

St. John's restoration and building project almost complete

STAMFORD, CT - The revitalization of historic St. John's Episcopal Church in downtown Stamford is almost complete. The planned installation of the Tiffany designed Transfiguration of Christ stained glass windows above the altar and completion of the Middle Building's extensive structural renovation will mark the end of a 60-year-old goal. With the help of a \$2.9 million loan from First County Bank and a major capital-raising campaign, "St. John's Rising," as the project has become known, will be complete.

"This all came to a head last October when engineers conducted a structural survey of the Middle Building. They determined the building was sinking and the bell tower steeple was a safety risk that needed to be permanently stabilized," said Alison Chaltas, parishioner and senior warden who headed up this project for St. John's. The Middle Building, a stone and timber structure built in 1867, is the oldest building on the three-acre site that was donated to the church in 1742. Before construction began, it was used for classrooms. When it reopens in early December for the annual St. John's Christmas Show, the Middle Building will be expanded to include classrooms, performing arts, celebrations and general community outreach.

"The restoration of our stained glass windows throughout the sanctuary was the easier part of the overall project: Something we could afford using operating funds," said Ann H. Barnett, a member of St. John's finance committee. "But when we found out about the structural issues with the Middle Building, we knew we had to seek additional financing. And that's when we started talking with community banks in the area."

After interviewing a number of banks, First County was chosen because it provided "a very attractive, fixed rate of interest," said Barnett. "It provided the flexibility we needed. It gave the church a one year line of credit against construction expenses, which was really unusual. The construction disbursements and loan payments matched up perfectly with our spending schedule."

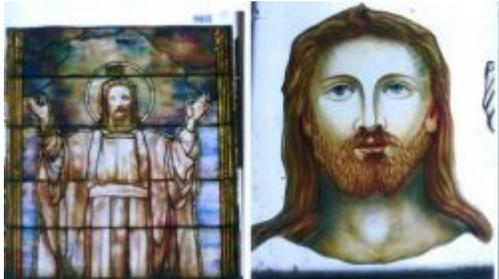
"We were looking to form a long-term relationship with St. John's," said Gene Schreiner, vice president business banking at First County Bank. "We customized the construction loan to convert to a 15-year permanent mortgage loan with no penalties for prepayment. The client was so impressed with our creative funding proposal we now handle all of its operating accounts."

"We chose First County because it proposed a single structure with a fixed rate – exactly what we were looking for. Gene (Schreiner), our advocate at First County, and his senior management came up with something we didn't think was available to us. They solved this dilemma and most importantly saved us a heck of a lot of money," explained Barnett.

“The timing of the window installation and completion of the Middle Building is perfect as we prepare for the return of our annual St. John’s Christmas Show, our parishes musical gift to the entire Stamford community,” added Chaltas. Rohlf’s Stained and Leaded Glass Studio, based in Mount Vernon, N.Y., is handling the glass work and plans to complete the installation of the Transfiguration of Christ windows by Nov. 10. And All Phase Construction is on schedule to complete the final touches to the interior in time for St. John’s Christmas Show and Stamford Model Railroad exhibit on Dec. 5.

“As the most visible part of 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,” said Reverend Dr. James Wheeler, rector of St. John’s Church since January 2008.

Transfiguration of Christ Stained Glass Windows



This three-piece window, donated to St. John’s by Josephine Leeds in memory of her parents, John and Eliza Leeds, was installed in December 1901. The window was produced by Tiffany Studios in New York from a design by Frederick Wilson, one of Tiffany’s most well-known artists.

“Christ Jesus transfigured in splendor. For Peter, James and John it was a glimpse into the holy mystery they as yet only dimly comprehended. Only after Jesus was glorified through his death and resurrection and then ascended to be with the Father did the disciples begin to comprehend the fullness of his glory,” said Father Wheeler in explaining the meaning behind the renovated window.

“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,” concluded Father Wheeler. “His glory is also an invitation to let his love do its transfiguring work in us.”

“We are extremely fortunate to have such a treasure for many reasons: Tiffany stained glass windows are the gold standard for church windows because of their design, use of Favrile glass, their unique construction and elegant appearance,” explained Garry Higgins, a parishioner and volunteer member of the building committee.

By using multi-layers of laminated Favrile glass, Louis Tiffany created the colors and tones that he demanded. Only the flesh colors were painted. Tiffany never allowed any leftover glass from his windows to be used in other windows or products. Therefore, only St. John’s has the glass for this window.

St. John’s Episcopal Church, founded in 1742, is a multicultural parish of varied ages,

lifestyles and socioeconomic backgrounds. The current Gothic Revival-style sanctuary, designed by William A. Potter and built between 1890-1893, has corporate headquarters on one side and low-income housing on the other. Its 6800-pipe organ, rebuilt in 1990 by Bruce Shultz, is one of the largest pipe organs in New England.

First County Bank, headquartered in Stamford, Conn., is an independent mutual community bank with 15 branches in Stamford, Greenwich, Darien, New Canaan, Norwalk and Westport offering deposit products, mortgages, trust and investment services, business banking services and online banking. First County Bank has assets in excess of \$1.3 billion. For additional information, please visit www.firstcountybank.com.

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