

London Diocesan Advisory Committee



THE SELECTION OF NEW STAINED GLASS

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1. WHAT IS STAINED GLASS?

(a) Stained glass describes the method by which small pieces of coloured glass are painted and fired in a kiln to make the paint permanent with the glass surface. When all the component pieces of glass are ready they are held together by strips of lead, which keep them in place and then, in sections, are placed within a window to form one complete stained glass window. Some modern glass is held together by a concrete formula and has thicker joining areas.

(b) The process by which the design of a window is decided and the legal way in which the window receives permission to be placed in the building, is explained in this document. Normally the procedure falls within the remit of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches in the London Diocese (referred to as the DAC) and is first handled in a parish by its Parochial Church Council.

(c) It might be helpful to set modern glass in the context of its historical development so we begin with that information.

2. WHY STAINED GLASS WINDOWS?

(a) The use of stained glass in the windows of churches goes back a very long time. When much of the population could not read and write our cathedrals and churches used every means available to make known the good news of Jesus Christ in every way possible. As well as in brick and stone using carvings, and on walls using painted murals, there were tapestries and embroideries. The whole building would have been alive with images depicting the Christian story and other biblical scenes.

(b) Thus the artist and craftsmen worked closely with the priest and donor to portray truths from scripture and stories of the saints in a way understandable by all ages and in a wide variety of visual images. As the church grew in its understanding of peoples' needs and abilities so the way in which the images in churches were depicted and adapted to suit the particular theological emphases of the age. In other words the artist and designer reflected the ideas most prominent at that time.

(c) Thus in the medieval period great stories of famous characters in the Bible were interspersed with local heroes and saints. You see this most strongly in the wonderful windows in the choir of Canterbury Cathedral and in other buildings. At Canterbury the story of their local saint, St Thomas a Becket, becomes interwoven with stories from the Bible.

(d) These magnificent stained glass windows have a number of important functions to fulfil. The main purpose of painting pictures in coloured glass was to tell a story and to keep the building water tight and let light in. They teach through their words and figures, they decorate and please the eye of the beholder and above all they provide a fitting background to the worship of the church. They are a background to devotion in that as the eye moves around the building either during worship or at times of visits, the window fixes the eye of the observer and guides the mind back to God through the story being told.

(e) Whatever the age of the church stained glass has played its part in the decoration and enriching of the architecture. These windows have also continued to tell another story, that of the people who have donated the window or are commemorated in them. By inscriptions and depictions the glass records for posterity the whole story of their installation and purpose. And so they have historical, artistic, theological and personal significance.

3. THE PROCESS OF SELECTING A WINDOW

(a) Today our churches still use stained glass to tell the same story and to record historical events. What usually happens is that members of a congregation or friends of those to be commemorated or those who wish to record an event contact the Vicar or Churchwardens to ask if the

church would be in agreement with a proposal to donate a window to their church building.

(b) This initial discussion is of great importance for it is essential not to promise anything until the proper channels have been used to see whether or not a stained glass window will be acceptable to a particular community. The different stages of such a gift need to be clearly understood. They are the following:

(c) Make contact with a church officer and discuss with the Parish Priest whether a window would be acceptable or whether the parish has other needs that the donor might meet with a gift.

(d) If a window would be acceptable to discuss fully the nature of the content of the stained glass and any restrictions that the parish may have on subject matter.

(e) To include the Quinquennial Inspector of the Church in an early discussion as to where the window might be placed and the timing of the process.

(f) Usually it is wise to involve the Archdeacon of the Area at an early stage of the proceedings. It is the Archdeacon who will guide the window through the Diocesan Advisory process of the Diocese.

(g) Every Anglican church needs to apply for a Faculty for such works. The legal document from the Chancellor, whose approval has to be sought for the new window.

(h) At an early stage, but not before the idea of the window has been shared with the Incumbent and parish, a recognized stained glass designer needs to be involved in the discussion on concept and contents.

(i) Before finished designs are undertaken, it is advisable to show the PCC the outline design of the window. It is the Parochial Church Council who will need to join the donor in applying to the DAC for advice and then to the Registrar for the Faculty.

(j) Once general approval of the outline design has been achieved the PCC and the Parish Priest will need to approve the design. Problems can arise when a finished design has been executed, and overall approval has not first been sought. When this approval has been given and the donor is satisfied, application should be made to the Secretary of the DAC for a Faculty application.

(k) The design with a 'Statement of Need' and other supportive documentation will then go to the next main meeting of the Diocesan

Advisory Committee for their approval. Sometimes a visit by members of the DAC will be made to clarify questions about the design and siting. When the DAC have considered the design and decided whether to recommend it, they will issue a certificate to the applicant and the Registrar. They will advise on consulting the Council for the Care of Churches, English Heritage or others. They will also supply forms to complete and send to the Registrar.

(l) After a statutory period of twenty eight days when the Faculty application is posted on the church premises to allow for public debate, the Faculty may be issued at the Chancellors discretion subject to the works being carried out by a given date and any other conditions.

(m) The window can then be made and installed in the building.

(n) This procedure may seem complicated, but the DAC office is there to help and advise how to make a satisfactory application. Usually it is only lengthened when careful preparation has not been taken or someone or something has been left out of the preparatory process.

4. THE DESIGN PROCESS

(a) Here are some tips to help you get the design process right.

(b) From the beginning do not make any rash promises to anyone about accepting a gift. Run through the idea with the Vicar and others.

(c) Look carefully at the interior of the church and see what qualities most strike you about its colours and character. Look and see if there are any spaces for a stained glass window to be placed? Don't assume that because there is a blank window it can be used for a new design.

(d) Ascertain just how much the cost will be to execute a new stained glass window. Depending on the size of the window and how intricate the design the cost will be calculated on size, how much actual painting of the glass will be required, how available are the coloured sections of the glass and their appropriateness. Whilst it is laudable to provide work for new and inexperienced artists to work in stained glass, to carry off a large stained glass window within the technical standards required by architects and the church, sometimes puts unnecessary strain on designers and inexperienced artists and there is disappointment all round. There are many experienced artists in stained glass, but the firing of the glass, the leading of the sections and the installation often require scaffolding and detailed expertise beyond keen amateurs.

(e) When the designer has been selected and you are satisfied that they are capable of undertaking your commission it is essential to brief the artist precisely on the requirements of your window. Even quite preparatory work can be expensive and from the beginning you need to understand just what the commission will cost from the planning stage. Quite often an artist will attend an initial meeting and draft a first design for discussion, but from then on you will be into serious money as you take the draft designs forward.

(f) From the beginning be straightforward with the person you select to design your window. If the design does not work out as you expect, say so.

(g) On the whole it is advisable to see stained glass windows as more aligned to architecture than painting. That is to say representational treatments of subjects, images bordering on the photographic and very detailed childlike representations often don't work. Bold colours strong designs and seeing the leading of the window as an integral part of the overall design does work. Using leading in an arbitrary fashion does not. Any lettering must also be seen as a crucial part of the overall window, not just as an afterthought. Canterbury's glass shows how lettering can be a part of telling the story.

(h) The DAC will want to see a detailed design in the context of the church building. It would require a plan and photographs of the exact location of the new window in the building, and how it relates to other windows and its surroundings as a part of the Faculty application.

(i) The whole experience of choosing a new window for your church should be an exciting adventure. All those involved need to be a part of the process. From the initial enquiry to the dedication of the window and its public appreciation new stained glass can be a significant part of the life of a church community and a major addition to its worship, ministry and mission.

**London Diocesan Advisory Committee
October 2006**