



## Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity

### WITH ATTENTIVE EYE, OPEN MIND AND HEART

by Mike Carsten, OFS

Recently in my day job, I had the honor of escorting one of our neighbors in downtown Detroit to his final resting place at the National Cemetery in Holly, Michigan. Carl was a veteran of the Korean war and lived in Section 8 housing in the inner city of Detroit. He was someone I was able to serve in life and honor in death. Carl was given a full military funeral with a flag-draped casket. The two-gun salute, sounding out in the silence, demanded an acute awareness of lives lived and lost.

The National Cemetery in Holly is a beautiful place. My own father is buried there. In going to the cemetery, whether to visit my dad or escorting one of our seniors, I am reminded of pilgrimage. Immediately upon entering, I find myself slowly moving in silence along a roadway that is lined with American flags, surrounded by perfectly placed white headstones shimmering and gleaming in the sunlight. Row after row after row.

After Carl's memorial service, I went to visit my dad. While standing in silence among all the headstones, I noticed (maybe for the first time) that there were many different religious symbols marking the top of each stone, most of which I did not recognize. I looked out across the vast white rolling field of thousands upon thousands of headstones and marveled at the amazing diversity of beliefs that were represented. In that moment, there was no need to debate the worthiness of individual belief systems. No need to defend my own beliefs. Just the silent witness of shared experience, unity in diversity and love of country. I was standing in the most ecumenical-interfaith place I have ever experienced. It is a Sacred Place.

I quote the following as found in the *Pilgrim's Companion to Franciscan Places* (printed by Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs):

*James Postell, teacher and architect, provides a rich explanation of sacred place:*

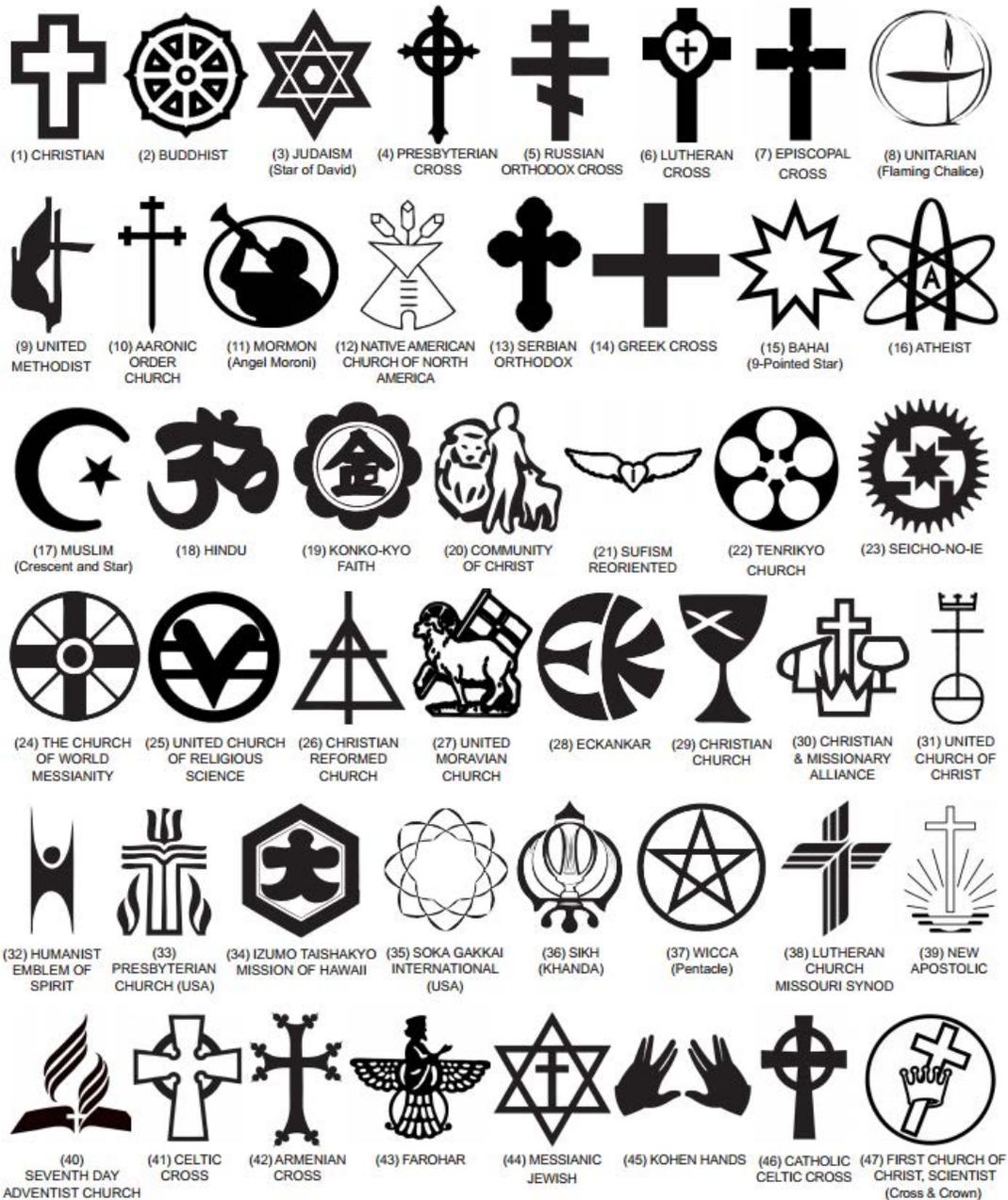
*Sacred has to do with both an inner and outer presence – a spiritual power, an intersection of Heaven and Earth.... Place implies human significance, human action derived from history, belief, ritual, and everyday... activity. According to Postell, sacred places are perceived as sacred and serve to mark important geographic, cultural, political, and religious transitions involving spiritual power. As such, their presence requires an attentive eye and open mind and heart.*

My pilgrimage to the National Cemetery allowed me a moment of insight. I was able to see and experience our “unity in diversity” as a nation in the signs and symbols we employ at death. I pray that with your help we together can work with attentive eyes, open minds and hearts to educate and raise our awareness as Franciscan sisters and brothers of the ecumenical and interfaith efforts taking place in our communities, in our parishes, in the Church, and in the Franciscan movement. We then may accept all people as a gift of the Lord.



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

## EMBLEMS FOR HEADSTONES AND MARKERS



Emblem (98) MUSLIM (Islamic 5-Pointed Star) is not shown due to copyright.

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