

Innovative Stained Glass to Accommodate Today's Multi-Media Churches

by Diana Scarborough



Rose Window,
*Christ United Methodist
Church, Jackson, Mississippi*

In today's rapidly changing society, the needs, desires, and questions that arise when a church considers building a new sanctuary are different than they were 20, 10, or even five years ago. One of the consistent concerns that we hear from churches today has to do with the need to accommodate multi-media pre-

sentations. With the large windows that adorn many church sanctuaries, it is next to impossible to darken the room sufficiently in order to make such presentations.

One of the solutions that Pearl River Glass Studio has developed and begun to offer to churches is that of

installing large light boxes in the place of ordinary windows. These light cabinets fill what would normally be a window opening with a series of fluorescent lights that have a Kelvin measurement equal to that of natural sunlight. The light fixtures are then hidden behind a large stained glass window, so



“Build Your House on the Rock,” *Christ United Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi*

that the finished result is relatively indistinguishable from a normal church window. The distinct advantage of this is that the windows can be “turned off” in order to give presentations in the sanctuary.

One specific and remarkable example of this concept is the series of “windows” that Pearl River Glass Studio built for Christ United Methodist Church (CUMC) of Jackson, Mississippi. The Studio began work with CUMC in 2003. Their new facility



“I Will Pour Out My Spirit,” *Christ United Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi*

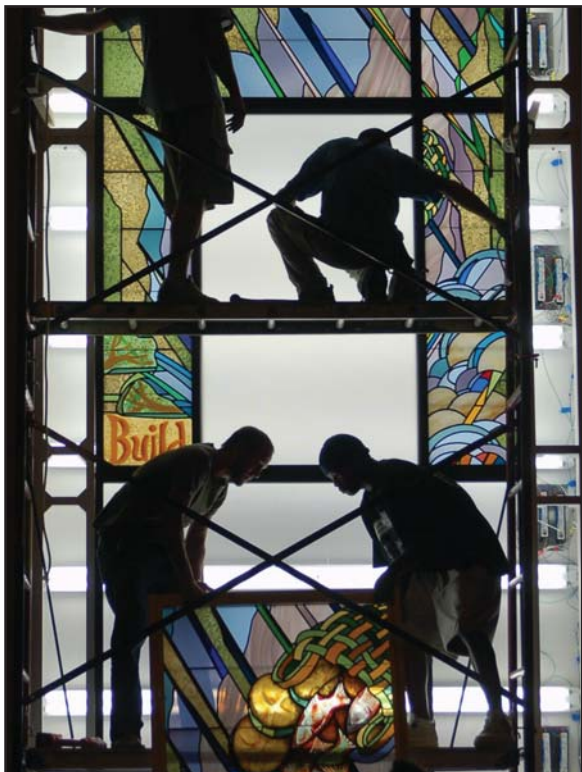
was designed to seat 1,500 people. Fire and safety codes for such a large space required that exit hallways surround the sanctuary. These exterior hallways prohibited the inclusion of windows on the interior walls of the sanctuary to let in natural light. The architects for the building did, however, design recessed niches into the side walls to approximate the look and feel of six large windows. Pearl River Glass Studio worked closely with the architect during the construction of the building to ensure that the



“As the Father Has Sent Me, So I Send You,” *Christ United Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi*

metal stud wall would accommodate the light box structures described above.

The studio then built a wooden sub-frame to support the stained glass in an aluminum frame. This wood was stained and finished to match the other wood moldings used throughout the sanctuary. The sub-frame was covered with wood casings that could be temporarily removed when the fluorescent lights needed to be maintained. The finished stained glass was lighted by 11 eight-foot electronic-ballast fluorescent light





Opposite: “He Is Risen,” “Do This in Remembrance of Me,” and the installation of “Build Your House Upon the Rock,” Christ United Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi

Above: “Behold” (detail) and “Crucifixion,” Christ United Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi

fixtures. Special color-balanced fluorescent light bulbs (T-8 5000 Kelvin) were used to approximate sunlight and give an accurate rendition of the stained glass. Because of depth restrictions, the bulbs were only eight inches away from

the stained glass windows themselves. In order to minimize the effect of horizontal bars of light that might be visible through the stained glass, an eighth-inch thick translucent white acrylic sheet was installed between the lights and the stained glass to diffuse the light and give even illumination.

Andrew Young, owner of the studio and designer of the stained glass, knew from the beginning that the windows were to be artificially lighted. Since the windows were not going to benefit from the inherent qualities of natural sunlight and all of its changing moods, the glass selection became very important. The glass was selected based on opacity, variations of texture, and color grada-

tions. These qualities were chosen to help mask any horizontal bands of light that may be visible even through the acrylic sheet and also to make the stained glass interesting to the viewer inside the sanctuary even when the windows were not illuminated or “turned on.”

The success of the windows at CUMC demonstrates that it is possible to have your cake and eat it, too. As many churches move to auditorium settings, where the use of audio-visual components is crucial, stained glass can still be incorporated to add color, beauty, and Christian symbolism to the worship experience.