

Peace Poles, Hidden in Plain Sight



Spotlight on Crestwood: Peace Poles, Hidden in Plain Sight

Have you ever seen something, but not really SEEN it? I'm embarrassed to say that I walk by our two Peace Poles at Crestwood every week, but the sight has never sunk into my consciousness. It appears I'm not the only one. Stop and think. Do you know where they are? They are in clear sight as you walk through the church.

My moment of awareness came one Sunday morning as I walked past the chapel on the way to the early service. What is that tall pole just inside the glass door, leaning a bit off-kilter in its wooden base? I asked a few others who didn't know. Someone finally identified it as our Peace Pole.

Ah! Another Crestwood mystery for the Spotlight! I had no idea of the interesting history I was about to dig up that leads to something already in the works for the church.

A few of the "old timers" with whom I talked said, after thinking, "Oh yes, it used to be out where our main sign is now." Another said it used to be outside the breezeway leading to the Mission Center. Another memory put it in the covered entrance where the Blessing Box is now. The Lafferty Garden was another place mentioned. I began to have vision of a mischievous gnome entering our facilities at night, moving the pole around.

I turned to Jim Cristi, our facilities manager, who knows our church inside and out. He says the pole has been in the chapel since he has been with us (confirming my inattention to detail). "There is another one, you know," he added. And sure enough, there it is in the small, intimate garden behind the glassed-in breezeway that runs between the main building and the Mission Center. When you enter the church from the north parking lot through the glass doors, you are looking straight at it.

I set off to find the story behind these interesting structures. They brought back memories of a very large one like it at the Chautauqua Institution in New York where participants gather in the morning to pray for peace.

Our two peace poles are four-sided wooden structures about six or seven feet tall. Some peace poles have six sides, I have learned. On one side, running up and down, are the English words, "May Peace Prevail on Earth." Each of the other three sides has the same words written in other languages. The garden pole has the statement in English, Japanese, Spanish, and Chinese. The one in the chapel has English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian (or a Slavic language).

As an amusing side, I was working on this while drinking coffee at Panera. A couple chatted nearby in an Asian-sounding language. I took my picture of the pole in the garden to them, asking if they could identify the writing. It was, indeed, their language, Japanese. The young man interpreted the peaceful message correctly. But that writing is attached to the pole upside down, he said. He asked where the pole is located and suggested I ask someone to fix it.

Later, in looking closely at my pictures, I realized that the two Chinese inscriptions ran in different directions. A helpful interpreter explained that the Chinese sign in the garden, like the one in Japanese, is upside down. My hope is that the chapel pole can be stabilized and the plaques reattached.

With help from our church historian and Cyd Cowgill, who was one of our associate ministers from 1998-2010, I began to piece together the history of the peace poles and the Shalom Peace involvement of Crestwood in the past.

Peace poles had their origin in Japan in 1955 in response to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Masahisa Goi, a man deeply affected by the bombings, made it his life's work to spread the concept of peace around the world. He designed the peace poles, hoping they would establish an energy field of love and harmony. Japan sent fifty-one peace poles to our country. These were distributed to each state and territory. Over the years the peace poles became a central symbol used by groups world-wide – religious and secular– to bring a focal point to peace activities.

The peace pole is still in use world-wide and is the subject of a current website that attempts to pinpoint the location of all of them. There are over 250,000 in all countries of the world, they report. Ours are not listed, but I will soon make sure that they are.

I am still searching to learn when we acquired ours at Crestwood. According to old minutes from the Shalom group, various church groups were encouraged to take the poles to their meetings or activities. Thus, the movement of the pole in members' memories was explained.

As you search for the Crestwood Peace Poles, contemplate what they were designed to represent. Think about the message they convey to tie us to our neighbors around the world. An on-line discussion about peace poles explains, " 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' is an all-inclusive message. It is a meeting place of the heart, bringing together people of all faiths, backgrounds, and cultures to embrace the Oneness of our planetary family."

The poles emerged from Crestwood's years as an official Shalom Church. Activities took Crestwood members to the coalfields of Eastern Kentucky, to the Fayette County Jail, and to a partnership with East 2nd Street Christian Church. The next Spotlight will look into that period of our history and, perhaps, into the future.

Peace.

Let's continue to explore together. If you have ideas for future Spotlights, contact me, Gaye Holman, at gdholman@bellsouth.net.





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