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A DIV. OF
STOLZ DESIGN

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New Hope for Churches Destroyed by Fire

Artist designs windows for Temple Beth El and churches in need

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By Bridget Mendoza

SOQUEL - Artist Maria Stolz has spent the last 13 years honing her art of creating magnificent stained glass, and the last few years spreading her liturgical masterpieces among churches in need across the United States.

But the most recent accomplishment of this Soquel artist was for her home congregation. On Friday night, windows depicting the 12 Tribes of Israel were formally dedicated at Temple Beth El in Aptos. Each window, which was sponsored by a family within the temple's community, delved into the roots of Judaism by telling the story of the lineage of Jacob.

"What makes this project so exciting for us is that normally tribes are depicted by simple images," said Stolz, who spent six months researching and designing the windows before the project was approved by the temple's board. Construction took another six months from start to finish.

"I adopted a neo-classical interpretation," said Stolz of how she combined all of the elements of the tribes, along with integrating traditional Jewish design concepts. Stolz used Biblical heroes such as Samson, Miriam, Moses, and King David to tell the story of the tribes through her stained glass images.

Stolz gave a talk Friday night on each window. Since Jewish services are held in the evenings, the windows were backlit from the outside giving the windows a "mystical effect," according to Stolz.

"It was not only a labor of love, but a real foraging into the past of Judaism," said Stolz.

And Stolz's labor of love has not stopped at the Temple. Stolz became horrified at the number of churches that had been burned by arson due to religious and racial prejudice across the United States. With the help of her rabbi, Stolz wrote a letter to the National Council of Churches in Washington, D.C., offering her services as a window artist to help in the rebuilding effort.

"I was moved to help." said Stolz, who was "appalled" by the church burnings. "It's a kind of plague that is attacking our



nation."

The response was almost immediate. Stolz flew to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where four churches were in immediate need of help.

Her latest project was in Seattle Washington, where the New Hope Baptist Church had been totally destroyed. A new, bigger church was resurrected. Stolz created 21 panels of stained glass for the church depicting African-American and international heroes. The church even sent a letter to Bishop Desmond Tutu about the project, and he sent a hand-written letter back with a check for \$500.

The Baptist church was dedicated last month, but Stolz said it almost didn't happen. When the church was near completion, arsonists hit the building again, this time causing only minor damage but creating a lot of fear.

"I think it's important to do," said Stolz of her work on the churches. "It's like a calling."

Stolz volunteers to help only those churches with no insurance to cover fire damage, and charges on the cost of materials and shipping costs.