

Christ Church historic windows show true colors

Stained glass regains its original brilliance

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Corrosion caused by pollution in the atmosphere and the weight of years combined to put the remarkable stained glass windows in Christ Church, New Brighton at serious risk.

When the damage was first noticed a few years back, church members did not have the funds to put a full-scale restoration program in effect, so only one window was worked on at that time.

A three-fold growth in attendance in recent years with its concomitant increase in available funds, plus some timely legacies, enabled the vestry (the church's governing body) to fully restore the beautiful, historic windows.

Emerging from the accumulated grime and corrosion are some 16 windows, installed between 1904 and 1959, from such noteworthy studios as Louis Comfort Tiffany (5); Lamb, D'Ascenzo, Valentine d'Ogryes, Gorham and Leuchs, according to Parish Historian John Woodall, who is writing a history of Christ Church.

The church's rector, the Rev. John Walsted remarked on a recent Sunday from the pulpit, designs and colors are coming out of obscurity that no one suspected were there. "It's a very exciting process to watch," he told parishioners.

Watching the work of restoration has become a summer pastime for parishioners. The four-man crew, headed by Robert Hall, whose grandfather founded Church Art Glass, Inc. in Minneapolis, Minn., in 1942, and cousins Dennis Hall (crew foreman), Danny Hall, and Paul Crosso, work slowly and painstakingly on the irreplaceable windows.

Whether atop a high ladder or scaffold, or replacing the rusting steel and corroded lead frames on the ground, crew members are happy to stop and explain their work to interested onlookers.

"It's fascinating to see pictures and colors coming out and gleaming in the light of day," said Mrs. Shirley Elfers, longtime church member, who serves on the Plant and Equipment Committee.

Mrs. Elfers, who is famed in the parish family for her painstaking care as head of the Altar Guild, joked that she is keeping tabs on every aspect of the work.

Irving R. (Rick) Boody Jr., whose family has been involved in Christ Church for many years, watched the proceedings with pride. "It's very gratifying to see the windows and other parts of the church plant restored to their former beauty," he said. Boody, whose family gave the church several of the windows, is chairman of the Plant and Equipment Committee.

Also enjoying the scene one sunny day last week was one of Christ Church's youngest parishioners, Samuel Murphy, 5-month-old son of Erin Urban (director of the John A. Noble Collection) and noted Island artist, Bill Murphy. "I never even noticed some of the windows," remarked Erin, "they were so obscured by grime. This is engrossing."



The restored Tiffany window, "Christ Blessing Little Children," was installed in 1904 in memory of two little children, Daniel and Marie Schnakenberg, who died in February of 1891.

Hall, whose firm has done many churches throughout the Midwest and up and down the East Coast, first visited the church and did a thorough evaluation on each window.

He found that many of the Christ Church windows, in addition to deterioration from the atmosphere, were also buckling from the weight of years.

He determined that not only did the windows need cleaning, their metal parts restored or replaced, but the cement needed replacing.

And finally, when the cleaning and other work is done, they will be covered with clear plastic to prevent further corrosion and also to discourage vandalism.

The work is taking approximately three weeks — "it's much pleasanter to do this sort of work in the summer," Hall said, "but we also work in the winter when it's cold on those scaffolds."

As he spoke, the sun shone brightly through the Tiffany window, "Christ Blessing Little Children," highlighting the rich blues of sky and the green of the signature Tiffany vines depicted in the stained glass.



Workers clean a historic stained glass window in Christ Episcopal Church at Franklin Avenue and Castle Place.



Shirley Elfers, center, member of the plant and equipment committee, and the Rev. James Manning, left, assist at Christ Church, watch Dennis Hall, right, cut a new aluminum frame for the ventilator portion of a window.



Dennis Hall, left, shows a ventilator to be restored to the Rev. John Walsted, center, rector, and Irving R. Boody Jr., right, chairman of the plant and equipment committee of the New Brighton church.