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Artist designs windows for Temple Beth El and churches in need.

**New Hope
 for Churches Destroyed by Fire**

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 By: Shawn Waggoner

In fires motivated by racial hatred, 42 churches have been burned since Christmas 1998.

"The most recent burning we know about took place March 12, 1999 in North Carolina," says Betsey Miller, director of the Church Rebuilding Project for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Washington, D.C.

Although church burnings are not a new phenomenon, this recent epidemic came to media attention in early 1996. The National Council on Churches is currently working in 33 states, including Indiana and Texas which were hardest hit in the last year and a half.

Says Miller, "Many burnings which made headlines took place in the deep South - South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas. But arson is an equal opportunity crime; it is not limited to the South."

The National Council on Churches, an outgrowth of the World Council on Churches, is a 50-year-old ecumenical organization of Protestant denominations that have joined forces. It serves as a clearinghouse of data and provides cash assistance, technical information and moral support for the rebuilding effort.

The National Council on Churches also matches donations and volunteers with churches in need. Three and a half years ago Maria Stolz of Stolz Design, Soquel, California, wrote offering her time and services to repair or restore stained glass destroyed by fire.

Stolz received an immediate response from Miller, who put her in touch with Rev. Robert L. Jeffrey, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Seattle. New Hope's rebuild was already underway. The glass artist began corresponding with Rev. Jeffrey and eventually visited the site.

Says Stolz, "I was moved beyond words when I found out churches were still being burned. I'm a child of the '60s, someone who marched during the Civil Rights Movement. I was appalled that something of this nature was occurring 30 years later. I needed to take action and thought I could give back



through my art."

New Hope Missionary Baptist Church was founded in 1946. Its mission was and is to improve the quality of life of African Americans in this central area of Seattle. Rev. Jeffrey came to New Hope in 1986 with the goal of fostering a more comprehensive social and community ministry. The church began to focus on promoting the economic advancement of its congregation by creating classes for business development and establishing The African American Community Endowment Fund, which provides loans for small community businesses. New Hope remains dedicated to protecting the civil rights of all underprivileged and minority groups. Through these efforts Rev. Jeffrey also organized the African American/ Jewish Coalition for Justice.

On May 17, 1994, in a blaze of racial intolerance, New Hope was burned to the ground. The church was under construction in October 1998 when arson reared its evil head again, this time causing extensive damage to the new site. Without a house of worship, services were held in a variety of places including neighboring churches, the YMCA Gym - even in a tent.

"Through these trying times, New Hope remains committed to the struggle for religious tolerance and a sense of sanity when it seems as though people have begun to use religion to persecute rather than liberate. That can't happen," says Rev. Jeffrey. "Those of us who understand that have to persevere in spite of any interference or trouble we encounter."

He continues, "The windows Maria Stolz donated to New Hope call us to the spirit of a people who have been resilient. They serve as a reminder to the community of the tradition and the foundation on which we stand as citizens who have come from a history of slavery and struggle"

The second burning left New Hope's congregation understandably frustrated and depressed. But the tides turned when the church received a hand-written thank-you note with a check for \$500 to put towards the rebuild from Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Lesotho, South African Anglican church and 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Tutu is the architect of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission through which he pursues his goal of a free, non-racial South Africa and "restorative" justice. He, along with other surviving African American heroes and/or family members, had been informed that his stained glass portrait would eventually adorn the church.

With a contest for the children of the congregation, Stolz's design process began in earnest. The kids were asked to write an extensive report on an African American hero, and the best were chosen from these entries. The names of 12 international heroes were suggested, along with eight liturgical themes. Additionally, a six-foot diameter panel depicting a dove of peace was requested.

"When I received the names and list of liturgical themes plus the idea of a dove, I began the task of tying these concepts together," says Stolz.

Cohesion was paramount, and the 21 panels were limited to a two-foot-square space, a serious concern for Stolz. A further restriction was the fact that they would be installed two stories off the ground. Therefore, detail from any given distance would

be lost. Simplicity was key.

Stolz designed the windows to depict a predominate face, enhanced by elements in the background - clues to the person's identity. For example, behind Harriet Tubman's portrait is a geographical map of the free states to which slaves escaped via The Underground Railroad.

The faces and liturgical themes were rendered in cathedral glasses, used for their clear translucency. On the 6-foot panel, Stolz created a different feeling with opalescent glass, one which ultimately unified the many images. This central window is reminiscent of Tiffany - heaven-like, with a path to the kingdom of God strewn with flowers, each representing one of the heroes. The dove of peace flies overhead.

"On the right or left lapel of each hero," explains Stolz, "I consigned to each person a genus flower in ink or lead line, which comes to full color on the main circle panel. The overall design concept came to me in this fashion: each hero, in his or her own way, showed the path to peace, which leads to the kingdom of God."

Research for the portraits required Stolz to scour history books in search of photos or line drawings of each hero. She copied the image, using lead lines to break up the face. For features and details - pupils, lips, eyebrows - she used a new painting system called Unique Colors. These water-soluble paints come in a wide array of colors and require no mixing.

"I like to do a minimum of painting and firing if possible," says Stolz. "I think painting takes away from the color of the glass. The challenge of the glass artist is to find a glass that will provide a three-dimensional field."

The heroes were organized chronologically, earliest deceased towards the front of the sanctuary (or nearer to God), and the liturgical themes as they chronologically appear in the Bible. Balancing gender on either side of the sanctuary was also a consideration for Stolz.

New Hope's dedication took place February 14. In attendance were noted author (Race Matters) and Harvard professor Cornell West as well as Joan Brown Campbell, the general secretary from the National Council on Churches, and many of the 1,000 members of the congregation.

Says Rev. Jeffrey, "We were amazed at Maria's generosity. She came and spent time with the members and got to know us before she started working on the windows. It was important for us when we rebuilt the church to put symbols and icons that would call people to the spirit of the struggle for equality, freedom and justice. The windows represent what our church stands for. They help identify the ministry of New Hope."

Adds Miller, "Maria's work was a true gift to a church destroyed by racial hatred."

Other stained glass artists around the country are donating work to the rebuild effort. Miller says one Arizona stained glass artist received a grant from the state arts council to create windows for two churches - one in Tucson and one in Georgia. Another church in Oklahoma was assisted by a volunteer group who collected donations to pay for stained glass windows.

There are many ways to help in the rebuild project.

If you are interested in donating time, materials, or supplies to

help rebuild churches and/or stained glass windows destroyed or damaged by fire, contact Betsey Miller at the National Council on Churches, Church Rebuilding Project, Room 668, 475 Riverside Dr., Washington D.C. 10115; (212) 870-2251. A free information packet is available on the many ways you can make a difference in rebuild efforts.

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