

# Things of our church

## THE CHURCH NICHE

Here is information about the special niche art in the church.

Praying as stewards of God's good earth is easy at St. Alban's. The desert mountain vista above the Lord's Table is a vivid reminder. Interior appointments affirm the first article of the Creed that God is Creator of heaven and earth. These appointments help worshipers feel at home with desert wild life and vegetation. Those long associated with St. Alban's take pride in the sculptures in the inside niches reflecting themes of the Bible and the human experience of the desert and its day and night creatures.

**The First Niche**, at the rear of the church, is a mural constructed of ceramic tiles depicting rain in the desert, the water necessary to life, leading us to remember the water of life that Jesus promised, and the bread and wine of the Eucharist. At the bottom of the mural, the drop-shaped tiles are reversed to become the pads of the prickly pear cactus of our desert. The rain becomes a stream that continues into the next niche. "the Lord...shall come unto us as the rain...unto the earth." Hosea 6:3.

**The Second Niche**, also at the rear of the church, is dedicated to St. Alban, the first English martyr, for whom this parish is named. In 303 AD, during a period of persecution, Alban gave protection to a priest, and was converted and baptized. Then the priest's presence was discovered. Alban put on the priest's cloak in order to take his place in execution. When Alban was thirsty just before his death, a spring appeared. The water drops that are carried into this niche from the first one represent this. The carving above and behind the figure is mesquite and represents the priest Alban died to save as well as humankind (ourselves), witnessing to the humility and self-giving of the kneeling martyr. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13. The

**Third Niche**, on the north side, represents the Hand of God. The base figures in wood represent praying human hands. "the hand of our God is upon all them...that seek him." Ezra 8:22.

**The Fourth Niche**, on the north side, represents God's covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. Moses carried the Ten Commandments, carved in stone, down from the mountain to the People of God in all generations. "Great peace have they which love thy law." Psalm 119:165.

**The Fifth Niche**, on the west side of the church, features a pillar of desert creatures of the daytime. Carved in honey locust are quail, ground squirrel, jackrabbit, bighorn ram and javelina. Francis of Assisi saw all creatures as brothers and sisters and felt a strong sense of reverence for the natural environment shared with them. "God made the beast of the earth after his kind,...and God saw that it was good." Genesis 1:25.

**The Sixth Niche.** The giants of the desert cacti, the saguaro, are visible from every aspect of St. Alban's. Their budded arms compose a trinity, reminding us of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Saguaros provide homes for birds

and humans. Early dwellers of this desert used the ribs to build. This majestic plant, easily seen from our pews, seems to speak of the love and responsibility we feel in the continuity of our human families. "They shall dwell in safety, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown." Ezekiel 34:39.

**The Seventh Niche** repeats the theme of our sharing the natural world with the other creatures of God's making. Here are the desert creatures of the nighttime. Carved in dark wild cherry are the bat, elf owl, kit fox, bobcat and coyote. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:24, 31.

**The Font Niche**, our newest addition, contains the baptismal symbolism of the "Spirit of God...descending like a dove." Matthew 3:16.