

## Signs & Symbols: Flowers



Have you ever visited a town for the first time, and been attracted by the really old church in the middle of it? You squeeze in through the huge old door and find a wonderful church – except there is something missing: there are no flowers.

Somehow their absence gives the church an empty unused feeling. Often it means that the church you've just discovered is no longer used for worship, and is now in the good care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

So what is it about flowers that make such a difference? Flowers are more than just 'living' things. They bring colour, shape, scents and memories with them, and that's without any 'meanings' being given to each variety, such as 'remembrance' for 'rosemary'.

When we visit people we often take cut flowers with us as a gift. We use them at times of celebration as well as times of illness and sorrow. They add the finishing touch to a dinner table, brighten up a dull corner and can attract attention to something near to where they are.

We use flowers to express our emotions, both in the choice of the flowers themselves and in the way they are arranged. Some speak of the informality of the country, while others are more sophisticated. Spiky flowers and sharp lines give a harshness, a crispness, perhaps a cleanness, while flowing shapes and pastel colours speak of gentleness and comfort. Yet others are used to tell visually a story or a sentiment that words alone struggle to express.

In one church this past Easter there was a formal arrangement placed on the lid of the baptismal font. It comprised three levels in decreasing circles but each with increasing height. All the flowers were placed almost vertically from a circular base of 35 cms diameter (approx 14"). The lowest of daffodils was 30 cms tall, then a second layer of taller yellow flowers came from within that ring to a height of 45 cms. The final ring was made up of 1 metre tall (3 feet) white Easter lilies. The whole arrangement spoke of Christ rising from the tomb. Not just waking slowly but rushing from below, up and out, in a great triumphal explosion. Fantastic!

This month

Have a look at the ways and the places that flowers are used in a church near you. What do they add to the experience? How would or could you use flowers to express your feelings to God?

**By The Rev Dr Jo White**  
a vicar in Derbyshire

