



Cox Chapel

Highland Park United Methodist Church

“The Altar”



Cox Chapel is a magnificent Gothic-style chapel within Highland Park United Methodist Church. At the heart of the life of the chapel are two Communion worship services offered every Sunday morning at 8:30 and 11:00. Though different in style, both services engage in congregational singing and praying, hearing and reflecting on God’s Word in the scriptures, and celebrating God’s loving and transforming presence in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Historically, the altar has been the table or structure on which a sacrifice is offered. In the liturgical Christian groups, such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, the altar has been the table upon which the bread and wine are placed during the celebration of the Mass. Strictly speaking and as defined by the United Methodist Church, the church does not have an altar in this sense.

The United Methodist tradition has been to have a Lord’s Table upon which the elements are placed during the service of Holy Communion. The communion table is often referred to, albeit incorrectly, as the altar. This can be traced back to the church’s original founding in England by John Wesley. The word altar has been used in another way in United Methodist tradition by inviting the congregation to come to the alter for prayer or other special services such as baptism or reception into membership. Here the usage means that people are to come to the chancel rail and in this sense altar has symbolic meaning.

Did You Know

Just as a typical calendar has four seasons, twelve months, fifty-two weeks, and three-hundred sixty-five days that include holidays, solemn days, and normal every-day days; the Liturgical Calendar of the Church defines the “special seasons” during the year.

The purpose of the Liturgical Year Calendar is not to mark the passage of time, but to celebrate and understand more fully the entire mystery of Jesus Christ; from his birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of his return in glory.








The Liturgical Year begins on the first Sunday of Advent, which usually occurs around the end of November or early December, and ends on the feast of Christ the King. The calendar first tells us what readings the Church has designated to be used for each day and names special feasts and commemorations celebrated during each season: Advent, Christmas, Lent, The Triduum, Easter, and Kingdomtide (also known as Ordinary Time).

The altar has several elements that are not only symbols but express meaning:

- the candles represent the light of Christ is in our midst
- the two candles on each side of the Lord's Table represent the two angels in the empty tomb
- the cross reminds us the perfect sacrifice made by Christ on Calvary
- the Bible is there to remind us that Jesus in the Word of God made flesh
- the filled offering plates represent our sacrifices and offerings to God

During the different seasons of the Liturgical Year, we enjoy distinctive music, specific readings, prayers and rituals. The colors of the paraments help express the character of the mysteries being celebrated; all working together to celebrate the particular season of the calendar.

Liturgical Colors

	Blue: represents Hope and celebrates the Presentation of the Lord and prepares us for the coming of Christ
	White: the color of Joy and Victory for the seasons of Christmas and Easter; may also be used for feasts of our Lord
	Gold: may be used with white on Christmas or when no other color is specified
	Purple: Prepares us for Lent; may also be used during the season of Penance and Renewal
	Red: recalls the Holy Spirit and used on Pentecost
	Green: symbolizes Life and is used during Kingdomtide (Ordinary Time)
	Black: represents the Silence of the Tomb and celebrates the passion of Christ

Sources: umc.org; archive.umc.org; hpumc.org; Wikipedia; and the book *United Methodist Altars "A Guide for the Congregation"* by Hoyt Hickman 1996