

What is Tau?

The word “tau” is represented by the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet “Ⲛ” and was later adapted to the familiar “T”. This symbol has both literal and metaphorical importance. It is a sign of protection and favor of God, as well as the goodness and faithfulness of God’s people. In the Bible, it represented the mark of protection over the doorposts in the Passover story; in both Ezekiel and Revelations, it is the sign or “the seal” marked on the heads of those who remained faithful to God. Both the Hebrew people and early Christians marked their doorposts and walls with this symbol. Early Christians introduced the custom of wearing the symbol on their body. Centuries later, St. Francis was intrigued by this symbol after meditating on the Book of Ezekiel and adopted it as his personal signature. He painted the symbol on the walls of chapels and the friars’ cells (some of which can still be seen today!) Early friars blessed the sick, particularly lepers, with the Tau so that today it is often invoked as protection against skin diseases.

Today the Tau symbol is most often identified with St. Francis and the movement he inspired. Walk down the streets of Assisi today and you will see countless depictions of the Tau. Carved wooden pendants for sale in shop windows; painted in colorful tiles on buildings; even as a large topiary of bushes in front of the Basilica of St. Francis! The Tau represents all that encompasses the Franciscan spirit: the fullness and abundance of God’s love and protection; the sacrifice and salvation offered by Jesus Christ; fraternity and a relationship to all of creation; a love of nature; a yearning for peace. By wearing this sign, Franciscans today live in solidarity with the message of St. Francis, and endeavor to bring peace, hope and compassion to the world.



Therefore, following this fine tradition of St. Francis, the Wheaton Franciscans proudly adopted this symbol for our Center of Spirituality. It represents our commitment to being instruments of peace, hope, healing, and transformation in the world. We hope that all visitors will experience peace and, growth and fulfillment at the Tau Center. We provide programs that deepen one’s experience of God, nourishes one’s body, mind and spirit, and give one the tools needed to encourage peace and harmony in a world of stress and discord.

(information resource: “The Tau” by Enrico Sciamanna. Tau Publishing Company, 2014.)