

## What is the symbolic significance of St. Matthew's Memorial Garden design?

To appreciate the meaning, we need to go back to our roots. For almost 275 years after Christ's death, early Christians were persecuted. This made sharing the Gospel a life-threatening experience. To counter this threat, common symbols took on special meaning for the early followers of Jesus. During the year long preparation for baptism, the initiates were not only schooled in the basic concepts of the faith, but also in Christian symbols as a method of coded communication.



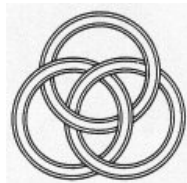
If a Christian suspected an acquaintance might be a fellow believer, he/she would draw an arc in the dirt. If the other person was a Christian, he/she would add a second arc touching at one end, and crossing over the other arc. These two arcs created the symbol of a fish, or ichthys in Greek. This was one of the first symbols associating Christ's followers as "fishers of men."

After Constantine converted to Christianity in 307 AD, he declared it the official religion of the empire. As Christianity spread across the known world, diverse cultural symbols were incorporated and used for instruction, and later, for purpose of adornment.



An early Celtic symbol for past, present and future, the triquetra came to be used to explain the Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the center of the triquetra is an equilateral triangle, also used to represent one God made up of three equal persons. This triangle was used as a grave marker for early Christians, and can still be seen in catacombs today. More recently, Christians have brought back Christian symbols as an outward sign of their faith. People wear a cross pendant with pride, although it is an ancient symbol of death. For Christians, it has become the symbol of our salvation through Jesus' death. People also connect fishing swivels to make chains for bracelets and necklaces, reminding them of Jesus' command to make them fishers of men.

Our Memorial Garden builds on these spiritual roots. It is a statement of belief based on a rich heritage, grounded in memories as we look to those who come after us. It includes:



- The circle, representing a God with no beginning and no end.
- Interwoven circles forming an inseparable Trinity of three equal parts.
- The triquetra depicting the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but a single Godhead.
- The ichthys as a declaration of Christianity.
- The triangle with equal sides at the center of the pathways, one of the earliest symbols of God, which lives on today as a reminder of Christ's first followers.
- All of these, forged into a single symbol whose meaning can be shared long into the future.

