chancel on the wall of the sacristy hallway.

Bev Wick  
March, 2016  
The King's Messenger  
Part Two of Four

THE SCULPTURE IS CARVED OF HONDURAS MAHOGANY, AND MEASURES 72" BY 10" BY 4". ITS SUBJECT IS CHRIST THE KING, AND ITS OBJECTIVE IS NOT AN ATTEMPT MERELY TO ILLUSTRATE, BUT RATHER TO SYMBOLIZE THIS CONCEPT. THE PLACEMENT, ANATOMICAL DISTORTION, SYMBOLISM AND CARVING TECHNIQUE ARE THE MEANS TOWARD THE END OF PUTTING OUR BELIEFS IN PHYSICAL FORM IN ORDER TO MINISTER AT ALL TIMES TO THOSE WHO WOULD ENTER THESE DOORS FOR WORSHIP...

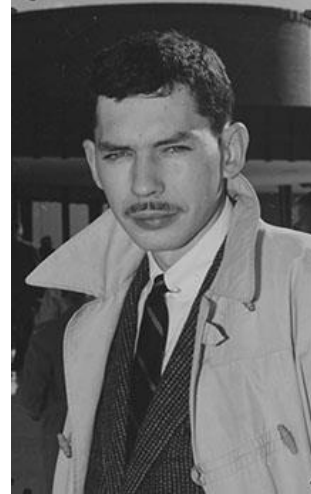
THE PLACEMENT OF THE SCULPTURE WAS DESIGNED TO FUNCTION WITH AND COMPLIMENT THE BUILDING AND PROVIDE A UNIFIED WHOLE...THE PLACEMENT OF THE FIGURE AND CROSS FULFILLED THIS FUNCTION BY CONFORMING TO THE SHAPE OF THE CHANCEL WALL AND RELATING TO THE SOURCE OF LIGHT...AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE COMMUNICATION OR LITERARY CONTENT. THE FIGURE OF CHRIST IN FRONT OF AND RISING ABOVE THE CROSS SUGGESTS MOTION AND ALLUDES TO A RISEN AND GLORIFIED LORD

ANATOMICAL DISTORTION WAS USED TO EFFECT THIS SUGGESTION OF MOVEMENT. THE ELONGATED PROPORTIONS WITH SMALL HEAD AND TAPERED CROWN CREATE A COMPLETELY VERTICAL LINE. THE ENLARGED HANDS AND FEET, POINTING UPWARD AND DOWNWARD ADD TO THIS EFFECT OF RISING. THEY ARE NOT ENLARGED, HOWEVER, JUST TO ESTABLISH THIS DIRECTION – THEY ARE SYMBOLIC.

SYMBOLISM AS A VISUAL LANGUAGE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE REAL COMMUNICATION OF THIS WORK. CHRIST RISES ABOVE THE BLACK PASSION CROSS, SYMBOLIZING HIS CONQUEST OVER DEATH, AND ASSUMING HIS TRUE DIVINE NATURE AND KINGLY OFFICE. HE IS SURMOUNTED WITH A CROWN OF FLAME, SYMBOLIZING HIS UNSPEAKABLE SACRIFICE. HE HOLDS FORTH HIS HANDS AND FEET TO SHOW THE WOUNDS SUSTAINED IN HIS VICARIOUS ATONEMENT. HE IS ADORNED WITH THE EUCHARISTIC VESTMENTS OF THE ALB, STOLE, CHASUBLE AND MANTIPLE, SYMBOLIC OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT OF HIS BODY AND BLOOD, GIVEN AND SHED ON THE CROSS.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF THE RISEN CHRIST. LET THOSE WHO WORSHIP HERE ACCEPT THIS WORK AS A SYMBOL OF OUR FAITH IN CHRIST'S ATONING SACRIFICE, AND AS A REMINDER OF OUR OBLIGATION TO OFFER PRAYER AND PRAISE TO CHRIST OUR KING.

ERNEST C. SCHWIDDER  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON  
APRIL 15, 1956



Ernst Schwidder  
1931 – 1998

