



Priest Plays Dual Role

Story and Photos
By Linda McConnell

PHILIPSBURG — The Rev. James Barry may not have a "load of many colors" in the biblical sense, but he does wear two hats in the contemporary sense. He has the unique position of being a Catholic priest at St. Philip Parish and owner-proprietor of the Art Glass Studio in Philipsburg.

Father Barry's hobby had an interesting beginning. When he moved to Philipsburg about 11 years ago, the church was in need of some remodeling, and the parishioners wanted new windows for the old church. He decided to make stained glass windows. The parishioners put up the money for the materials, and achieved lasting materials for loved ones in the process.

A garage was converted into a temporary workshop. Father Barry and a young friend, Steve Immenschuh, made use of a hand saw with a diamond blade, and began cutting glass in the backyard of the church. When it came time to pour epoxy resin around the pieces of glass, Father Barry opened up his dining room, and again went to work.

These windows were the beginning of a new addition, though Barry says he didn't mean for it to turn out that way. Before the windows for St. Philip's were even finished, Barry had a contract to make windows for another church. "That's what got us into a studio business situation."

At that point, he decided he needed a workshop and brought the old city hall and converted it into a studio-workshop.

Father Barry makes his windows from faceted stained glass. He explained that the glass comes in disks about 10 inches square and about one inch thick.

Father Barry begins with a basic design, which he draws or has drawn by someone else. Sometimes a person describes what he wants, and Barry tries to draw a design reflecting that description. The miniature designs are colored, often with crayons, so that Barry is sure of his color combinations before he begins his work.

After he has his design, he enlarges his paper pattern to the desired size, and uses magic markers to write in the color names in the spaces. He covers the paper pattern with a sheet of plastic, builds a wooden form around the pattern the exact size of the finished product, and begins to cut the slabs of glass.

He said he sometimes uses the same basic shapes throughout a piece. Other times, each piece of glass has its own unique shape, and may vary from a flame, to a leaf, or even a solid piece of glass cut in the shape of a hand. All this depends on the effect he wants to achieve. Sometimes the desired effect may be simply a play in color.

Father Barry uses a special water cooled saw with a diamond edge to cut the glass into the desired shape. Then he takes a hammer, and chips away at the upper edge of the piece of glass. The chipping is necessary, he explained, so that light will be refracted. Without the chipping, the glass appears dull, and little light shines through it.

At each piece of glass is cut, it is placed in position on the pattern until all the glass for a product is in place. Then a latex mold release is poured around the glass to hold the pieces in place. After the epoxy resin is set up, Barry sprinkles sand on it to give a textured effect to what will be inside of the window. After the epoxy is completely dry, the window is picked up, the latex is peeled off the back, and the window is ready to install.

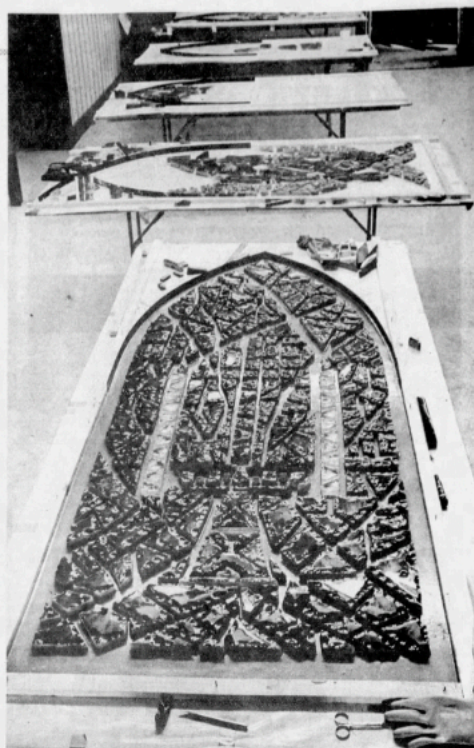
Father Barry said his windows are different from those produced in most other studios in that he uses "much more glass than most." The epoxy resin allows him to "produce a window that has unusually great strength, and requires no protective materials or covering on the outside."

Barry also emphasized that he never duplicates a design. "People would never see a duplicate of one of our windows anywhere else, unless, of course, someone copied it."

Barry said that while 80 per cent of his work is probably done for churches, he has done windows for both commercial and residential buildings. Last summer, he worked closely with the Granite County Bicentennial Committee to make a window for the courthouse for the bicentennial celebration. He said that the design for the window was a combined effort of Bob O'Loughlin, who works with him in the studio, Sue Elk, a local artist, and himself.

Barry said he does no advertising, and most of his business is secured by word of mouth. He did say that perhaps his best advertising comes from a local bar. The Club Bar in Philipsburg has a faceted stained glass bar produced by the Art Glass Studio. When asked why he thought it was such good advertising, Barry laughed and said, "because so many people drink!"

Two weeks ago, Barry's work was suspended by a mild heart attack. Therefore, the two men he has trained in the studio, Steve Immenschuh and Bob O'Loughlin, are working under Barry's supervision, to finish the current project, 12 windows for the Sacred Heart Church in Roman. Father Barry said he is limited "only by the doctor," and he appears ready to return to work. Meanwhile, he is "drinking tea, and washing my dishes," and taking it easy for awhile.



STAINED GLASS — Bob O'Loughlin (below) and Steve Immenschuh work on the original stained glass windows created by Father James Barry for the Sacred Heart Church in Roman. The studio is a sideline for the Philipsburg priest who is temporarily unable to work because of a recent heart attack.

