

Stained Glass Case Study: St. Stanislaus Kostka Church

Professional consultation and volunteer involvement distinguish a stained glass restoration project in Rochester.

Repairing stained glass windows is viewed as an expensive and daunting task that sends shivers up the spines of building committee members. These beautiful works of art are often the most visible, valuable, and beloved components of any house of worship, but the necessity of proper maintenance and repair is frequently ignored. This was not the case at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Rochester, NY, where the Stained Glass Committee grappled with the confusion and responsibility of undertaking stained glass restoration and eventually completed a major project with the assistance of a professional stained glass consultant and volunteers.



St. Stanislaus Kostka R.C. Church, Rochester, New York
(Gordon & Madden, 1907-09). South aisle window depicting
St. Stanislaus Szczepanowski, Bishop of Krakow (1030-1079), a
Patron Saint of Poland and symbol of the country's national unity.

Located in what was once a Polish community, St. Stanislaus retains an Old World atmosphere. The Lombardian Romanesque Revival style building, constructed in 1907 to 09, contains an ensemble of 46 stained glass windows depicting Eastern European saints, New Testament scenes, and Christian symbols. The windows were commissioned between 1912 and the late 1920s from the Tyrolese Art Glass Co. and Mosaic Studio of Innsbruck, Austria. The firm's style, reflective of the Munich school, embraced early Renaissance imagery in figurative painting and represents the highest quality European work of the period.

For over 70 years these windows had slowly deteriorated due to the lack of adequate support bars, the installation of unvented protective glazing, and general aging. Problems included severe bowing, cracked glass, deteriorated lead comes (the lead strips that surround each piece of glass), corroded ventilator frames, weathered wood frames, and an accumulation of dirt. In 1991, the Parish Council agreed to undertake a complete stained glass restoration program and conduct a capital campaign that eventually raised \$120,000. Led by lifelong parishioner Kathleen Urbanic, the Stained Glass Committee was determined to carry out restoration according to the highest preservation standards.

Like many congregations, the Committee started the project by first requesting proposals for restoration from two stained glass studios. This resulted in bids that could not be properly compared since each studio based its price on a different area of repair. "We were at an impasse not knowing how to assess the quality of work that the two firms had proposed," says Ms. Urbanic. Consequently, the Committee engaged Arthur Femenella of Femenella & Associates, Annandale, NJ, as an independent consultant to assess each window's condition, recommend restoration procedures, and evaluate the proposals.

The first step Mr. Femenella undertook was to complete a conditions survey of the stained glass and to train volunteers. Mr. Femenella oversaw the documentation of each window with a written record, photographs, and rubbings made on vellum indicating leading patterns, certain physical features, and types of deterioration. "The volunteer rubbings and documentation not only saved money, but really made each person understand how complicated these projects are," said Mr. Femenella. The training also provided a sense of involvement and ownership of the project. Ms. Urbanic stressed: "Art not only helped reevaluate the project but his visit gave us an opportunity to showcase our project through an article in a local newspaper and through a slide presentation that we hosted for representatives of other parishes in conjunction with The Landmark Society of Western New York."

Once the conditions were evaluated, Mr. Femenella recommended modifications in the treatment specifications which were used in developing a final contract with one of the initial bidders, Pike Stained Glass Studios of Rochester. Femenella's own consulting fees amounted to less than five percent of the project budget. In an ideal situation, the conditions survey of the windows would have been completed first, followed by the development of treatment recommendations and specifications that could be sent out to bid by three stained glass studios.

"Because our Committee members didn't have the background to assess the proposals, Art's confidence that Pike Studios was going to employ high standards of workmanship helped us make a good decision," said Ms. Urbanic. Correcting the buckling, areas of condensation, and damage caused by unvented protective glazing was a major aspect of the project. Pike cleaned the windows, flattened bowed areas, re-leaded and putted, repaired broken glass, reproduced surface decoration, and installed new structural supports.

A volunteer architect prepared specifications for the repair of the wood frames and the installation of new protective glazing that

included recommendations by Mr. Femenella. The work included removing all the old exterior glazing and replacing it with clear, quarter-inch laminated safety glass. A ventilation system consisting of small screens set in lead was designed by Mr. Femenella and Pike Studios.

At the completion of restoration, Ms. Urbanic wrote and produced a 47-page booklet on the history of the windows and the project, illustrated with photos and details of the fund-raising campaign (see Resources). By retaining a consultant, the church was able to take control of the project, not only saving money but ensuring that its investment was implemented to the highest standards.

Using a Stained Glass Consultant

Using a consultant to evaluate a stained glass restoration project can help empower committee members and enable them to sort through difficult issues before the project is underway and throughout the restoration process. Since proposals can vary widely, building committees are often unsure of which approach to adopt. An outside consultant can counsel committees about existing conditions, methods and techniques for treatment, and pricing. Revising scopes of work and rebidding once the project is underway consumes more time for both the committee and contractors.

"We use stained glass consultants as a matter of course," says Richard Pieper of Jan Hird Pokorny Architects, New York, NY, an advisor to the recently completed Protective Glazing Study (see Resources). "They are essential for figurative windows found in most ecclesiastical settings, historically significant windows, and any unusual window installations, such as those using copper foil." Restoration of simple leaded glass in geometric patterns, however, can usually be specified by a preservation architect provided that bidding is restricted to prequalified contractors.

Most stained glass studios offer both consulting and conservation services. All too often, a congregation relies on one studio for everything from the conditions assessment to restoration work. If a studio undertakes a conditions survey, it may be advisable to pay for these services eliminating any sense of obligation for future work. "Make it clear whether their role will be as a consultant or as a contractor bidding on restoration work. Don't muddy the waters," advises Arthur Femenella of Femenella & Associates. Always seek a minimum of three bids on any project from qualified firms. "We don't allow the consultant to bid on the project," says Mr. Pieper. "It's not in the best interest of the client."

"The consultant can also be retained to supervise the work," suggested Valerie O'Hara, Director of the Pike Stained Glass Studios of Rochester, NY. Shoddy workmanship in details such as setting lead and matching lines is not readily apparent to the untrained eye, she explained, but can result in problems that will require costly premature repairs. The consultant should ensure that work conforms to contract specifications and recommend solutions to problems that arise.

For small restoration projects (under \$20,000 to \$30,000) involving uncomplicated windows, a consultant may not be necessary, says Mr. Femenella. Building committees can turn to publications from the Census of Stained Glass Windows in America, the Stained Glass Association of America, the National Park Service, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation for guidance on standards and contracting. If two or three bids from qualified studios are comparable, with the same scope of work and procedures, a committee can usually make a decision with confidence.