

# FCBUZZ

Arts & Culture of Fairfield County

## Through the glass brightly

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This will be a particularly special yuletide at St. John's Episcopal Church in Stamford. That's because the Tiffany Studios-designed "Transfiguration of Christ" stained-glass windows were restored and reinstalled above the altar, while the Middle Building's structure was renovated, just in time for the Dec. 5 Christmas show.

"As the most visible part of the St. John's Rising building project, the beautiful Tiffany stained-glass window of the Transfiguration reminds us that this project is not only about repairing aging buildings but more importantly, about letting our hearts, our lives and our buildings be transformed and transfigured by Christ's light and love," says the Rev. Dr. James Wheeler, rector of St. John's since January 2008.

While love may be eternal, buildings aren't. In October of last year, engineers determined that the Middle Building – an 1867 stone and timber structure that is the oldest building on the three-acre site – was sinking and that its bell-tower steeple was a safety risk. The renovated and expanded building – achieved with the help of a \$2.9 million loan from First County Bank and a major capital campaign – now includes space for classrooms, performing arts, celebrations and general community outreach.

First County "provided the flexibility we needed," says Ann H. Barnett, a member of St. John's finance committee.

The restoration of the stained-glass windows was easier, she says. Rohlf's Stained and Leaded Glass Studio in Mount Vernon, N.Y., one of the foremost makers and restorers of stained glass in the country, handled the work on the windows, which depict Jesus in transfigured splendor on a mountaintop, surrounded by awestruck disciples Peter, James and John.

The three-piece window was donated to St. John's by Josephine Leeds in memory of her parents, John and Eliza Leeds and installed in December 1901. It was produced

by Tiffany Studios in New York from a design by Frederick Wilson.

There are lots of Tiffany Studios windows in the metro area and even quite a few designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany himself, including windows at Trinity Episcopal Church in Ossining and the Congregational churches in Briarcliff Manor and Haverstraw.

Certainly, Tiffany was no stranger to this region. He spent a part of his youth in Tiffany Park in Irvington, sailing the Hudson with his pal, mentor and Dobbs Ferry neighbor, Samuel B. Colman, an important member of the second generation of Hudson River School painters.

Tiffany himself wanted to be a painter, something Dad – the jeweler and silversmith Charles Louis Tiffany – wasn't keen on. So he sent junior off to several military schools, including Eagleswood Military Academy in Perth Amboy, N.J., where one of his teachers was, yes, a painter – George Inness, perhaps the most idiosyncratic members of the Hudson River School.

You can't, it seems, escape destiny. Tiffany never became an artist like Inness or Colman. But he did pioneer the use of Favrite glass – blown glass shaped into waves while still molten and embedded

with jewels, mosaics and bits of pottery.

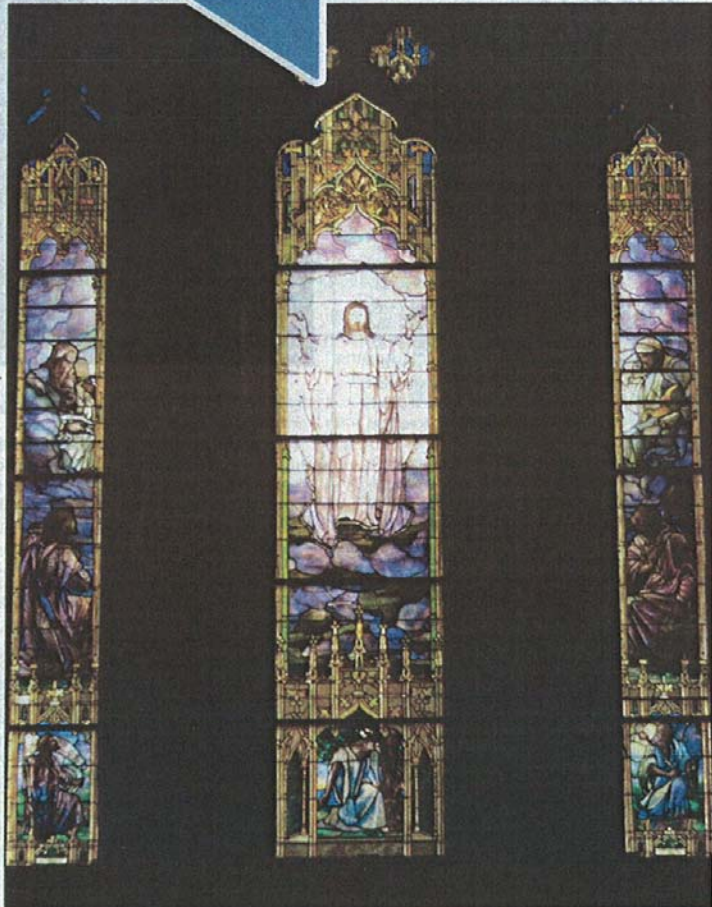
It was this technique that gave Tiffany windows and objects their unmistakable jewel-toned palette and rich textures.

So in a way, Tiffany did become a painter. And Rector Wheeler is glad he did.

"For worshippers at St. John's to look up into this stunning image of Christ's glory is a wonderful and constant reminder of who

we worship. His glory is also an invitation to let his love do its transfiguring work in us."

St. John's Annual Christmas Show is at 4 and 6 p.m. Dec. 5. Admission is free with a ticket and a gift of canned or dried goods or a toy for St. Luke's Lifeworks. St. John's is at 628 Main St. in Stamford. 348-2619, ext. 10, stjohns-stamford.org.



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