

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon



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STAINED GLASS ENHANCES CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY FAMILY

By Kiplly Lukan Yaworski

One of the most striking features of the new diocesan Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon is the innovative stained glass that adorns the building's white spire.

Those driving by on busy Attridge Drive in northeast Saskatoon can clearly see the solar-cell-equipped glass art of "Lux Gloria", arrayed in



Interior "Glory" window

Artist Sarah Hall stands with the Glory window in progress at Glasmalerie Peters Studio in Paderborn, Germany, where her windows are created.

- Photo courtesy of Sarah Hall Studios

three large sections of colour – red, golden and blue-green. Twelve small golden crosses are visible in the swirling colours of the glass panels.

Canadian artist Sarah Hall says the design was inspired by prairie skies and the glory of light and creation. Visiting Saskatoon recently for the installation of five interior non-solar windows that she also designed for the building, Hall reflected on the impact of the solar stained glass feature.

"I am so happy, because for the first time, we have been able to bring strong colour to the outside of a building. We have not been able to achieve this before," she said, noting that traditional stained glass is often invisible from the outside. Even on a grey day, the colour captures attention, and when the sun hits the spire, the effect is both "dazzling and celestial," she said. "For me, this celebrates the glory of God."

The unique combination of stained glass art and solar cell technology means that the south facing "Lux Gloria" panes collect solar energy to help meet the building's electrical needs.



"Lux Gloria"

Solar Stained Glass art in the spire of the cathedral includes solar cells that are collecting energy from the sun to help provide electricity for the building.

God has created light, and from that gift we are also creating light, and honouring the gifts of creation, noted Hall.

“There is a partnership with the sun, and a partnership with light and it is manifested in such a way that is only possible with our latest technologies,” she said, adding with a smile: “I’ve never seen such a good looking solar panel!”

Inside the building, in the cathedral’s worship space, Hall’s artwork is equally striking, with five stained glass windows circling the sanctuary, drawing eyes upward to the “clerestory” or upper level windows.

Inspired by the Saskatchewan landscape, the sacred scriptures and the story of revelation, the five windows are entitled “Creation,” “Covenant,” “Incarnation,” “Resurrection,” and “Glory.”

Hall’s design process for the five windows began with the “Resurrection” window high over the altar. “I started with the theme ‘light of the resurrection,’ adding a celestial story. If this window is the light of the resurrection, then what do the other windows mean? How can the story unfold here?”

The five windows create a narrative through the story of redemption. “They are part of a story. These are not just windows, they are proclamations,” she said.

At the same time, the themes are also cyclical, says Hall, containing images of life, death and the emergence of new life. “It’s a universal story as well.”

The five themes explored in imagery and colour in the windows span the story of divine revelation – beginning first with “Creation” as recorded in the Book of Genesis, and then moving to “Covenant” with its imagery of the rainbow, the burning bush, and the parting of the Red Sea.



Stained glass windows arrive for cathedral interior

Building manager Jim Nakoneshny (*far left*) and Bishop Don Bolen were on hand to welcome the stained glass components when they arrived at the cathedral in December. Wilhelm Peters from Glasmalerie Peters Studio of Paderborn, Germany (*far right*) was in Saskatoon for the installation of the artwork created by Canadian glass artist Sarah Hall.

“For me, this celebrates the glory of God.”
- Artist Sarah Hall

With the “Covenant” window, Hall introduces the imagery of dozens of small candles, symbolizing human beings, entering into relationship with the divine, reflecting the light of the Creator. “We are there too, like those little candles. They represent us, all of us.”

The “Incarnation” window explores the theme of God coming to dwell among us, enfleshed in the ‘here and now’ of this time and place, said Hall. “Between ‘Covenant’ and the next window ‘Resurrection,’ comes ‘Incarnation,’ the birth of Christ. That has to be the strongest light – it is pivotal,” she said.

“The ‘Incarnation’ window is no longer symbolic and metaphoric in terms of the artistic language,” she added.

The trees that appear in the Incarnation window are taken from photographs of trees adjacent to the cathedral property, and the water is the Saskatchewan River, she described.

“The Incarnation window is our world. So it was important not to have a symbolic tree, I wanted to have a real tree from our world. The previous windows had been symbolically portrayed, then there is an artistic shift to realism in the ‘Incarnation’ window.”

The “Resurrection” window above the altar features imagery of light and revelation, and text in Aramaic, the language of Jesus: words from the Sermon on the Mount, including the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer, as well as the Apostles’ Creed.

The fifth window is entitled “Glory” and it created challenges for Hall, who at first considered the Book of Revelation for inspiration to depict the transformation of eternity. In a second effort to re-design this final window, texts sent by Bishop Don Bolen steered her in a new direction.

Hall turned to the parable of the Kingdom of God being like a mustard seed that grows to be the largest tree, filled with birds of every kind - depicting a tree of life bursting with motion and colour, showing a world of light and beauty transformed and born anew as in a beatific, eternal vision.

“I went back to all of my other windows, and brought elements of trees and water into a metaphorical tree of life,” she described. “That tree of life became the mustard bush ... and all these birds can nest in it. There’s a place for everybody. In Revelations, the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. And so that seemed to me to have a feeling of gathering, a sense of unity, of room for all,” she said. “And the candles are still there. We are there.”

The building committee’s original idea was to delay putting stained glass into the building as the expense was not covered by the initial fund-raising campaigns for constructing and equipping the new cathedral. However, the solar stained glass for the spire could only be installed during the construction process.

Similarly, as interior work progressed, it was also deemed to be more efficient and cost effective to install the five interior stained glass windows now rather than later. The wisdom of designing the artwork as a unified whole was also recognized.



Interior windows span history of divine revelation

With the largest “Glory” window in the background, glass artist Sarah Hall speaks with Wilhelm Peters of Glasmalerei Peters Studio, Paderborn, Germany, (right) who was on hand during the installation of interior stained glass windows at the new Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon. Hall’s artwork is created at the Glasmalerei Peters Studio. During the installation process, one pane of the Resurrection window over the altar shattered, but was replaced shortly after.

As a result, fund-raising continues for the stained glass features – the Saskatchewan Knights of Columbus are assisting with fund-raising for the solar stained-glass, and a campaign for the interior windows has been launched by the Diocese of Saskatoon Catholic Foundation.

This summer, the bishop met with the clergy and lay leadership of our diocese and there was considerable support for completion and installation of all the stained glass windows. Many parishes have already committed to the windows and the section entitled “*Glory*” -- which features an image of the tree of life -- will be where all parish contributions are directed.

“This is an historic opportunity to participate in the installation of these spectacular stained glass windows, which are so integral to the beauty of the cathedral sanctuary,” says Don Gorsalitz, director of the Catholic Foundation. “The fund we are establishing will permit people to donate in the name of a family, or to honour individuals, as a gift or as a memorial.”

All donations to the new fund both now and in the future will be recognized in a digital display that will eventually be set up in the welcoming area of the new building.

In their stunning beauty, the windows are a witness to the world, and are a way of evangelizing to our culture in a gentle and profound way, says Bishop Don Bolen.

“Their beauty is going to attract people in our community – even people who are not Catholic, or even Christian,” says Bolen, who is collaborating with artist Sarah Hall on a book about the new cathedral’s stained glass windows.

“Just as the solar panel windows have attracted an extraordinary amount of interest, these interior windows too – which are an entry point to say something about our faith will also capture people's attention and draw them into discussion.”

The bishop added that he was delighted to be able to join with some family members in contributing a pane of glass from the Creation window as a way to honour the memory of his own parents Joseph and Rose Bolen.

“Our parents were the greatest influence on our lives. The church was immensely important to them, built into the fabric of our family life. Furthermore, Sarah Hall’s windows resound with the beauty of the created world, and specifically with the beauty of our prairie skies; this was the world, the land and sky that my parents loved, and that we love. It is wonderful for us to be able to associate the love and faithfulness of our parents with the magnificent beauty of these windows,” said Bolen.



Interior windows span history of divine revelation

Bishop Don Bolen meets with artist Sarah Hall to discuss themes of the five interior stained glass windows circling the worship space: “Creation,” “Covenant,” “Incarnation,” “Resurrection,” and “Glory.”