



Magic of Glass

Documentation of
Stained Glass Windows
St. Agnes Church

Vermillion, South Dakota

*Stained Glass Documentation of
St Agnes Church
Washington Street Arts Center*

202 Washington Street
Vermillion, South Dakota

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Clay County Historic Preservation Commission

Forward



The Clay County Historic Preservation Commission is organized under the Clay County Commission and is funded primarily through the South Dakota State Historical Society and the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service.

Preparation of the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission's project has been funded with the assistance of a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service. The South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office administers these federal funds as part of South Dakota's Certified Local Government Program.

The South Dakota State Historical Society, first organized as the Old Settlers Association of Dakota Territory in 1862, established its official relationship with state government in 1901 through the former Department of History. Originally housed in the state capitol, the Society moved in 1932 to the newly completed Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Building across the street. In 1989 South Dakota celebrated its centennial and to mark the anniversary and showcase the state's history, the Cultural Heritage Center was built as the new headquarters for the Society. Through the years, state government reorganizations have shaped and reshaped the Society into the vigorous organization of today. An office within the Department of Tourism and Economic Development, the Society manages five programs— archaeology, archives, historic preservation, museum, and research and publishing. All the programs are located at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, with the exception of the State Archaeological Research Center, which is located in Rapid City and the Archival Microfilm Unit at the Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield.

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Vermillion Area Arts Council

The Vermillion Area Arts Council is a non-profit organization that encourages, assists, and coordinates activities related to the arts and humanities in the Vermillion area in order to involve the arts and humanities pervasively in the life of the community.

The main goals are to play a central role in the development of the arts in the Vermillion area and make art a part of all segments of the community, encouraging both participation and appreciation.

The Vermillion Area Arts Council (VAAC) incorporated in 1974 as a community grassroots organization as one of the first local arts councils when the South Dakota state arts council was formed as an arm of the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1977 the VAAC became a non-profit organization. For many years the VAAC held its classes and programs in buildings throughout the community and a major portion of the energy and funds were directed toward the production of the summer musical. The Wizard of Oz , Peter Pan, and the Sound of Music were produced through cooperation with USD Theatre Dept. and community residents of all ages.

After a great deal of thought and investigation the VAAC board in 1990 purchased its present home, the former St. Agnes Catholic Church at 202 S. Washington Street, and it became the Washington Street Arts Center. Through the years, community residents volunteered hours of labor to restore and repair the building. In 1995 the WSAC was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The VAAC hosts art exhibits, children's and adult's art classes, music concerts, dance performances, literary readings, dramatic events, and film showings. The group also fosters arts education and art appreciation in area schools. The organization's signature events, such as the "Chili Blues" chili competition and the St. Patrick's Day celebration, celebrate food and music and take place at the Washington Street Arts Center.

The VAAC plays dual roles in the community as an arts council and caretaker of a 100-year-old building. Over the years thousands of volunteers have made our programming possible and helped with extensive renovation of the arts center. Past and current funding sources include annual memberships, the

City of Vermillion, the United Way of Vermillion, the Vermillion Area Community Foundation, the South Dakota Arts Council/NEA, Foundation and private donors.

There are plenty of opportunities to be a part of the Vermillion Area Arts Council – through membership, volunteering, and larger gifts. This is your arts council and community arts center – your involvement is essential – because everyone benefits when local arts flourish!

Vermillion Area Arts Council

PO Box 484

Vermillion, South Dakota 57069

The Old St Agnes Catholic Church

A Brief History

The former St. Agnes Catholic Church, and since 1991 the Washington Arts Center owned and operated by the Vermillion Area Arts Council, is an excellent example of late Gothic Revival architecture. The building was designed by Anton Dohmen and built in 1907.

Anton Dohmen was born in Speyer, Germany in 1861 and studied architecture. In 1892, at the age of 31 he came to the United States and settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dohmen owned his own business and became known for church construction in Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota early in the 20th century. He designed 19 churches in the Midwest from 1900-1922. The churches he designed include six large Catholic Churches in South Dakota, North Dakota, Wisconsin and one in Kansas and numerous small churches. Dohmen died in 1950 at 90 years of age.

The building construction was commissioned to the August Goetz Construction Company from Yankton, South Dakota. The cornerstone was laid in August of 1906, and the church was completed in September, 1907.

The St. Agnes Church building is the only remaining example in South Dakota of Dohmen's style of small Gothic churches. Other church styles in South Dakota designed by Dohmen include: St. Patrick Catholic Church in Wakonda built in 1904, an example of a small sized church with a prominent steeple; St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Hoven built in 1921, an example of a large cathedral church; and St. Theresa Catholic Church built in 1904 which was in Beresford and no longer exists.

The St. Agnes Church is elevated a half story above street level, facing east with a gabled brick end wall that is capped by a pressed metal parapet. The floor plan of the building (page 9) is cruciform and has a prominent three-story bell tower. The church is built of brown-red pressed brick with a molded concrete belt course at floor level.

The interior of the church consists of plastered rib vaulting and high molded baseboard running along the walls of the sanctuary and foyer. Throughout the main floor there are beautiful stained glass windows.

On the second floor is the choir loft ,at the back of which is a magnificent three-paneled stained glass window facing east. Several large, medium sized and small stained and painted glass windows throughout the church were gifts of parish members when the church was erected. The bottoms of most windows contain dedications to specific individuals. Information about these people will be provided as each window is described.

The first Catholic Church in Clay County and the Dakota Territories was built in Fairview Township in 1860 and consisted of a log cabin on 10 acres of land donated for a church site and cemetery by August Bruyer in 1859. By 1879 a new wood frame church was constructed south of the original log church. An historical marker located at the Fairview Cemetery, now some three miles east of Vermillion on Highway 50, marks the location of the "Bruyer Church," which served both the Vermillion and Fairview parishes.

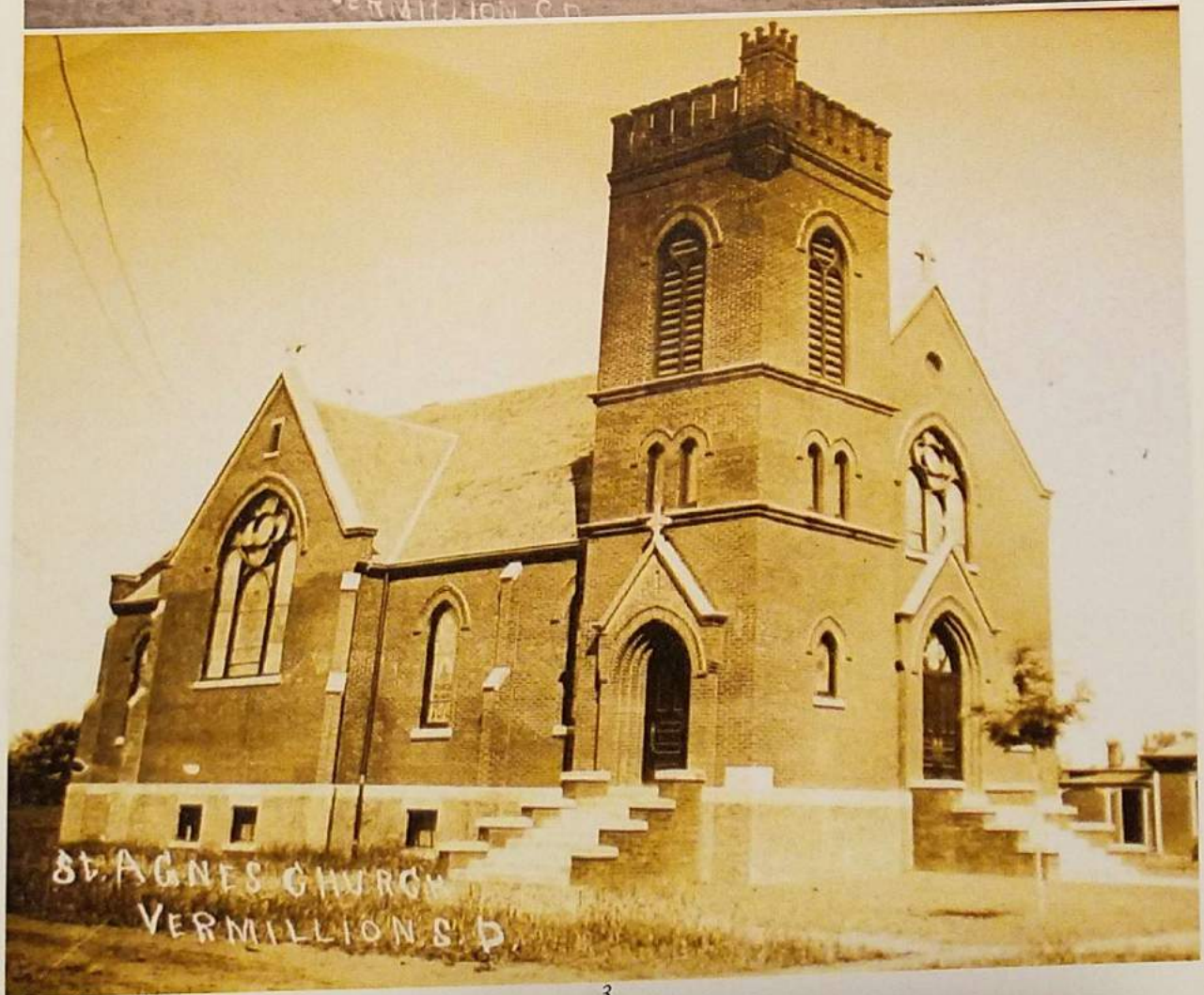
In 1884, Cyrus Snyder donated land in Vermillion to build a new church which was completed on June 29, 1885. This first Catholic church in the town of Vermillion was named St. Agnes but was also known as the Fairview Church. On June 19, 1889 the building was destroyed by a tornado and a new structure was built in 1890 from materials salvaged from that church. As the parish grew, discussion early in 1900 of building a larger structure were prompted by Father Bunning. The Ladies' Sewing Circle of St. Agnes Church was started at that time to collect funds for the construction of the new church. Following the leadership of Father Bunning and Father Feeney and for a short period Father Dooley. Father Thomas L. Flood arrived in 1902 and remained as priest for the next 48 years.

With the destruction of the Fairview Church, the need for a new church became imperative. The building committee for the new church consisted of J. Ringley as treasurer and fund raiser and Messers. Morrison, Bruyer, Lambert, Lyons, and Lennon. J. Ringley donated \$6,000 toward the project. Mr. Tarsany and Dan Sullivan each donated \$500. Several windows in the St. Agnes Church bear their names or those of their family members.

In August 1906 the cornerstone to the new St. Agnes Church was in place and the building was completed by September 21, 1907. The Church was formally dedicated on October 2, 1907. The several Diocese dignitaries present included Bishop O'Gorman.



ST. AGNES CHURCH NOV. 10 1906
VERMILLION, C.D.



ST. AGNES CHURCH
VERMILLION, S.D.

The rectory north of the church was built in 1919. Pictures of the church up to 1950 show beautifully painted murals in the sanctuary. In 1952 the building was renovated and redecorated.

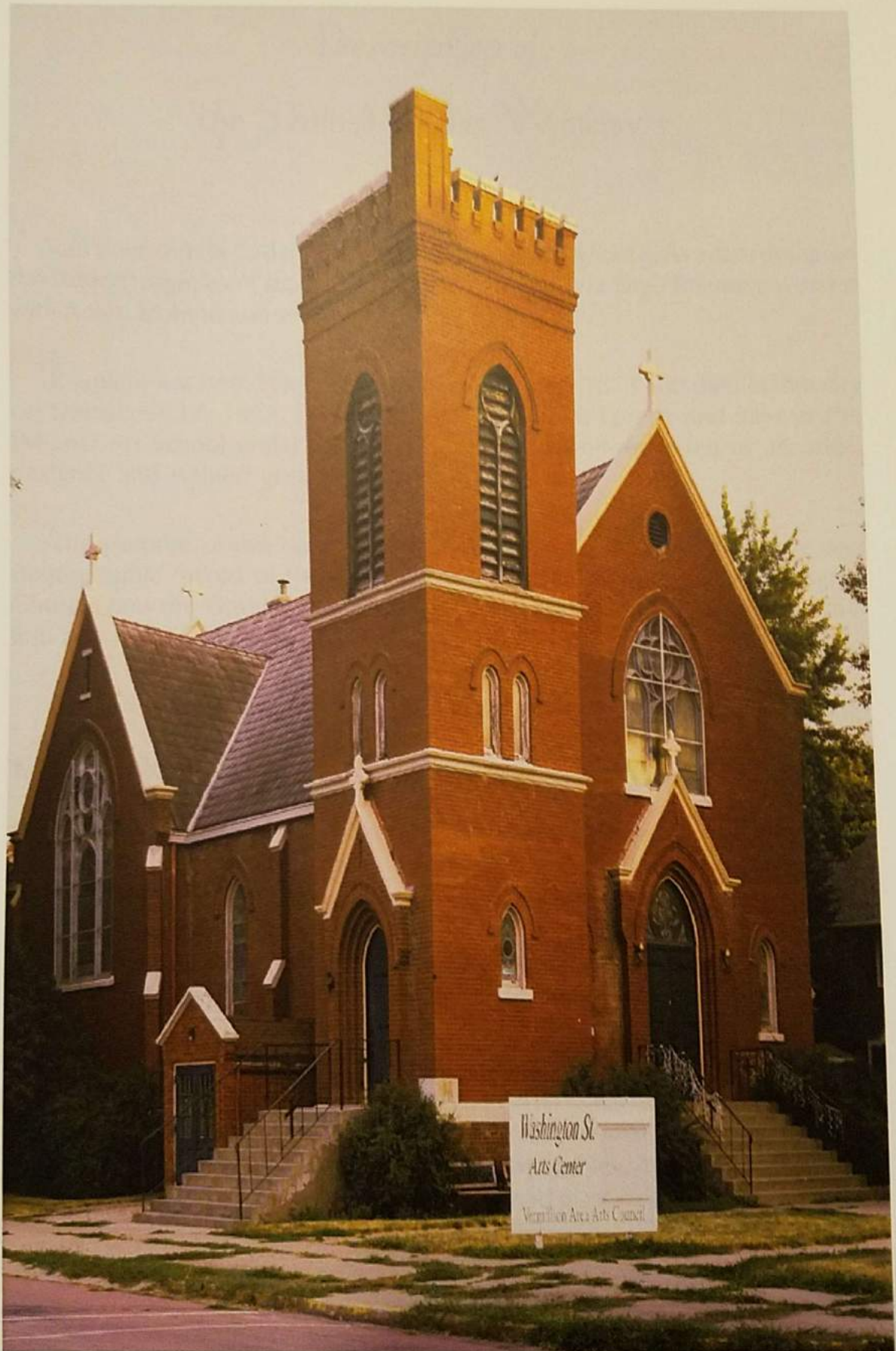
In the early 1960's a Catholic School was built in southeast Vermillion. By the spring of 1974 the St. Agnes Catholic Church became too small for the 420 families that attended the Church. In addition, the building required extensive renovations, both inside and out. Moreover, the parish had a considerable debt.

As such, the church and lots west of the church were sold to the Dakota District of the Church of the Nazarene for \$24,000. The rectory was sold for \$29,500. That, with the sale of separate lots, liquidated the parish debt.

In 1990 the nonprofit organization the Vermillion Area Arts Council, Inc. (VAAC), purchased the building and lands for \$7,000. The mortgage was paid off on April 1, 1997. In 1995 the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The VAAC and thousands of volunteers have accomplished extensive renovation on the building, which had been vacant for a number of years after the Church of the Nazarene left the building.

Renovation projects included cleaning and refurbishing the kitchen and restrooms, replacing the furnace, installing new wiring, cleaning, re-plastering and painting the entire interior of the building, laying new carpet, cleaning and sealing the bell tower, sealing the stained glass windows, building classrooms in the basement and repointing a portion of the building. Funding for these projects has come from the City of Vermillion, the Clay County Commission, Civic Council of Vermillion, United Way of Vermillion, the Vermillion Area Community Foundation and grants from the Deadwood Fund and the Sheldon F. Reese Foundation as well as private donations. Renovation of the building is a continuing process.

Since the extensive renovation projects the building has been used for many community events, including art exhibits, children's art workshops, plays, an acoustic coffee shop, and signature events for the VAAC such as Chili Blues and St. Patrick's Day. In the future this building will continue to be used as both a community building and a historical site.



Description of *the Stained Glass Windows*

Karl Reimann (or Carl Reimann), an exceptionally gifted glass artist, designed the sixteen magnificent stained glass windows in the building. Reimann worked with Anton Dohmen on several projects.

Reimann was born in Milwaukee on February 13, 1873 and died in that city on December 17, 1937. He was a pupil of Richard Lorenz and later at the Weimar Art School under Max Thedy. He was well-respected as an artist, designer and stained glass craftsman.

The purpose of this book is to document and to provide an historic and photographic record of the magnificent stained glass windows in St. Agnes Church, now the Washington Street Arts Center, as part of the history of Vermillion and South Dakota.

There are several types of glass used in the windows' production including:

1. Single Color glass, sometimes called cathedral glass or metal glass;
2. Opalescent glass, a semi-opaque glass which may be of one color or a mixture of two or more colors, including streaks and swirls. At the time the windows were constructed, this was a relatively new type of glass; and
3. Painted glass, which allowed great detail to be drawn onto the glass and was used extensively on windows in the St. Agnes Church.

The St. Agnes stained glass windows were constructed in Milwaukee. At that time the city boasted 50 or more firms that constructed stained glass windows, including the Milwaukee Mirror and Art Glass Works. Stained glass from Milwaukee firms competed with firms like Tiffany in New York. During the early 1900's, around the nation, the quality of stained glass in churches peaked.

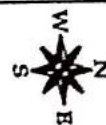
To locate the windows in the church, a floor plan of the building (developed by Ciavarella Designs, Inc., Mitchell, South Dakota and owned by the VAAC) is used, with their permission. Windows are located on the main floor of the building within the sanctuary and apse. Additional windows are also located in the office, closet, foyer, on the staircase to the choir loft and on the east wall of the choir loft.

Each window is described according to its location in the building, who dedicated the window or to whom the window was dedicated, and important artistic and symbolic characteristics of each window.

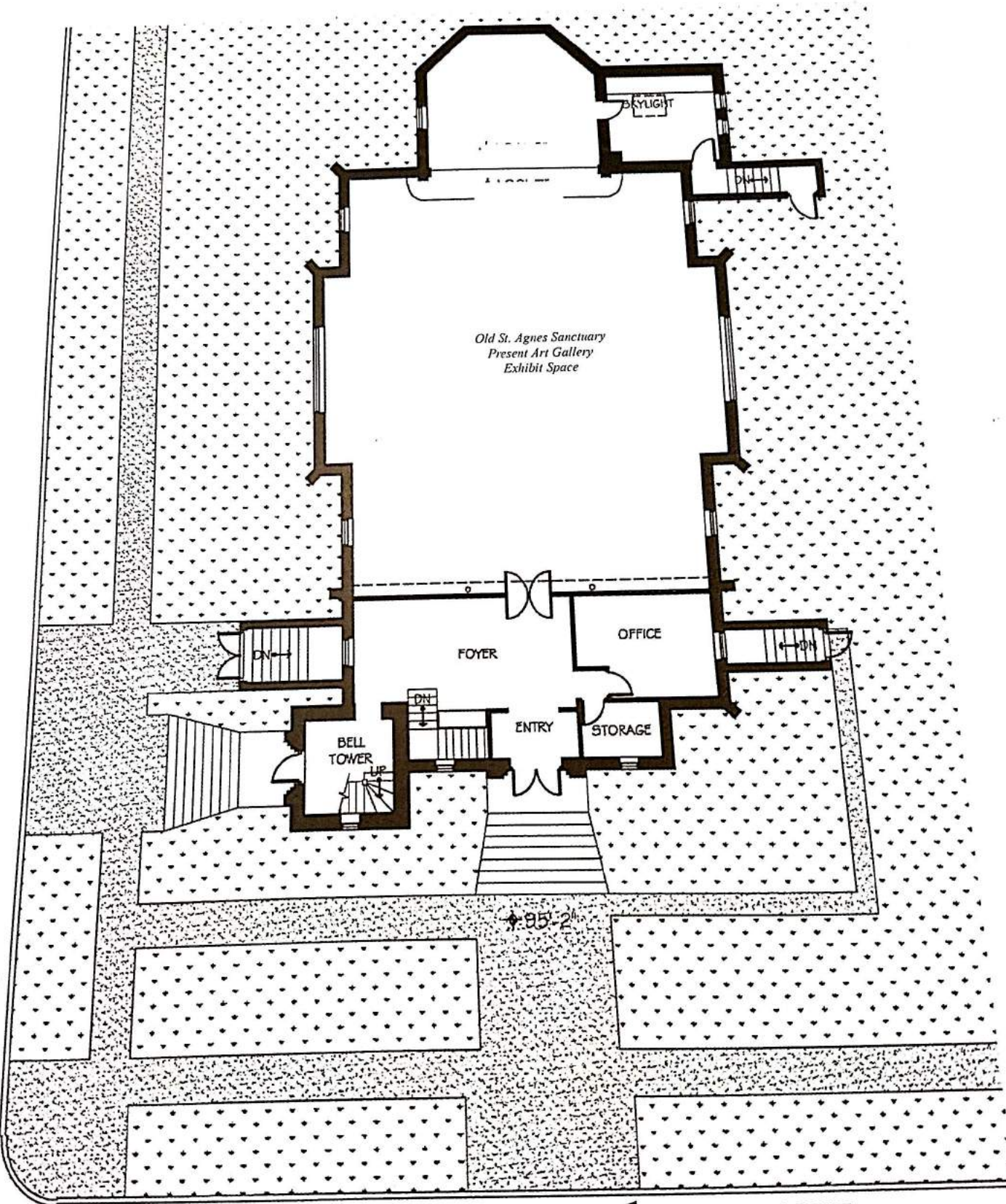
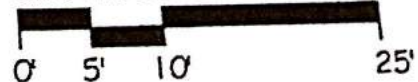
CEDAR STREET

WASHINGTON STREET

MAIN FLOOR PLAN
3,880 SQFT



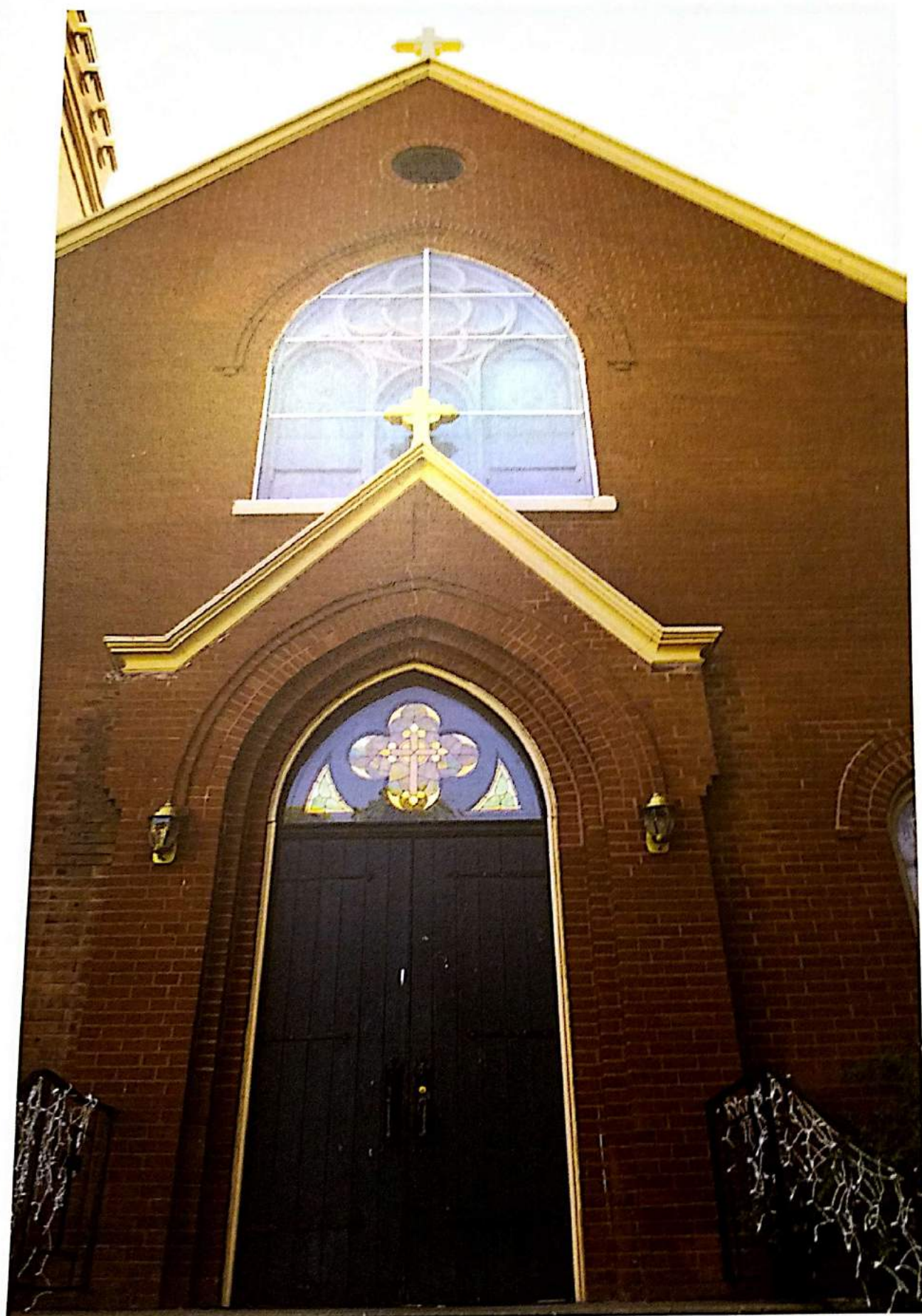
GRAPHIC SCALE

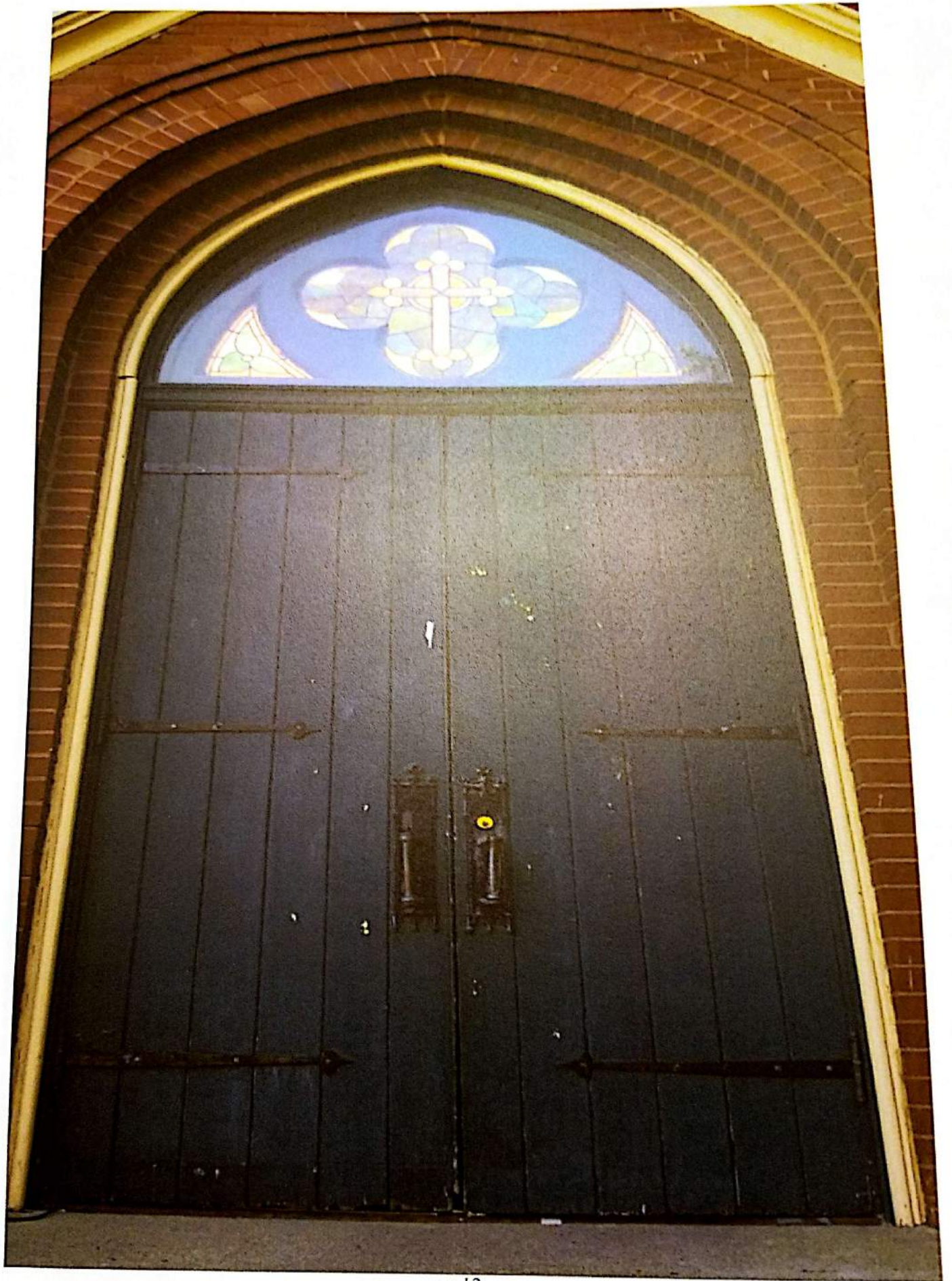


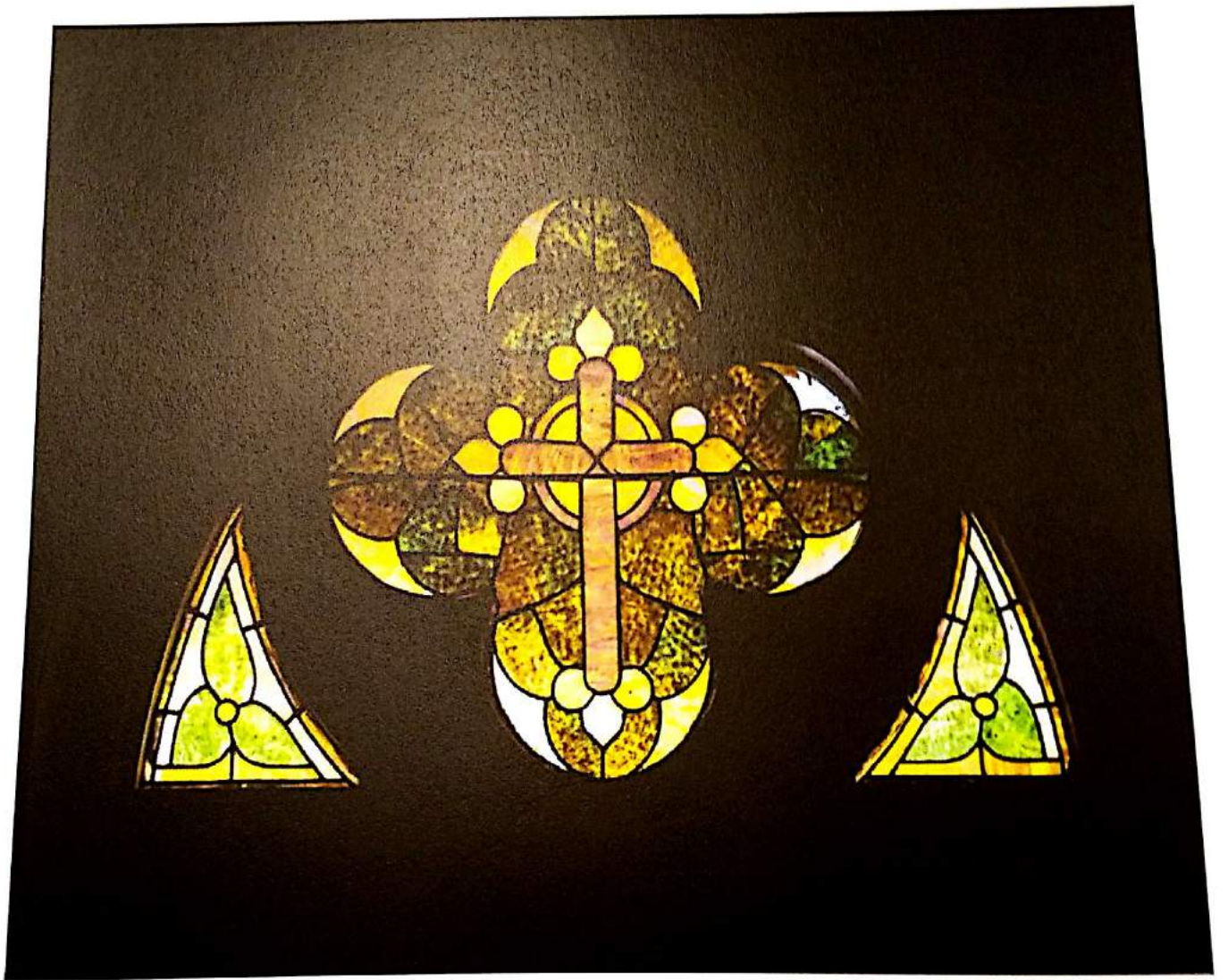
Main Entrance East Facade of the Building

A half circle stained glass window resides above the main entrance on the East facade of the building. This window's main feature is a pink/yellow opaque cross with stylized lilies at each arm. Smaller side windows contain green flowers consisting of three petals. The use of groups of three throughout this window is indicative of the Trinity.

No information about the dedication or purchase of these windows was located.





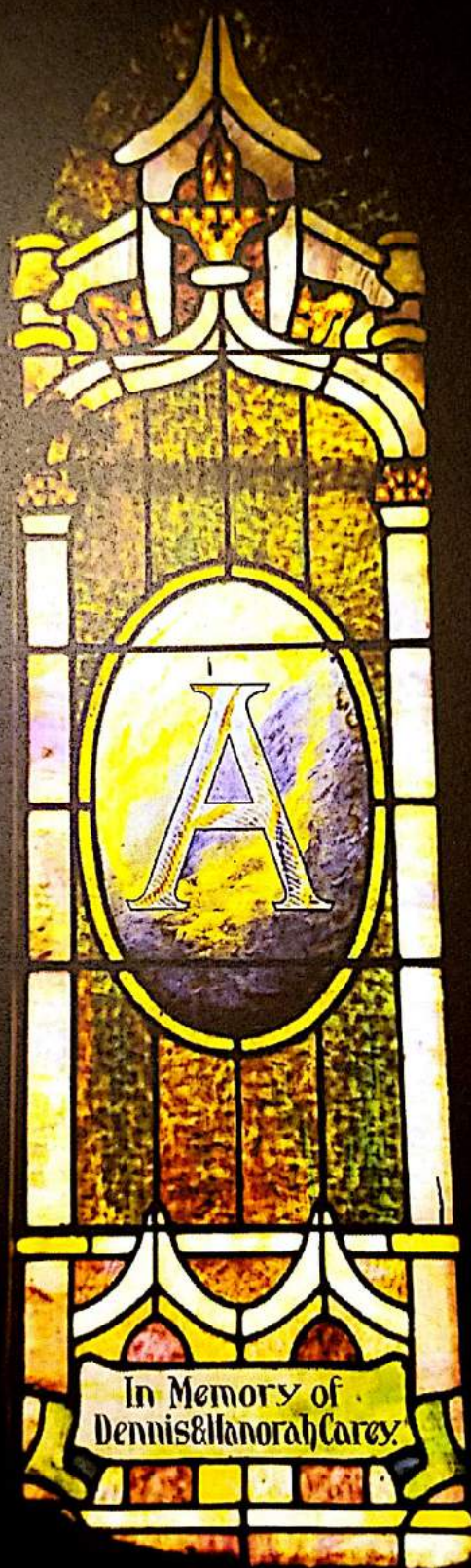


Alpha Window

North Side of East Wall
(Foyer)

The "Alpha" window is located on the east wall, north of the building's entrance, in an area that is currently used as a storage closet. The "A" is depicted with a background of yellow and blue opaque glass. The inscription at the bottom of the window is "In Memory of Dennis and Hanorah Carey". Dennis and Hanorah (or Hannora) Carey came from Ireland to the United States and homesteaded in Fairview Township in Dakota Territory.

The window was most likely dedicated by the Carey sisters and one brother. All three sisters lived in Vermillion and the brother, according to Margaret Carey's obituary in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (July 27, 1950) resided in North Dakota.



The Omega Window

South Side of East Wall
(Foyer)

The "Omega" window is located on the east wall, south of the building's entry. It is visible in the foyer above the stair well to the basement. The "Ω" is shown with the same type of background and design as the Alpha window. The inscription below the Omega is "In Memory of Sister M. Dominica".



Saint Matthew Window

North Wall within Office
(North of Foyer)

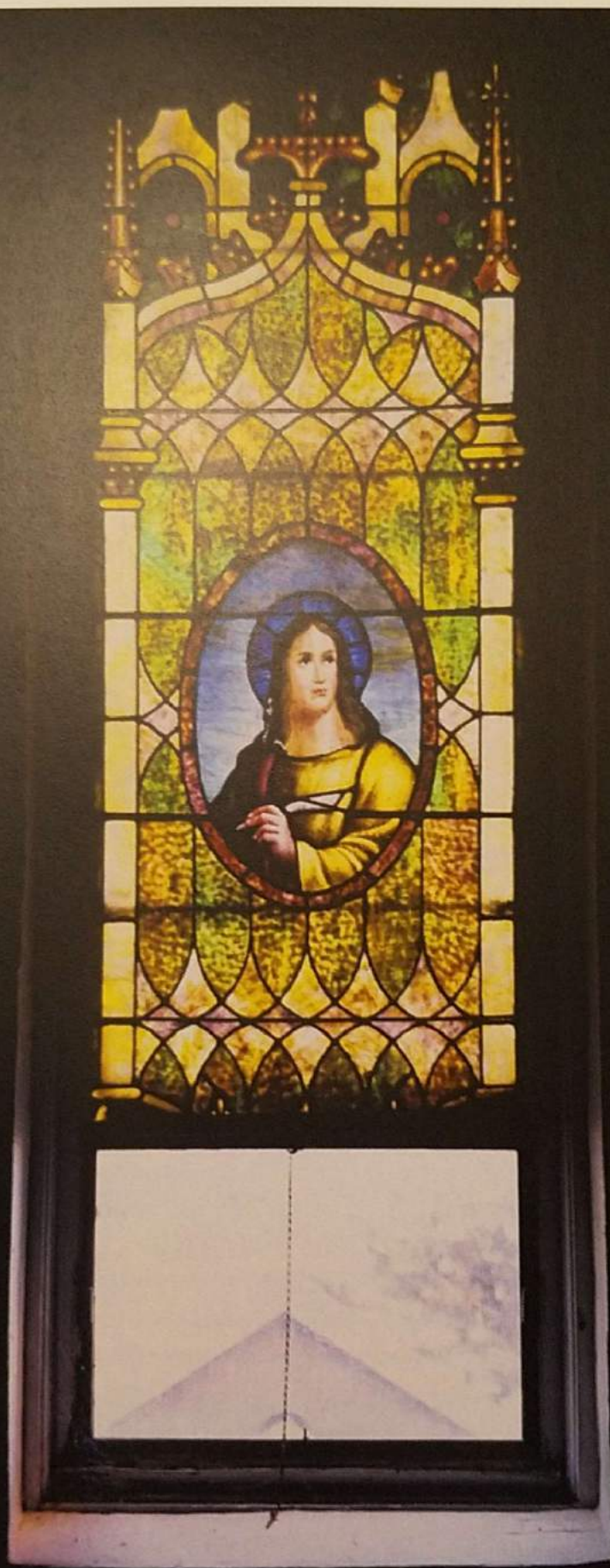
This window is located on the north wall, inside the office situated in the northern portion of the foyer. The portrait may be of St. Matthew, whose head is surrounded by a purple halo and is finely painted. The inscription at the bottom of the window is "In Memory of Francis Stephani". He is buried at Fairview Cemetery. Francis Stephani was one of two sons of Joseph and Elizabeth Stefani, early Clay County (Fairview Township) settlers.



Saint John the Evangelist

South Wall
(Foyer)

On the south wall in the foyer, a window depicts a beardless St. John the Evangelist, with a halo and holding a quill. The portrait is very precisely painted. The bottom portion, under repair at the time of the photograph, has been reinstalled. The inscription reads "In Memory of Mrs. Cornelius McHugh".



Pelican

Stairway Leading to the Choir Loft (South of Foyer)

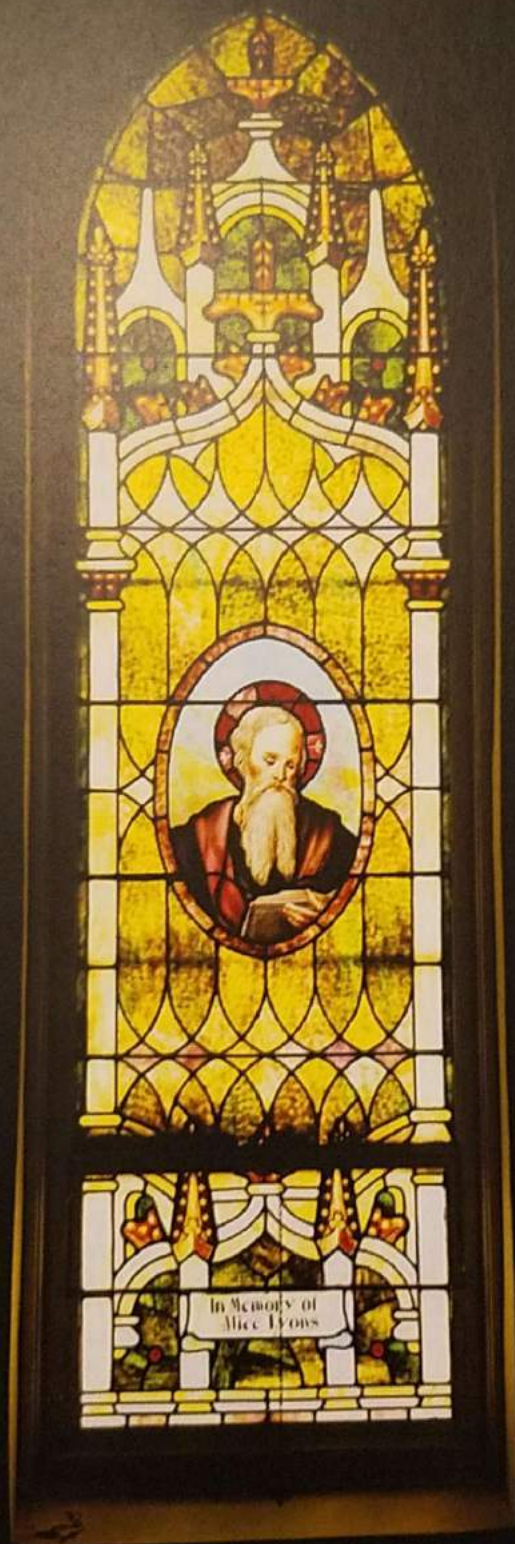
A relatively small window is located on the wall next to stairs in the southeast corner of the building leading to the choir loft. The window depicts a pelican feeding three chicks, symbolizing atonement. The painted window has a panel indicating that this window is "In Memory of Daniel Sullivan". Most likely the donor was the Dan Sullivan who was active in the parish and donated \$500 toward the building of the Church. Daniel Sullivan was an early homesteader in the Prairie Center Township area of Clay County.



Saint Mark Reading a Book

North Wall: East Window
(Sanctuary / Main Gallery)

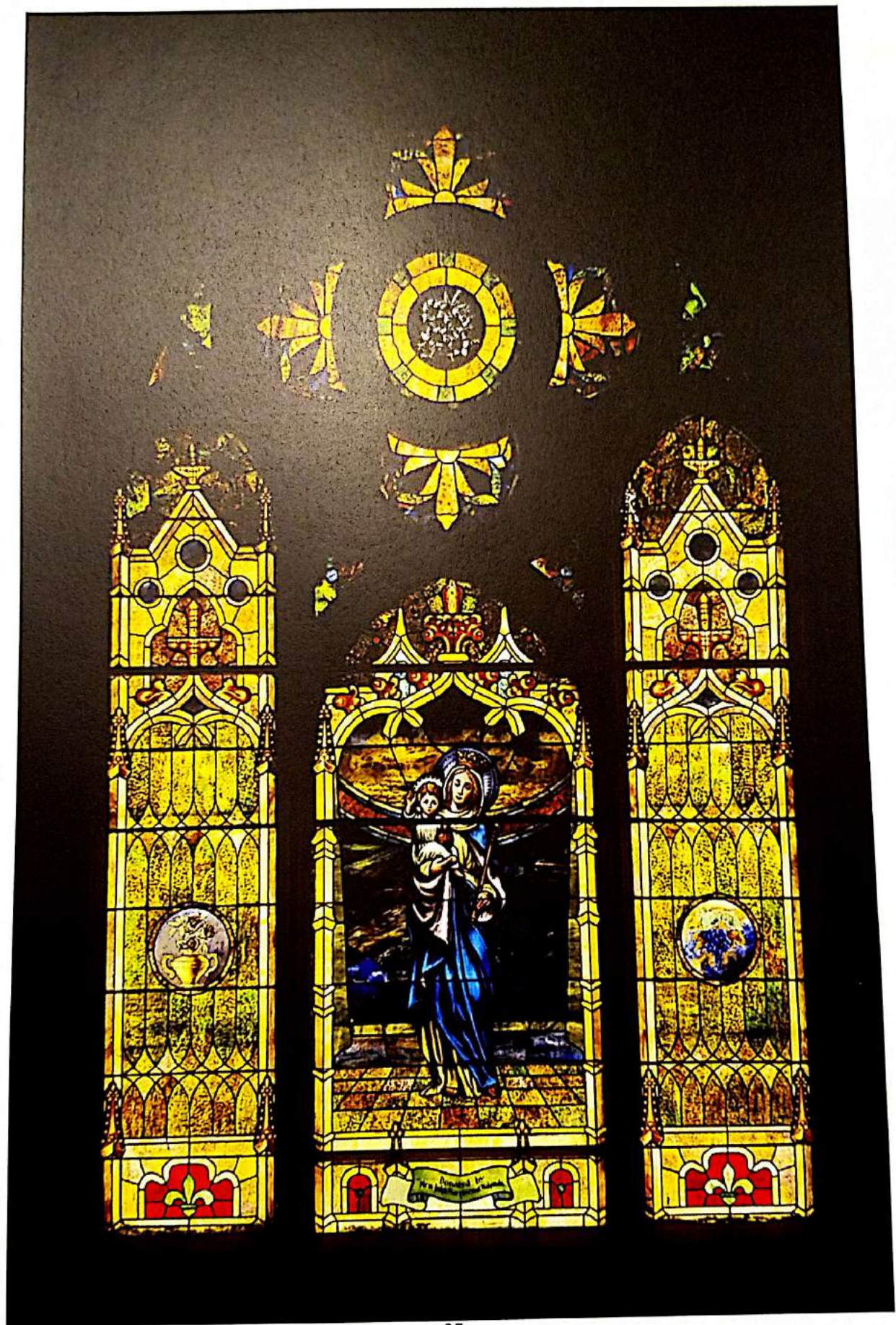
As one walks into the main gallery and exhibit space (the St Agnes Church Sanctuary), there are three windows along the North wall. The first depicts Saint Mark reading a book. The figure is beautifully painted with a red halo. Outside the figure are decorations that are repeated in several windows, especially those of the four Saints and appear to be towers in a stylized church. Surrounding the figure is a mottled opaque brown, green and yellow glass. At the bottom of the window is a memorial to Alice Lyons, daughter of Richard F. Lyons, Sr. and Sarah A Lyons (nee Donlan). Alice died at the age of 17 while she was a student at South Dakota State University.



Mary Holding Baby Jesus

North Wall: Central Window
(Sanctuary / Main Gallery)

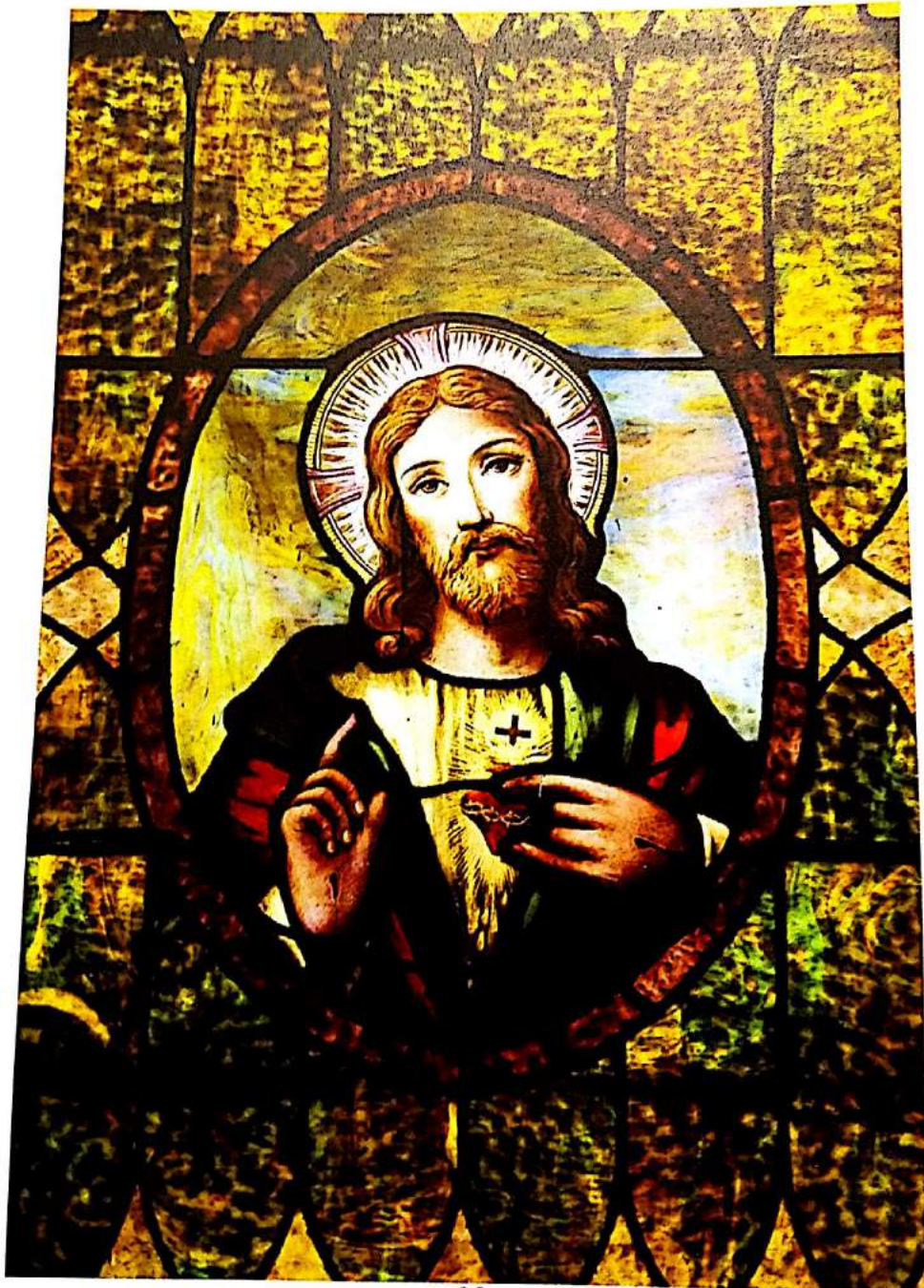
The central focus on the north side of the main gallery and exhibit area (sanctuary) is a very large window with a center panel and two smaller panels. Within the center panel is a depiction of Mary holding baby Jesus. On the top of this panel is a circular window that consists of 5 parts. The center circle is a black and white painting of five roses symbolizing the five wounds of Christ. Surrounding the center are four semicircles with stylized flowers constructed in a background of opaque brown/green/yellow glass. In the smaller panel furthest east is a cluster of purple grapes, a symbol of the wine. The other side shows a vase of three roses, indicative of the Trinity. A panel below the center panel contains an inscription that the window was "Donated by Mrs. John Morrison of Wakonda". Mrs. Morrison died in 1908.

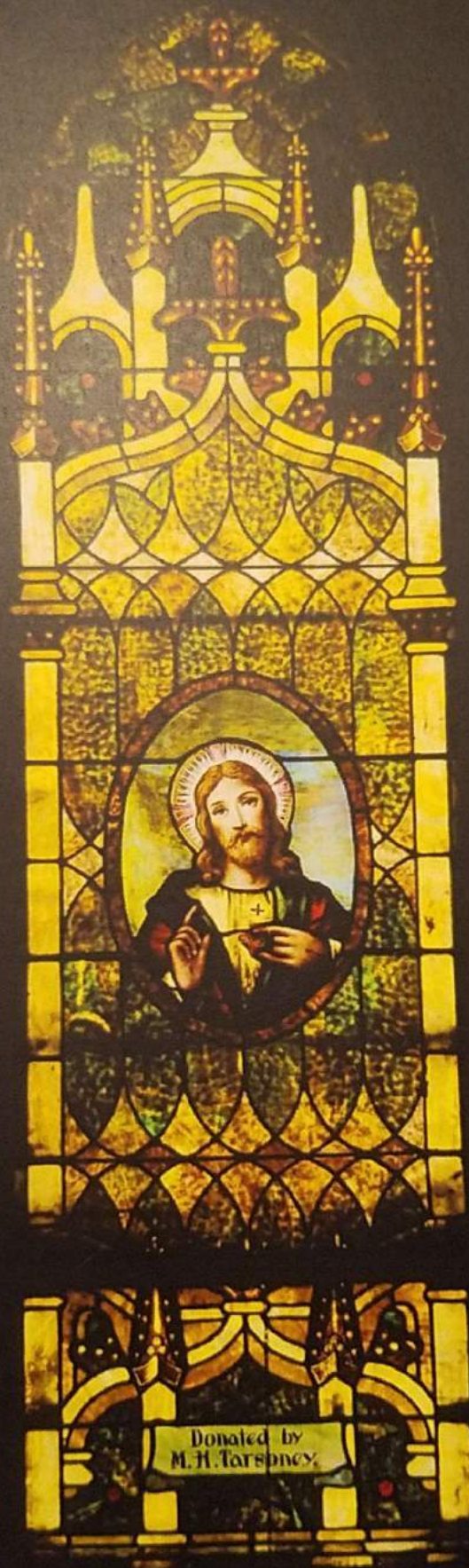


Jesus

North Wall: West Window
(Sanctuary / Main Gallery)

The last large window on the North side of the gallery/sanctuary is a painted window of Jesus, with wounds on both hands, holding his heart. According to the inscription at the bottom, M.H. Tarsany (Michael Herman Tarsony) donated this stained glass window. Mr. Tarsany was also on the building committee and died on July 3, 1913.

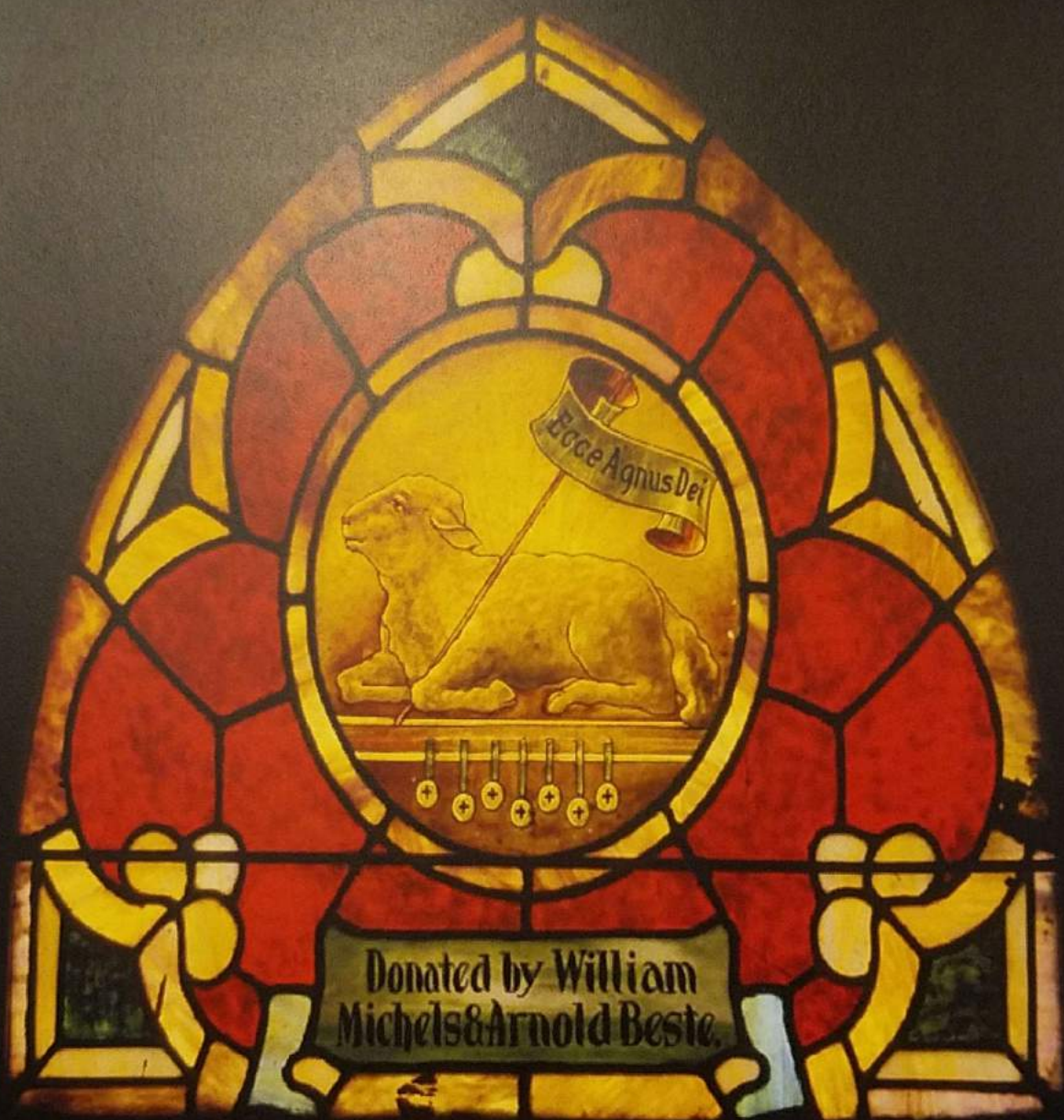




Lamb Reclining on the Book of Seven Seals

North Wall
(Apse)

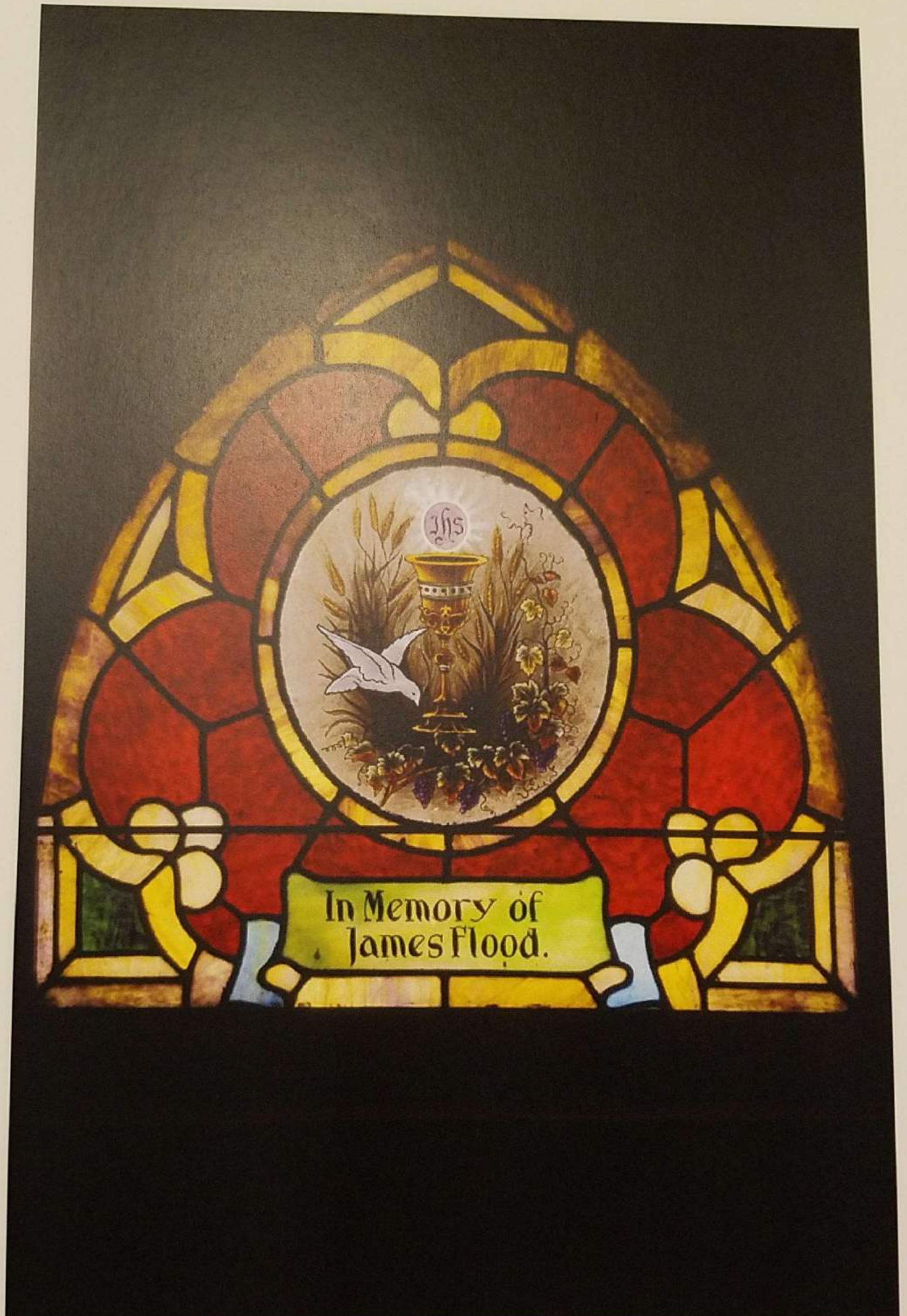
On the north wall of the apse, located at the west end of the building, is a small window showing a lamb reclining on the book of seven seals. Above the lamb is a banner with the inscription "Ecce Agnes Dei" or "This is the Lamb of God". Surrounding this scene are red glass flower petals. This window was donated by William Michels and Arnold Beste. Good friends, Mr. Beste became a dentist in Nebraska, while Mr. Michels was a prominent businessman in Vermilion.



Chalice

South Wall (Apse)

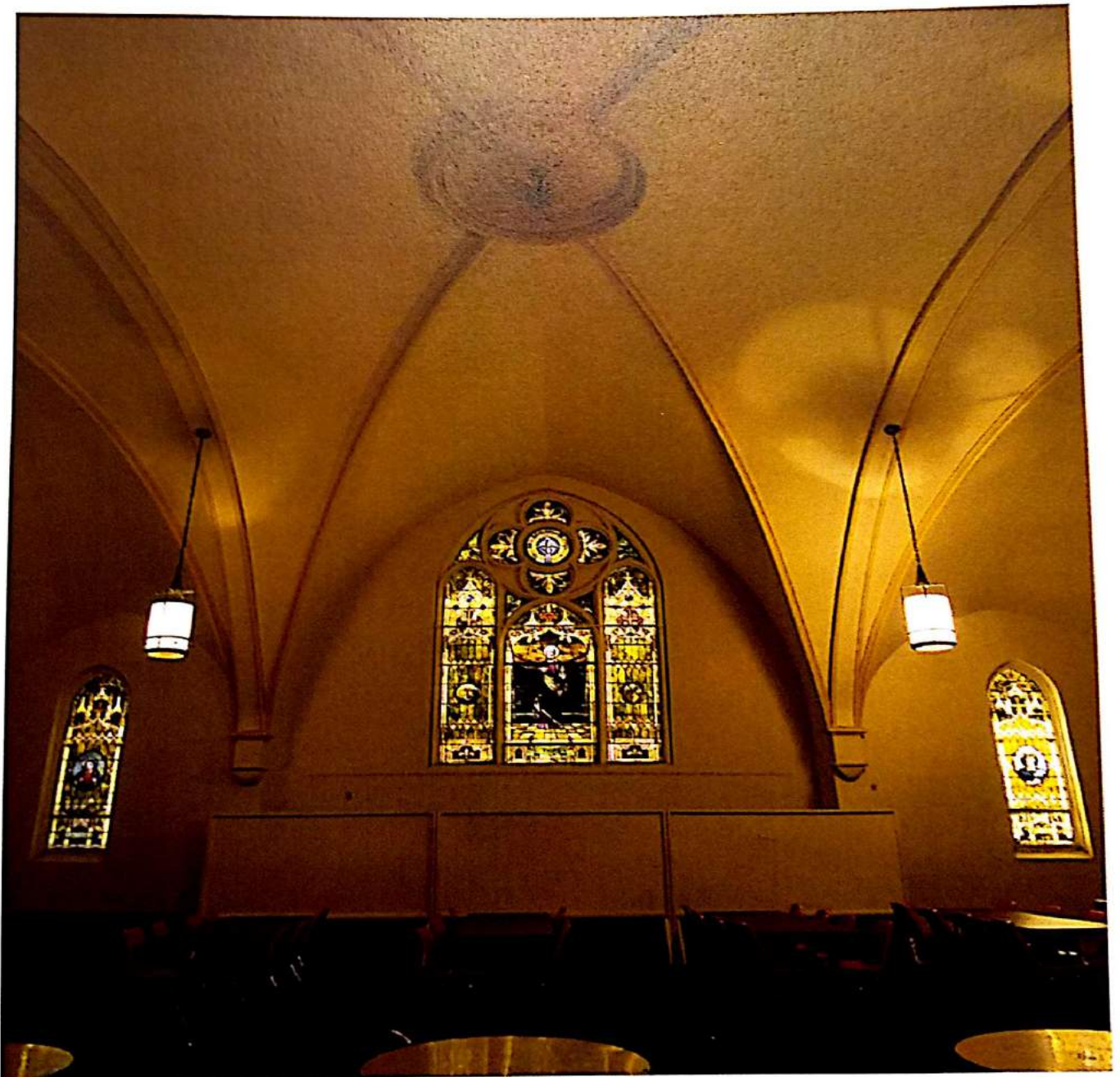
Moving toward the south side of the apse is another small, beautifully painted window of a chalice, with a circle of light above it containing the initials IHS (the Greek spelling of Jesus). Surrounding the chalice are wheat and grapes symbols of the last supper and a dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Surrounding this exquisitely painted scene are red glass flower petals, similar to the window described on page 30. This window is "In Memory of James Flood", Father Thomas Flood's father.

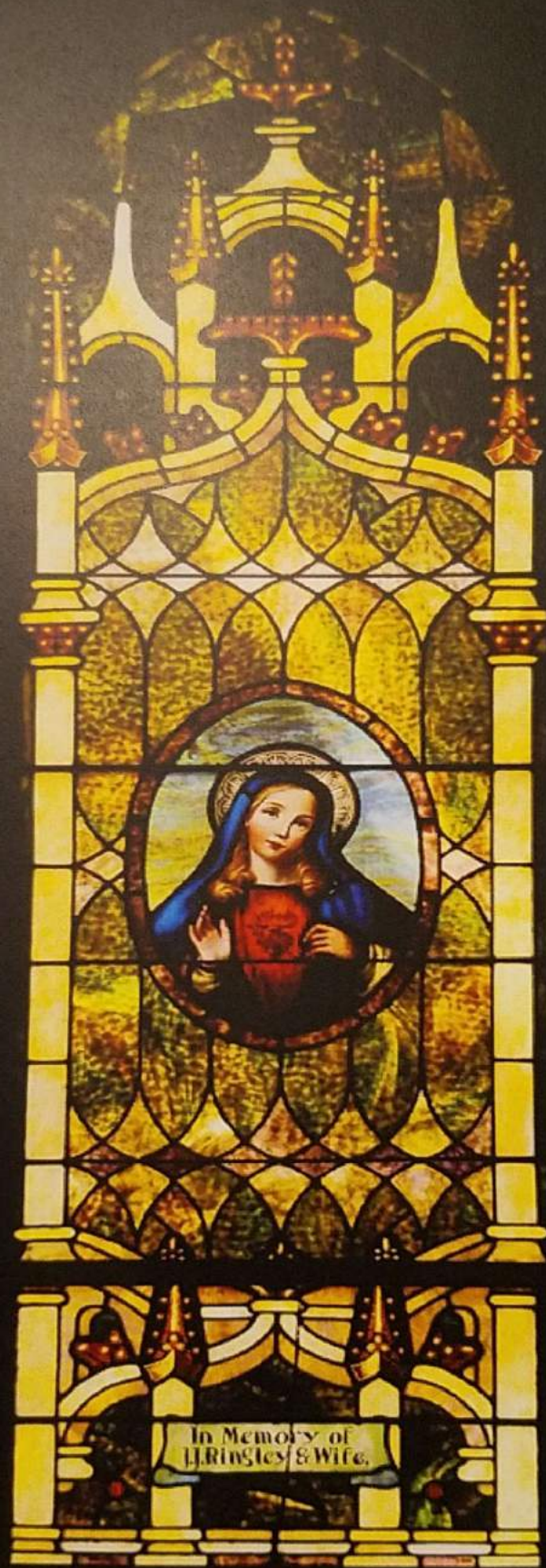


Mary

South Wall: East Window
(Sanctuary / Main Gallery)

The first, or easternmost, window on the south wall of the gallery/sanctuary is a single window depicting a finely painted Mary, who is surrounded by a halo. Her hand is "holding" a flaming heart pierced by a dagger, symbolic of the sacred heart of love of Christ. The window is "In Memory of JJ Ringley and Wife". J. Ringley was the treasurer and chief fund-raiser during the construction of the church.



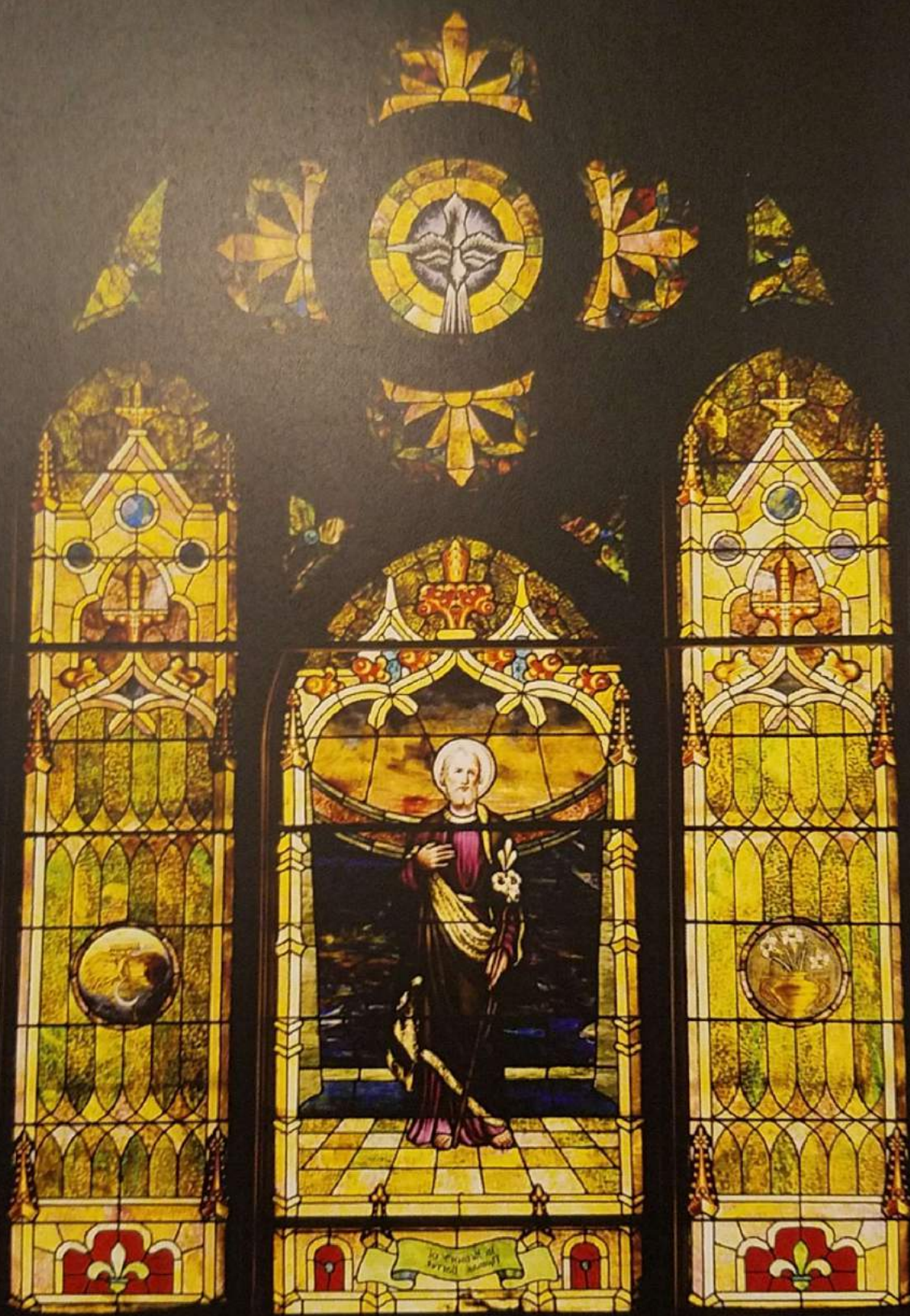


In Memory of
J. R. Ingle & Wife.

Joseph Carrying a Flowering Staff

South Wall: Central Window (Sanctuary / Main Gallery)

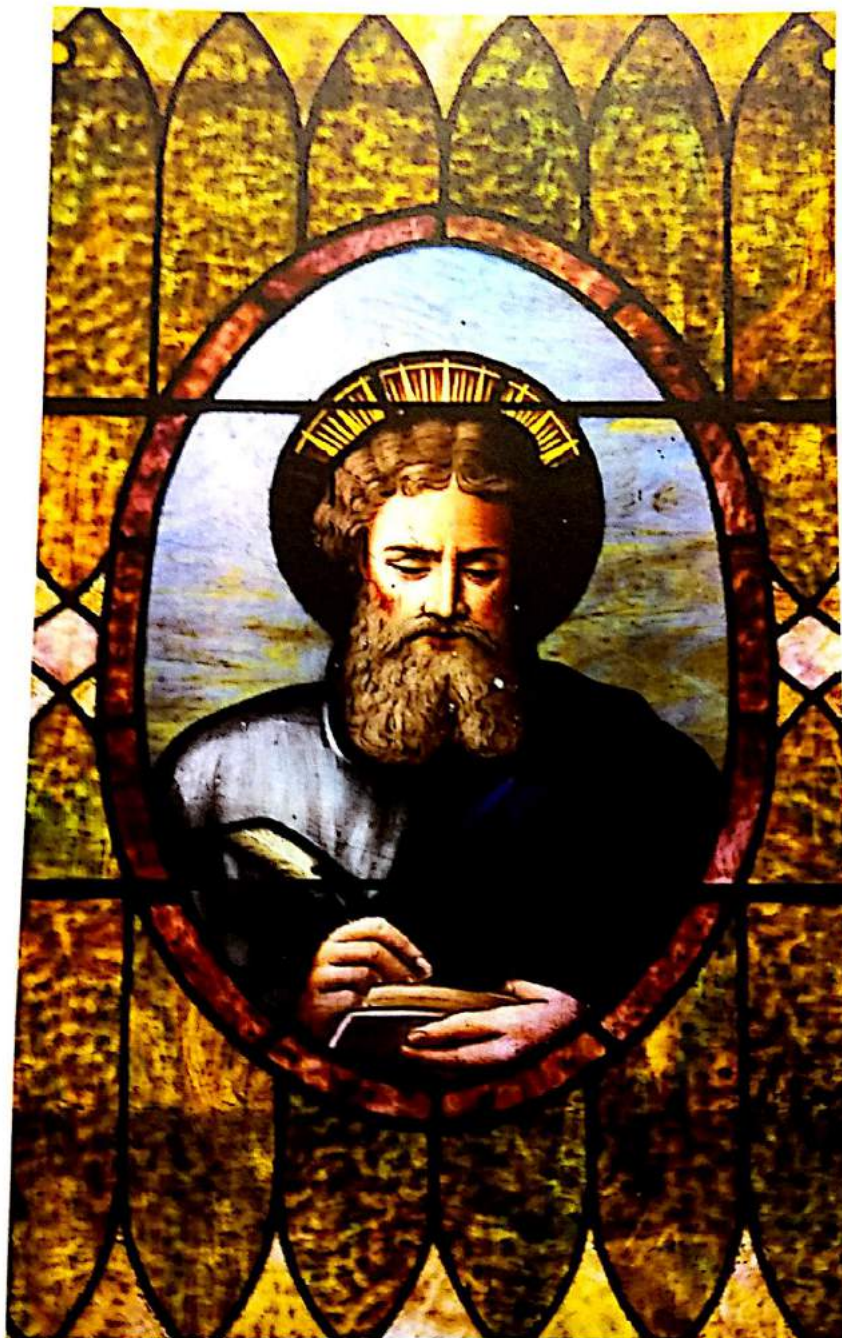
The large central window on the south side of the gallery consists of three panels. In the center is a beautiful depiction of Joseph carrying a flowering staff. Small, circular painted glass "pictures" show a bundle of wheat surrounded by a hoe and rake on the east side (a symbol of the Bread) and three lilies in a vase in the west side. Above the center panel is a dove with outstretched wings, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The window is "In Memory of Thomas Barret". He is buried in Miller, South Dakota.



St Luke

South Wall: West Window
(Sanctuary / Main Gallery)

The west window on the south wall of the main exhibit area is a window "donated by John Rabusch and Family". The painted glass figure is of St. Luke using a quill to write in a book. Members of the Rabusch family still reside in Clay County. The house on Catalina Street in Vermillion where the current pastor of the "new" St. Agnes Church lives once belonged to the Rabusch family.

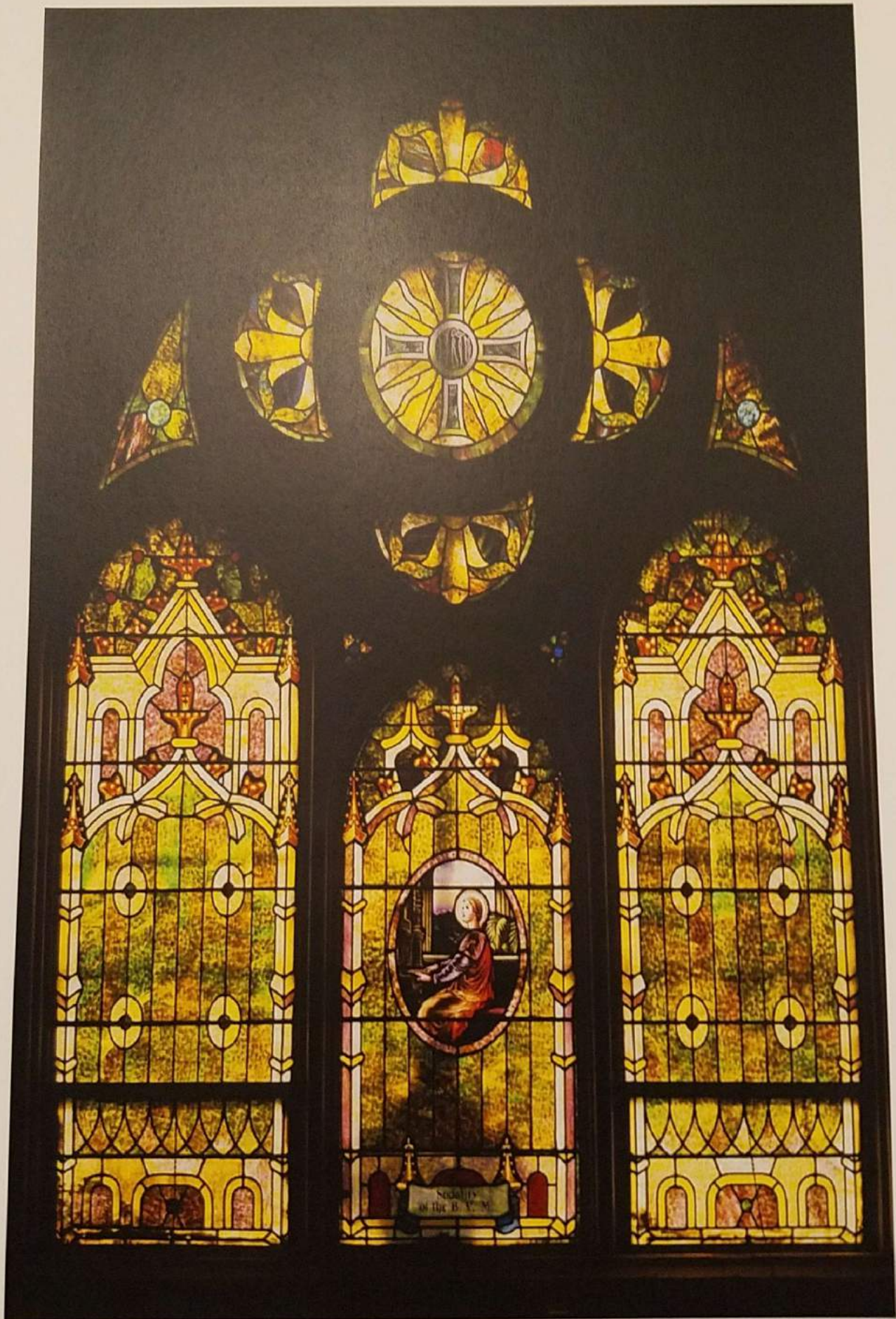




Saint Cecilia

East Wall (Choir Loft)

Facing east at the back of the choir loft is a large three-paneled window. The central panel is that of St. Cecilia, the patroness of music, playing an organ near an open window and looking out to a garden. Although there are no figures on each of the side panels, stylized stained glass may represent the inside of a temple. Above the central panel is a large rosette, composed of a stylized cross and sun rays. In the center of the cross' intercepting arms is a small circle with the letters IHS. Stylized flowers surround the larger circle. The inscription at the bottom of the window is "Sodality of the BVM" or the Blessed Virgin Mary. This was an organization of women and girls at the church who may have collected funds for this window.



Father Flood Many Years of Service

Vermillion Historical Society Records and
the Vermillion PlainTalk



Reverend Thomas L. Flood arrived in Vermillion in 1902, and for almost half a century he was the shepherd of the flock at St. Agnes. So profound was his influence that his successors jocularly referred to the three eras of the church as pre-alluvion, alluvion, and post -alluvion.

Father Flood was born at Dayton (Brooklyn), Wisconsin, on January 7, 1871, the son of James Flood and Bridget Murray Flood. In 1892, he entered St. Joseph's College in Dubuque, Iowa as a student of classics. After graduation in 1897, he entered the St. Paul Seminary, and was ordained a priest on June 1, 1901 by Bishop Ireland for the Diocese of Sioux Falls. Fr. Flood served as assistant pastor at Yankton for approximately three months, and then moved to Watertown from September 1901 to May 1902. He became the minister to Elk Point in June 1902, and on October 1, 1902, he moved to Vermillion. He would lead the Saint Agnes parish for the next forty-eight years. ¹

Father Flood was a young priest, full of energy and enthusiasm for the tasks which lay before him. One of the tasks included the continuation of the fund

drive initiated by Father Bunning in his effort to draw the congregation together and to construct a new church. Father Flood's mission during his first five years at St. Agnes was dedicated to completing what Father Bunning had begun.

In 1905, Bishop O'Gorman decided to discontinue the rural Fairview church, and to combine that parish with the one in Vermillion. The decision was highly unpopular and created the most controversy ever experienced within the St. Agnes and Fairview parishes. The St. Agnes congregation faced the decision and held a revolt against the wishes of the Bishop. All sides were characterized as tenacious which added to the length of the revolt. A resolution was neither quick nor easily obtained.

It is thought that Bishop O'Gorman's intentions were altruistic, to eliminate duplication, streamline administration and modernize the church. As a former professor of history he seemed to have failed to recognize that the members of the Fairview Church also had an altruistic motive in their deep sense of history as the first Catholic parish in South Dakota. The Fairview Parish members did not want the first Catholic church in South Dakota to be abandoned and forgotten. A direct result of Bishop O'Gorman's decision was that a number of the Fairview parishioners left the church, never to return.²

The addition of the Fairview congregation, approximately forty-five families, was more than the Vermillion parish building could accommodate. A meeting called to propose the construction of a new building resulted in a resolution to do so at a cost of not less than \$12,000. Father Flood appointed a building committee consisting of J. Ringley as treasurer and chief fund raiser, R.B. Shields as secretary, and Mr. Morrison, J. Bruyer, Mr. Lambert, Mr. Lyons, and Mr. Lennon as general members. Ringley donated a \$6,000 bond to launch the building fund project. The members employed the traditional methods of fund-raising, including a church supper that garnered \$50. General contributions reached \$191 by April, 1906. Realizing that these small amounts were not going to get the building accomplished, parishioners subscribed another \$5,200 in bonds. In addition the parish received \$300 for the old church building and \$500 for the sale of ten acres of land at Fairview. Two individuals, Dan Sullivan and Mr. Tarsany, each contributed \$500. By April 15, 1907 the fund-raising effort had achieved a total of \$13,281.³

Construction on the building at 202 Washington began August, 1906, with August Goetz of Yankton as contractor. The structure was completed September 21, 1907, and the following Sunday morning Father flood officiated at the first mass in the new church. Costs for the building, altar and interior furnish-

ings totaled \$15,000. All agreed that the new church was the finest in the Diocese of Sioux Falls.

The church was constructed of cherry red pressed brick with cement casings. It measured forty-one by ninety-two feet with three-foot wide center wings on either side. The auditorium portion of the church was seventy-five feet in length, and had a twenty-foot rostrum. A gallery in the front of the church accommodated a choir, or parish members, if there was an unusually large attendance. Large stained glass windows adorned the north and south sides of the building, as well as the front on the east side. Smaller stained glass windows were located throughout the building. Individual members of the parish donated the windows. Interior furnishings and pews were of solid oak. The new church seated an estimated sixty families.⁴

Formal dedication of the church occurred on a Wednesday, October 2, 1907. The service started at 10:30 a.m. with the formation of a procession at the parsonage. Nine visiting clergymen headed the column, followed by Bishop O'Gorman, Father Flood, and the congregation. Upon arrival at the church door, Bishop O'Gorman conducted the invocation and blessed the exterior of the edifice. The Bishop and priests then entered the church, where the blessing of the interior took place after the admittance of the congregation.

A High Mass followed, conducted by Father Lawrence Link of Yankton. Father Ernest F. Cuniff, also of Yankton, assisted as Deacon, and Father D. F. Desmond of Huron served as Subdeacon. Father John J. Shea of Mitchell and Father E. Egan of Wakonda were assistants at the Bishop's throne. Father John O'Hara of Parker delivered the homily, a tribute to the parish, the fine new church, and the "university" city.⁵ After the services, Bishop O'Gorman presented his dedication speech. He called for harmony between the dissident members from Fairview and the church in Vermillion:

"I regret very much that dissension arose in some quarters when I felt it a duty to close the church as Fairview, and combine that parish with the one in Vermillion. But I am confident that today that dissension has disappeared, and instead a perfect harmony prevails. The generous contributions of Fairview people makes me feel that in the future harmony will prevail in every quarter. Let "harmony" be the watch word of every member of this church henceforth, and may you all earnestly strive to do your duty in behalf of St. Agnes Church."⁶

As a conclusion to the ceremonies, Bishop O'Gorman confirmed a class of twenty-three adults, seven boys, and thirteen girls.

Bishop O'Gorman, through his presence in Vermillion, and his speech, attempted to bring unity to the church. However, declining school enrollment at St. Joseph's Academy revealed continuing discord.⁷

In 1906, the construction of the new church manifested external changes at St. Agnes, but internal modifications were also considered and adopted. Prior to April 1, 1906, there was no regular form of church government, a situation that was highly unsatisfactory to the members of the church. The church government, in existence since 1885, was purely an advisory board whose actions had very little effect on the decision-making processes, and no financial control whatsoever. The wishes of the Executive Board could be ignored or overruled by an autocratic priest, and grievance petitions or physical withdrawal were the only recourses to unpopular actions.

T.J. Sloan, pioneer member and long time church officer, wrote:

"In that year (1901), I was elected secretary of church. [sic] This is now April 1st, 1906 and up to this I had no books and kept no account, all accounts were kept by Father Flood and he collected all moneys & paid all expenses heretofore up to April 1, 1906."⁸

Not only was this situation intolerable to the parish, but it was also unacceptable to Father Flood. Consequently, on March 10, 1906, during a meeting at the parsonage, someone suggested that a board of trustees be established to relieve the priest of duties not directly related to his ministerial position. The congregation accepted this motion on April 1, 1906. Because of the support of Father Flood, the Bishop also sanctioned the resolution.

Under the terms of the proposition, a civil government was established, with a four-man board of trustees. Through an electoral process, Father Flood became president, Eugene Lambert treasurer, A. A. Geppert secretary, and T. J. Sloan member. Lambert was placed under \$1,000 bond, since he would handle church monies in the course of his duties. He collected all income, including a salary for the priest, and paid all expenses. Checks were drawn by the priest, signed by the secretary, then countersigned and paid by the treasurer. However, all bills and expenditures first had to be approved at the regular meeting.⁹ The checks-and-balances nature of the new civil government was an effort to prevent the mismanagement of funds such as the church had experienced a number of years earlier under Father Heidegger.

The establishment of civil government was only the first proposal made at

that meeting in March of 1906. A second was a motion to adopt the Bylaws of the Diocese of Sioux Falls. These were the Statutes and Regulations of the Diocese of Sioux Falls For the Good Government of the Temporalities of Parishes, promulgated in August of 1904 by Bishop O'Gorman.¹⁰

The motion passed, and Father Flood was given proxy voting privileges for members of the group.

The benefits derived from adherence to the statutes and regulations were readily apparent to all who read them, for they clearly defined the disposition of revenue, obligations incurred by individual parishes, control of real and personal property at both parish and diocesan levels, and of course, the rights and obligations of priests. Bishop O'Gorman obviously intended to avoid the difficulties encountered by his predecessor. A second obvious benefit from the establishment of a corporate structure was increased interaction and communication with the members of the corporation, i.e., the parishes and their representatives. Discussions and democratic procedures at a board meeting were preferable to petitions and parish revolts. Finally, a non-profit corporate structure offered protection, and an opportunity for the redress of grievances under civil law.

O'Gorman's reforms, which attempted to define and clarify authority, obligations, and responsibility, recognized and eliminated some of the more flagrant abuses that plagued the church. They more clearly delineated the church hierarchy, and lines of communication, but they failed where previous reforms failed. While there was an illusion of democracy, the church was not actually more democratic. The reason it failed to become more democratic was inherent in the nature of the institution itself, a "conflict" of leadership between the cleric and the layman, the professional versus the amateur, the expert against the novice. This was true for St. Agnes Parish and was a problem compounded by the personality of its priest.

Father Flood was an unusual man. He was extremely intelligent, and as a result, most parishioners held him in awe. A solitary man, a "loner," he took daily walks, always along the same route, from the parsonage to the public library. It was said that he had read every book there, some more often than once. He had an aristocratic bearing, a Spartan look, as if he were a Bishop of the Church of England strolling across a moor. Each day he returned home along the railroad tracks, meditating and saying his daily prayers. Father Flood believed in tradition, and allowed no variations, either in his daily walk or in his sermons. Approximately the same time each year he preached a sermon from

one of the Gospels, which he confessed he did not understand completely, but it was a tradition, and Father Flood did not break traditions easily. Each Sunday he said two masses, and became annoyed if a church member wanted to receive communion at the second mass, for it was his custom to distribute Communion to the parish at the first mass, and, generally, only visitors sought Communion at the second.

Father Flood considered the church a beautiful, personal religious experience, and he always sought perfection. He did not allow the altar boys to give their responses during mass, but rather preferred to take their part as well as his own so that inferior replies would not be given. He was always shocked if a new altar boy responded during the mass. His quest for perfection was as an individual, however, and he did not teach the altar boys to respond in the manner he desired. He had a delightful sense of humor, but it too was personal, and there was never much levity from the pulpit. God's work was serious work. He was conservative by nature. He never owned an automobile. Even as a young priest, the people thought of him as being old. He refused to have assistants, and the Diocese never interfered with him very much, perhaps because he was competent and always met their financial needs.¹¹

Father Flood was also extremely frugal.¹² His major goal was to insure that St. Agnes was always solvent. He hoped to leave enough money to build a new church for those who followed him, because building the church had been a highlight of his career. At times his emphasis on money seemed almost obsessive. When the annual pledge Sunday came, Father Flood called out from the pulpit, in a sing-song voice, each parishioner's name and the amount he expected him to donate for the coming year. After a month he repeated his list of those who had still failed to contribute. Humiliation drove away many who could not or would not contribute the amount he had determined for them. His intention was not malicious, however, and the money was not for himself. When he died, he left all of his property and personal monies, a substantial amount, to the parish.

From time to time, Father Flood consulted others for advice on church business, but, generally, he dictated policy for the church. No one seemed to resent this; perhaps the parishioners found it easier to follow his lead.¹³

As a conservative dedicated to tradition, Father Flood was prone to maintain the status quo. To borrow a phrase from T. J. Sloan, after the construction of the church was completed, ". . . nothing important transpired during his [Father Flood's] time."

The church, as a microcosm of society, mirrored the culture in which it existed. As South Dakota entered the twentieth century, it changed – and so did St. Agnes Church. When Bishop Marty came to South Dakota, it was a rough, wild land, filled with unknown danger and hardship. The men he recruited were adventurous enough to meet those challenges. It was a time of great growth for Dakota in general and also for the church. However, during the births of both the state and the church, there were labor pains. The people who homesteaded Dakota were, for the most part, immigrants from Europe who sought the fulfillment of a dream of a better life. The priests sent to serve them were also, generally, immigrants who shared that dream. For them, the pains were not unbearable.

Shortly after the turn of the century, during the era of Theodore Roosevelt, the nation was aggressive, dynamic, and self-confident. During this period, the church, under Father Flood, was also vital and expansionist. In the years following the Roosevelt era, the nation became more isolationist, particularly after World War I. The church reflected the mood of the nation and the times as it, too, became more conservative and introspective. The nation was well on its way to the establishment of a modern, corporate state, and the church was adopting a modern, corporate structure. Bishop Marty eagerly accepted any volunteer to provide impetus for growth; Bishop O’Gorman carefully screened his priests to eliminate the less fit. Bishop Marty could not have succeeded without individuality in his priests. Bishop O’Gorman needed consensus, for it was his task to consolidate previous gains, distilling the essence of previous fermentation. St. Agnes Parish, after years of growth and construction, became staid in the years after 1910. In the post-World War II years, the United States recognized its position as a super power, and actively played its role in the world’s drama. St. Agnes Parish also became more activist, again a reflection of its society.

Father Flood’s long tenure at St. Agnes was uneventful, for the most part, but it was meaningful. Service cannot be measured only in terms of dynamic men in dynamic times. The untiring efforts of those who serve the challenge of meeting the day-to-day needs of the people without fail should also be considered. Father Flood dedicated most of his life to the people of his parish. When he died, on January 10, 1950, at St. Bernard’s Hospital in Council Bluffs, Iowa, after a six month illness, it was a day of great sadness for the people of St. Agnes Parish. A pillar in the foundation of their spiritual lives had been removed. It was only proper that he was buried in Vermillion among the people he loved and served so faithfully for so many years. ¹⁴

Foot Notes

- 1 + 4. Vermillion Plain Talk, October 3, 1907; Dakota Republican, October 3, 1907.
- 2 - 3. Miles, Kevin N. *Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls. History of the Saint Agnes Parish in Vermillion and Fairview.*
5. Priest's Register, 277; Vermillion Plain Talk, October 3, 1907; Dakota Republican, October 3, 1907.
6. Vermillion Plain Talk, October 3, 1907; Dakota Republican, October 3, 1907.
7. Duratschek, Under the Shadow of His Wings, 161; Vermillion Plain Talk, October 3, 1907; Dakota Republican, October 3, 1907.
8. St. Agnes Parish Records.
9. Ibid.; St. Agnes Parish Corporate Records.
10. Statutes and Regulations of the Diocese of Sioux Falls, August 20, 1904.
11. Field Notes, Interview by Author with Robert Stark, December 30, 1974, Vermillion, South Dakota.
12. Field Notes, Interview by Author with Ida C. Lynch, December 30, 1974, Vermillion, South Dakota.
13. Field Notes, Interview by Author with Robert Stark, December 30, 1974, Vermillion, South Dakota.
14. Priest's Register, 56.

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