

4th & Main Designs

By: Scott A. Flanagan

It is always a blessing to come home and be able to worship at Bethlehem. I see so many familiar faces that I grew up knowing; however I also see many new faces in the congregation as well. So for those of you who are wondering who I am and what my connection to Bethlehem is, I am Scott Flanagan, my parents are Gary and Jean Flanagan. I was baptized and confirmed here at Bethlehem and feel blessed by the many close friends and great memories I have of growing up here. I currently live near Omaha, in Fremont Nebraska, which is why you don't see me very often, but occasionally will see me sitting in the choir around the holidays. My Grandparents were Marvin and Wilma Ropte whom the pavilion is named after. The banner that had been hanging up front until today, was made by my Grandma, who was an active quilter here for many years. She made it celebration of the building of the current Sanctuary 22 years ago; and actually as I was working on getting ready for today I came across grandma's hand drawn and hand colored note from when she made that original banner.

Last August I received an e-mail from Pr. Mark that the Worship and Music committee had been discussing that maybe it was time for a new set of Green Paraments and would I be interested in being commissioned to make them? I e-mailed him back that "I was honored to be asked and that I needed to think about it; but let's talk when I am back in January." Going into church that Sunday in January after months of consideration, I had decided that I was going to say again "I am honored to be asked but I don't feel I have time to take on that big of a project". As I was sitting up front with the choir that morning, at some point during Pr. Mark's sermon, my mind wandered off (and YES I did admit this to him) and I was looking at the east bank of stained glass windows. It was at that point that the Holy Spirit interceded and within the span of a few moments I saw the entire project come together in my mind; at which point all I could say was "Well God, you win. I guess I am making a set of paraments".

After church I walked around and inspected all the stained glass windows and chose to use the three that I originally looked at: the Three Crosses, the Lamb, and the Bread and Wine. However I also wanted to find a way to incorporate the Bethlehem Logo in the set as well. Since the Lamb had a shepherd's crook and so does Bethlehem's logo, I decided to replace the Lamb with a Manger from the logo. It wasn't till just recently, while I had the complete set hanging in my apartment, that I realized the Holy Spirit had once again been at work in how the three large banners are tied together. On the right you have the Bread and Wine but without the Three Crosses on the left the Bread and Wine from the last supper lose their meaning. Then in the center you have the Manger and without the Manger in Bethlehem you don't have the Cross or Bread and Wine.

Once the windows had been selected I took a large picture of the full window and then a close up of the scene depicted in the lower third of each window. I gave my dad the pictures and told him how big I needed them blown up, to make the different banners, and he drafted full size images on the computer for me. Once I was back in Nebraska, I printed off and taped together the full size drafted images. I then started the process of reverse engineering the math so I would know how big each piece of fabric should be, as well as making sure that the three large banners came out the same size in the end.

After getting the math and very rough yardage requirements figured out, it was time to decide on what type of fabric to use. After much research, discussions with quilting friends and mentors, and debating I decided to use Batik fabric which is hand dyed and gives the closest representation of stained glass.

It was now time to go pick out and buy fabric. My dear friend and second mom Lu Ann Ehmke, who is here with her husband Gary on vacation with me, and I went and spent about half a day going to different quilt shops picking out the 45 fabrics used or approximately 32 yards of total fabric.

Then it was time to let the creative process begin. So as to not bore you with the whole sewing process, I did figure some stats for you (some of which I am glad I didn't know till this last week):

- about 250 hrs went into the design and sewing of the complete set
- there is approximately 4500" of Black leading ranging from 1/4" to 1/2" finished.
- the Stole, Pulpit Banner, and Altar Banners each have over 115 pieces
- the Large Banners each have over 400 pieces each
- and over 6000" of thread were used in the construction and quilting of the set.

As I was making and attaching the 1300" of binding to finish the edges, the Holy Spirit visited for a third time. I knew I was going to be close on having enough to go around all the pieces and may not even have enough. Then I had some "oops" moments, but the Holy Spirit was watching and when it came to the end of the final banner I had two pieces of binding left totaling 5".

To conclude I would like to quote a favorite verse from Hymn 710 "Let Streams of Living Justice" in the ELW that paints a wonderful picture of how God is woven and sewn into lives, much like the many pieces of fabric and thread that are used to make a quilt. The verse reads: "Weave our varied gifts together; knit our lives as they are spun; on your loom of time enroll us till our thread of life is run. O great weaver of our fabric, bind your church and world in one; dye our texture with your radiance, light our colors with your sun." Amen.