

# **LAMB OF GOD STAINED GLASS WINDOW: A LABOR OF LOVE AND FAITH**

The *Lamb of God* stained glass window that overlooks the altar area of the sanctuary here at Our Shepherd was created by Brad Butler, a well-known and respected Hoosier stained glass artist, and his son-in-law and business partner, Andrew Vargo. Butler and Vargo incorporated seven significant Biblical elements to visually convey the focus and principles of Our Shepherd Lutheran Church and School. The elements include:

The Bible as the undisputed Word of God and the foundation of our faith. The words of Psalm 23 are painted on the pages displayed.

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, a symbol of our Savior, Jesus Christ. *John 1:29*

Agnus Dei, which is Latin for the Lamb of God.

Alpha and Omega are the Greek letters for the beginning and the end. Taken from Revelation 22:13, Jesus is the First and the Last.

INRI is the Latin inscription that Pontius Pilate put above Jesus on the cross. It is an acronym for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. *Luke 23:38*



The Staff, in the shape of a cross, is symbolic of the ultimate authority of Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who was crucified and now reigns over heaven and earth.

Eight sets of three rings encircle the glass. The three rings represent the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The number eight is significant as the eighth day is the day of redemption, Easter, when the God's plan for His creation was fulfilled by Christ's glorious resurrection.

The fine art piece was begun in the fall of 2015, was completed and installed over a three day period in June 2016, and was dedicated on Sunday, June 19, 2016. The window is an eight foot circle consisting of an aluminum frame with over five hundred individual pieces of glass backed by five diffuser panels. The *Lamb of God* was hung in front of the existing window so that it may be moved to another location should another sanctuary be built in the future.

## THE HISTORY

When the new facility was built, church members began discussing raising funds to commission a stained glass window for the sanctuary window above the altar. A committee formed to make suggestions for the design and to select an artist. Butler submitted a design for consideration in fall 2015, with an estimated cost of \$30,000. Rev. Daniel Lepley, Our Shepherd's senior pastor, began an educational campaign in December 2015 to teach the congregation about the window, its design elements and the benefits of having a fine art piece as a reminder of God's love and provisions for His children, as well as an evangelistic message to our community. At the end of December, a collection was taken during the church services in the hopes of raising funds needed to purchase the window. Our Shepherd members, and friends from seven states contributed over \$36,732.48 for the window! It was finally time to begin building.

## THE IMAGES

Many of the images Butler chose to use are found in religious art through the centuries. The Lamb and victory banner, for example, are old symbols used in a variety of liturgical art. Butler takes design inspiration from classical works as well as images he finds in his research, to create a unique piece all his own.

The Lamb was requested by the church as a central theme for the window. Brad combined aspects of a variety of lamb drawings to arrive at our unique Lamb, and used a lion's mane idea for the Lamb to give it a nobler look. There is much detail in the Lamb that might be missed from viewing the Lamb at a distance, including the detail in the lamb's wool and hooves, and the incredible life-like eyes. Pastor Lepley said the detail in the eyes called to mind the description of the "Lamb on His throne" in Revelation 7. Due to the detailed painting of the Lamb, particular stained glass pieces required as many as five firings in a kiln to set all the colors. The milky glass that was used came from a

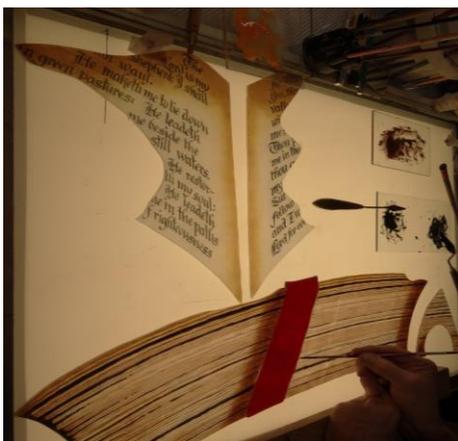


Pennsylvania glass manufacturer, Youghiogheny Opalescent Glass Company and is so unique that other glass makers are unable to copy it.

The staff, the traditional symbol of a shepherd, actually takes the form of a cross, and sits in the arms of the lamb much like a king's scepter.

The victory banner symbolizes Christ's victory over the sin, Satan, and death. Banners such as this are often found in liturgical art. Butler had a certain look he wanted to achieve with the color and texture which required a special kind of glass from Koko Glass Co., an Indiana glass maker, and a number of firings to get the right textural effect.

The banner includes the Alpha and Omega, representing Christ as the beginning and the end. It also features the Latin words, Agnus Dei, meaning Lamb of God, and INRI, the letters printed above Christ's head at the crucifixion, meaning Jesus Christ, King of the Jews. The letters are a marvel in themselves. Butler and Vargo used a technique never done before - beveling the edge of the glass pieces so they would lay flush against each other. This was done so they wouldn't have to add a line of leadwork through the letters to make the pieces of the letters hold together. The finished result is a letter that looks like one piece of glass, but is actually two or more pieces put together.



The open Bible is the Word of God and foundation of our faith. It also reminds us of an important part of our Lutheran heritage, that Martin Luther made the Bible available to everyone through his translation of it into the language of the common man. It also symbolizes how God's Word is available to everyone and is for everyone.

## THE PROCESS

When designing a piece, Brad begins by free-hand drawing the design. He then uses a stylus and drawing mat to transfer the design to PhotoShop, and refines the final product on Corel Draw X6.

In October 2015, Brad and Andrew began sketching out the design on a large sheet of paper that would become the pattern pieces for the glass. Each piece was numbered for the assembly process, resulting in well over 500 individual pieces of stained glass.



The majority of the stained glass comes from the [Kokomo Opalescent Glass Company](#) in Kokomo, Indiana. KOG is America's oldest glass manufacturer, founded in 1888, and is world-renowned for its high quality art glass, and wide variety of colors and styles.

Brad also utilized glass from another well-known manufacturer. The [Youghiogheny Opalescent Glass Company](#) in Pennsylvania created the glass used for the Bible and Lamb, as well as the gold background glass.

Brad paints the various details of the images onto the glass, then fires them in a kiln at 1080 degrees Fahrenheit to set the paint. Sometimes, more than one firing is required, as was the case with the lamb's features. Finally, the completed piece of glass is fired at 1090 degrees to mature the paint and glass before installing it into the design.

In the case of the victory banner, Butler hoped to achieve a unique color and effect, so he used a piece of glass from KOG, etched the back of the glass, then fired it at 1250 degrees to fine polish the back of the glass while still keeping the texture of the etching. This process creates a glass piece that's more translucent than usual. Butler said that he had to use care in the firing, because firing at too high a temperature would cause the glass to become opaque, and would ruin the effect.

Brad installed five diffuser glass pieces behind the window - a smaller one in the center of the frame, and four in quarters of the exterior - to increase the light saturation through the different elements of the work, allowing certain elements to "glow". The aluminum frame around the work was painted burgundy to blend with the color of the altar wall, and the



frame sits eight inches away from the stained glass. The aluminum frame itself is a Butler Vargo creation they have used on other installations, but is unique to them. It provides stability to the finished piece, particularly to windows that are exposed to the elements, although stained glass is durable and flexes.

Brad said he lost count of the number of hours he and Andrew spent working on the window project. He mentioned that creating a stained glass piece can be nerve-wracking; the process is

long, the multiple firings take time, and sometimes there are unknown imperfections in the glass that don't make it through the firing process.

## THE ARTISTS

Brad Butler graduated with a Masters of Fine Art from the Pratt Institute in New York. He spent 15 years as the VP of

Operations for the largest sign maker on the East coast before moving to Indiana to manage a stained glass art studio. Already an artist in other mediums, Butler began assisting the studio artists with the simpler elements of their work, and gradually fell in love with the craft. Eventually he opened his own stained glass design studio behind his home on the East side of Indianapolis, specializing in art for churches. He



prefers religious art because of its historical significance in churches, and because of its ability to create a worshipful experience for the viewer. In recent years, Butler partnered with his son-in-law, Andrew Vargo, who has learned the craft and helps with all aspects of the design creation, manufacture and installation of the art pieces.

*“That’s why I like doing work for churches. It’s up there for a long time. It’s lasting...It’s about that historical connection.”*

Butler's inspiration comes from the great artists throughout time, plus books he has read, people he knows, images he finds in his research, and from his imagination. He used his daughter, Hilari, as the model for a Joan of Arc stained glass piece that drew inspiration from Mark Twain's book about [Joan of Arc](#).

When asked how he creates his designs, he said he thinks about the design elements and eventually inspiration hits - sometimes right away, and sometimes after a lot of thought. He tries to sketch out his ideas right away before they are lost.

*"That's kind of the way inspiration comes...it's fast! And you just have to grab it."*

Butler's hobbies include making stained glass, painting, and bird watching. He even entered his painting of Governor O'Bannon in a contest to select an official portrait.

Butler and Vargo often develop a video of their creation process to go along with the work after completing the installation. They are currently working on one for the Our Shepherd lamb window.

Butler says their studio's goal is "to start out making our best." Their other work can be viewed at [ButlerVargo Fine Art](#).