

# Monticello church seeing in color with new stained glass

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Patty Mitchell, a member of St. Mark Church in Monticello, remembers when the new church was built and dedicated in 2008 just like it was yesterday.

She also remembers how the parish had wanted stained-glass windows even then, 17 years ago.

“Our initial plan with construction was to do stained glass windows from the get-go. But it just wasn’t in the budget after we finally got the church built,” she said.

Fifteen years later, Mitchell found herself on the parish council in 2023. The parish council knew that the parish had taken the time to build up its finances in the past 15 years and was looking for improvements to make around the building and grounds.

“We had been taking different surveys with our parishioners because we built a columbarium, and we got that completed, and we were like, ‘OK, what’s next?’” Mitchell said.

The survey listed several improvement possibilities.

“We were letting the congregation tell us. Do you want stained glass? Do you want a new

kitchen? ... So we gave parishioners three or four options, and stained-glass windows won.”

The parish council began the process of hiring stained glass experts at Soos Stained Glass in North Little Rock to help them pick designs, styles and saints to include.

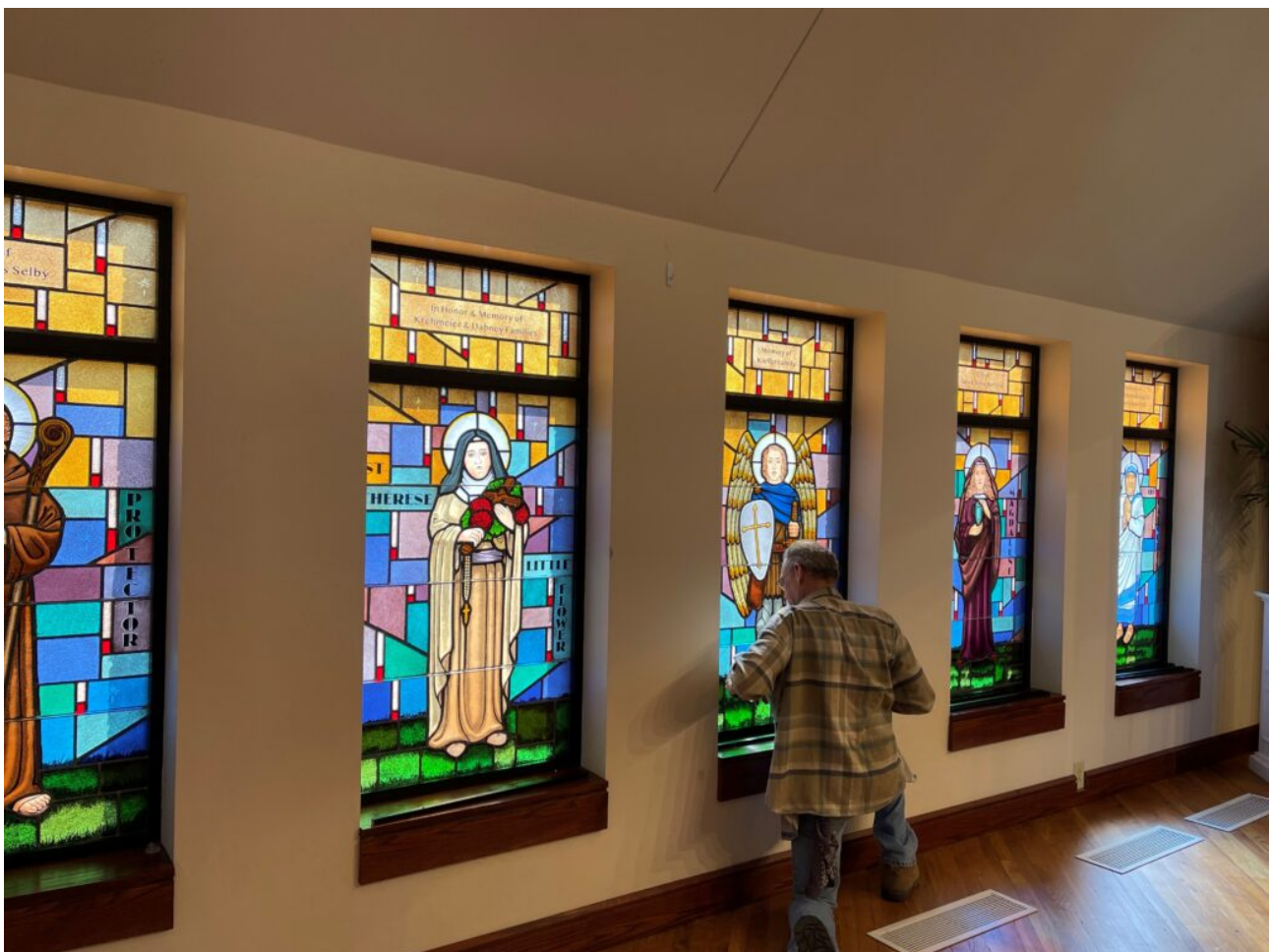
“We started probably in October or November of 2024. And then they started installing them (in March)... When you walk in the church ... the whole left side, all the windows behind the altar, and the very top (circular window) is done on the right side. ... They’re gorgeous.”

On each side of the altar are six large windows. Higher up on the right and left walls are two circular windows, featuring a dove and chalice with the Eucharist. Under one of the circular windows are two large windows, each split into halves, flanked by two slightly smaller windows, also split into halves.

Parishioners are hoping the work will be complete in time for Easter.

The new windows depict the life of Jesus and saints, including the Holy Family, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Michael, St. Mary of the Assumption, St. Benedict, St. Pedro Calungsod, Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Paul, St. Joseph, St. Christopher, St. Edward, St. Francis and St. Catherine of Siena.

Mitchell said saints with different ethnicities and backgrounds were chosen by the parish council so that everyone at the parish would have a saint that resonated strongly with them or with their culture.



*A worker from Soos Stained Glass puts the final touches on the new stained-glass windows at*

*St. Mark Church in Monticello March 12. (Denise Adams)*

“We have a diverse congregation. We’ve got a large group of Filipinos, Black Catholics, Hispanic Catholics — we’ve got a lot of different ethnicities in our congregation,” she said.

Parishioners helped lower the costs by donating to dedicate the windows behind the altar to loved ones, donating around \$37,000. Mitchell said the initial quote was around \$150,000, but the cost has been closer to \$85,000 as the designs were not as complex as originally anticipated.

For Mitchell, Catholic churches are synonymous with stained-glass windows. She said she was stunned when she saw the windows behind the altar for the first time.

“I walked in one Thursday to put numbers up on the board for choir for Sunday,” she said. “And my jaw dropped, and I almost started crying. I walked up there, and I found my mom and dad’s window (that Mitchell dedicated to them with the image of St. Francis of Assisi).”

For Mitchell and many other parishioners, the stained-glass windows are a more authentic touch.

“I don’t know anything about stained glass, but the detail to me is just stunning. It is amazing,” she said. “I grew up at St. Joseph’s in Pine Bluff. I mean, I grew up with stained glass windows. So that’s how I always pictured a Catholic church to be. Now, we finally have them.”

Pastor Father Mark Abban, who also leads St. Mary Church in McGehee and Holy Child of Jesus Church in Dumas, said the windows have put the parish in a more prayerful mood.

“If you go to any Catholic Church, you realize we have stained glass ... no distractions. If you are looking at the pictures and the images, they speak volumes. ...”



*Stained glass windows flank the altar at St. Mark Church in Monticello. (Denise Adams)*

But from his place on the altar in front of the congregation, Father Abban could tell that because of the parish's location on a busy road, sometimes the previously see-through windows allowed parishioners' minds — and gazes — to wander during the Mass.

"The church is so close to the road. We have a street. So with the transparent glass, when we are celebrating Mass, I could see parishioners looking outside," he said. "If there is an emergency, you can hear the sirens and all of that. So people get distracted; they like to look through the windows and all kinds of things. ... We need to center our attention — everything — on the celebration of the Mass."

Now, parishioners are already discussing how to incorporate the windows into parish events and liturgical celebrations.

"We're even thinking ahead to Christmas. Can we do lights shining in there instead? We've always put poinsettias around the windows and things like that, but if we could get little spotlights on each stained-glass window, something like that. We're already planning, trying to think what we'll do for Easter, for Christmas, that'll be a little bit different," Mitchell said.

Even just in the weeks since the stained glass installation began, Father Abban has noticed the difference — a difference that he says makes the 17-year wait worthwhile.

"If we consider our spiritual life, then it's worth it," he said. "We have to invest into something like that to help us enjoy our celebration, to be part of it, not only just being present, but participating in the celebration."

“... (Parishioners could) see the importance and benefit of what we were doing. ... It helps them to appreciate what it is all about other than looking at it from just the design of it being beautiful. Not only is it beautiful, but we have spiritual benefits from it, and that is the goal.”