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Author

Dickinson, Duo

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Duo Dickinson

60 Panes Of Faith

Embracing the Past, Embodying the Future

Time is inevitably cast in the amber of our objects. Those objects can be signs that identify, symbols that reflect a greater reality, or icons that connect to something that is more than history or aesthetics. This is a piece on the relationship between icons of intent and icons of coincidence.

When cataclysmic coincidence created ad hoc salvaged bits of World Trade Center, wreckage was saved and given a reverential context in a memorial. At that point, the salvaged material ceased to be a sign of the properties of structural steel. Instead, their distorted and broken shape is an iconic portal to the extreme pain caused by human cruelty. As an object of iconic coincidence, the wreckage became elegiac through a shift in context.

When designed objects are preconceived as embodying more than their tangible or aesthetic reality they purposely convey their origins and message. These are icons of intent. For Christians, the Incarnation of God in man is iconically distilled in the empty cross—the graphically simplest of symbols that travels well in any context to convey its spiritual impact.

Based on my work as an architect designing the new offices for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, this article focuses on how some elements of iconic intent were removed from their generating physical context, and invigorated with new meaning by becoming icons of coincidence.

In the 1950s sixty panes of stained glass replaced clear panes in an existing 1913 home in an overt effort to transform the mansion's sunroom into a Chapel when the mansion became the home office of the church. Those panes now follow the Episcopal Church to its new offices as recycled icons, where they will take on a new role as points of historic connection and transformation. In this case, the use and reuse of sixty panes of glass signals the transformation of meaning through a new location in a changing time.

Context: Spirituality in Transition

Since World War II, in Europe and New England, religious belief has waned (Hitchens, 2007). Many families who once held religious



Figure 1 New site for the Protestant Episcopal Church in America: A mansion.

observance as central to their lives no longer set aside the Sabbath day to worship. Instead of attending to a “day of rest” in religious venues, time is spent in Starbucks, shopping malls, or sports arenas.

Cultural transitions, including a changing landscape of faith, alter the meaning of religious icons. White clapboard churches on town greens used to symbolize New England Christianity. Now they lend the region historic gravitas while their role in religious life declines.

But the process of secularization does not mean religious icons become merely historic. Focal icons like a church can become a touchstone for new forms of spiritual life. The universal symbolism of the cross may convey the essence of the Christian message in resurrection but meta-icons need contextual connection or they slide away on the secular tide into artifact status.



Figure 2 The mansion was retrofitted as a chapel with a “Swamp Yankee” mindset.

Context: History and Locus

Sixty years ago the offices of the Connecticut branch of the Church of England, the Protestant Episcopal Church in America moved to a new site: a mansion. Designed by architect Erick K. Rossiter, for Charles William Johnson's daughters Mabel and Eleanor and their aunt Elizabeth Stedman in 1913, the ten bedrooms, six bath Tudor home was located in the Hartford's wealthy West End, alongside many other "stately" homes built before the mid-20th century. At that time, Hartford Connecticut was a bustling city that harbored Industrial Revolution magnates, and emboldened by being the seat of new insurance empires and Connecticut's state government (Sterner 2012; Commemorative Biographical Record of Hartford County, Connecticut 1901).

In 1952, at the urging of Bishop Walter Henry Gray, the home shifted owners and became the property of the Episcopal Church. Without irony, the once private mansion gained a proper new name: Diocesan House. Although the building was residential in origin, the superimposition of the offices of the Anglican Church in America, the Episcopal Church, within its Tudor walls was almost seamless.

The leap in use from "domestic" to "religious" had a physical manifestation so stealthy that those driving by had only signs and a new parking lot to indicate the home's new identity as a spiritual center. On the inside however, a building with a new religious focus needed a place to practice the preaching they were facilitating. Rather than build a new place of worship that would counter the mansion's history, a chapel was retrofitted into an existing space.

Iconic Transformation: From Domestic to Sacred Space

In contradistinction to the familial hubris embodied in the mansion's original construction, this conversion of a secular space to a religious one

manifests a classic “Swamp Yankee” (Schell, 1963) mindset: No walls, windows, or surfaces were removed, but the room’s reinvention was achieved; waste not, want not. As described in *Connecticut Churchman* (Chapel Windows at Diocesan House, 1953) Len R. Howard of Kent, Ct. envisioned five of the existing six openings infused with new iconic insertions “teaching something of the history of the church.” Only the window at the end of the space, the backdrop for the freestanding altar, remained clear.

Beyond a new freestanding altar and candlesticks donated by Bishops, the existing solarium was subtly transformed by deft insertions of sixty pieces of stained glass as intentionally iconic avatars of history. The context of each icon pane was completely formatted by the existing glazing divisions.

The original solarium was an eclectic hybrid of style, technology and the timing of its creation. Apparently executed after the main home was finished, while the structure of the solarium clearly did not integrate with the existing structure, its detailing matched the parent building. The heating system of low sheet metal encased radiators was robustly retrofitted with exposed insulated pipes.

The solarium’s windows infill Tudor-esque ogee-arched masonry openings, but they used classically New England style wooden muntins, mullions and frames - right out of the Royal Barry Wills (Wills, 1946) playbook with individual true divided lite panes. These muntin “grilles” serve as armatures for the scattered pattern of retrofit pieces of art.

Sponsored by dozens of individual donors, the panes of hand painted icons and leaded glass were slipped into these muntin grids over a fifteen-year period. The last piece was installed in 2001. Rather than a holistic reinvention, the continual process of installing new panes amid the transparent clear glass existing windows suggested future retrofits for an indeterminately open-ended occupancy as a place of worship.



Figure 3 Photograph by author.



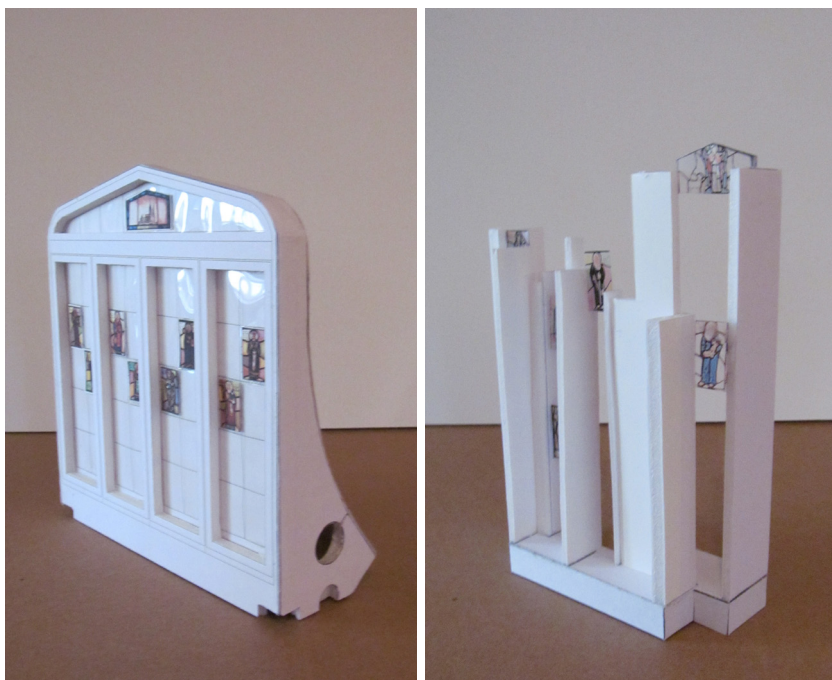


Figure 4 Model of original design (left) and the new design (right).

Given the intentional freeze-framing of a specific religion, in a specific country, in a specific building's smallest available armature, it's not surprising that these individual panes were similarly exquisitely specific in their iconography.

Five "Epoch's" were commemorated in each window's Tudor/ Colonial armature. Gothic/Renaissance techniques depicting ancient European and American images were awkwardly resonant with the unapologetically eclectic interior. The entry door to the space had panes inserted celebrating Religion in the Arts. The remaining flanking windows within the Chapel itself embraced each one of the five Epochs. Each Epoch had designated stakeholders in the church memorialized by the creation of the iconic glass. These small panes guilelessly depict

people and places that embody and symbolize Christianity, The Anglican Church, and The Episcopal Church in America:

1 Our Lord (Jesus and the Apostles and Evangelists)—in Memorial to Clergy and Those Who Served in the Church 2 Early Church Fathers (Saints)—in Memorial to Laymen Who Served in Diocesan Posts 3 Medieval and Reformation Church ([mostly] European Buildings and People)—in Memorial to Local Parish Priests 4 Church in the British Isles (British Buildings and People)—in Memorial to Lay Persons Who Volunteered in Local Parishes 5 The Church in America (George Washington, Bishops, Martin Luther King and others) in Memorial to Clergy or Lay Persons the National Church 6 As noted the sixth piece was the portal into the space—depicting the arts—Music (Handel, Mendelssohn), Words (Spenser, Milton), Representational (Durer, Giotto, Rembrandt)—with various memorialization by their donors.

Over the course of sixty years, the sunroom thus became the All Saints Chapel, accruing many other iconic, historic and incidental objects, furniture and art. Its ad hoc collectivism was a good fit for a church whose Protestant origins celebrate the personalized individual connection to God versus a more Catholic collective relationship through a church hierarchy.

Redefining Via Relocation

Those sixty panes of glass installed over sixty years, would still be innocently random retrofits, quietly conferring a spiritual scent in a sunroom, if the Diocese decided to stay put. But staying put would have meant the church was standing still, which is slow motion suicide in 21st century religious reality. After a decade of considering

renovation strategies that would allow the Diocesan House to achieve energy efficiency, handicapped accessibility and realistic parking accommodation, it was clear a new venue had to be sought. Beyond the dollars and cents realities of a diminishing constituency, the messaging of inhabiting a place of culturally rejected values had to respond to a secularizing society.

Diocesan House was sold in 2013. The Diocesan offices moved in 2014 to a repurposed 19th century ball bearing factory in a post-industrial New Urban context of downtown Meriden, Connecticut. The light-filled 11,000 square foot loft space was crisply renovated in the 1990's for a tech start-up. The new venue is an apt refocus for a church in transition—but raw space needed to be made to fit a new purpose.

A modest renovation was designed for this rented space, and the symbolism of leaving a late Gilded Age mansion to occupy a Post-Industrial reuse in a struggling blue color city was intentional. Physical relocation facilitated a holistic review involving the transition of people, files, and icons to a new venue. What could have been a hopeless downsizing triggered a reconsideration of how the sacred now fits into a world with a changing view of religion.

The Design Realized

The design for the church's new home called for the corporate sensibilities of a traditional "Office Space" to be eschewed. Initially a large scale office furnishings supplier/designer suggested a cubicle-filled space with the CEO (the Diocesan Bishop) in a separate walled office of honor—much like the space it replaced at the head of the stairs at the abandoned Diocesan House—up and away. Embracing a corporate identity with stock, new and anonymous furnishings to define flexible space and relegate history to a controlled archive would be too

predictable, would deny the “both/and” identity of a living church infused with its historic underpinnings.

Instead, the ethos envisioned by the client, the Diocesan Bishop Ian Douglas, was one of egalitarian openness of space with separations only as necessary for privacy and security, the space itself inspired a ‘both/and’ approach to the design. Archives would be in a separate secure ‘vault’, personal conversations and finances would happen in the existing separate flanking office spaces. Otherwise, Bishops, Canons, and staff would all be in the central open space.

It would have been easy to buy stock movable partitions to facilitate the reconfiguration of this main open area from the large commercial supplier. It would also have been easy to install the salvaged All Saints Chapel windowpanes as a permanent exhibit in the archives, along with the portraits of previous Bishops. But both solutions deny the role of new contexts to refocus intent and inspire and reflect transformation.

Mirroring the transformation of the church and its community through their shift to a new home, I proposed a design that re-contextualized the stained glass icon windows from the old All Saints Chapel as moveable partitions to allow various configurations of space in the open area of the office. My first design response was to incorporate the windows in their entirety, removing them from the sunroom’s masonry openings, giving each of those the units a new rolling base. However, I realized that approach precluded transformation of the objects through a new context. Rather than transforming the space, or being transformed by a new context, the popped out windows would be anchors to a past that is increasingly disconnected from contemporary culture.

An intentional, clear break from precedence was needed, requiring a new context for the existing icons, one that celebrated their transportation. Icons can be frozen markers of a moment that



Figure 5 Photography by author

has vanished, or they can be portals of new life as seen through an established context. The current design attempts to maintain the epochal organization of the panes while rejecting all other possible allusions.

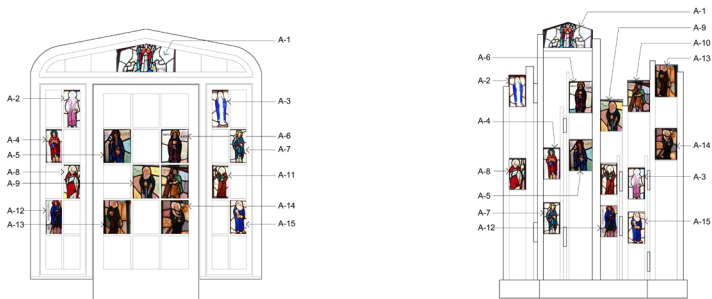
Details and Designs

The design attempts to redefine the icons as points of memory, history and inspiration, creating new meaning for old icons. Rather than leave



Figure 6 Photography by author

them in their static muntin straight jacket the panes are removed to become individual time capsules. The removed panes are swaddled between two pieces of safety glass; each set in a metal frame and then mounted in a wood armature that is neither Colonial nor Tudor. Paint, or even a consistent finish, does not homogenize the wood. Instead, different species of salvaged wood of varying thickness, widths and heights, are arrayed to hold each Epoch's icons as dynamic compositions, reinterpreting the ad hoc insertion of the panes while maintaining each



Our Lord, Apostles and Evangelists and New Testament Figures
Memorial to Clergy who have served in Diocesan Posts

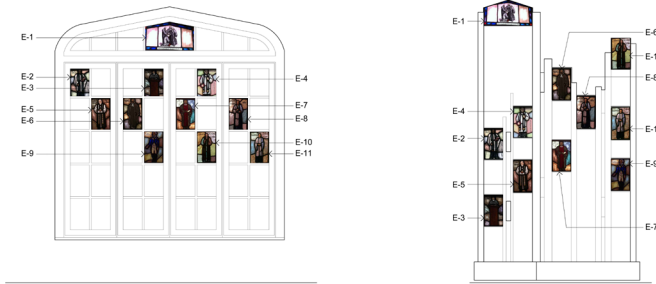
A-1	Our Lord, Christ the Good Shepherd Gift of the Bishop Walter Henry Gray in memory of Bishop Edward C. Johnson			
A-2	A-5	A-6	A-11	A-14
Gift of the Diocesan Alum Guild in memory of departed members of the Guild	Gift of Mrs. James P. Andrews in memory of Canon Sidney W. Wallace	Gift of Diocesan House In employers in memory of Bishop John H. Esquirol	Gift of the Church of St. Andrew the Apostle, in gratitude for the ministry of Bishop Walter Henry Gray	Gift of the Standing Committee of 1972 in memory of the Rev. Daniel M. Cheney
A-3	A-6	A-9	A-12	A-15
The Bishop's Wife Mary, Mother of Our Lord	Gift of Mrs. James P. Andrews in memory of Dean Arthur F. Mackenney	St. Paul	Gift of Mrs. Annie M. Gecker in memory of The Rev. Dr. Elmer J. Cook	Gift of friends in St. Mary's Church, Manchester, in memory of the Rev. Alfred L. Williams
A-4	A-7	A-10	A-13	
St. Matthew	Gift of Christ Church Cathedral in memory of Canon John F. Plumb	St. Simon the Zealot	Gift of the Standing Committee of 1972 in memory of The Rev. Daniel M. Cheney	
			Gift of Virginia Gray in memory of Bishop Frederick G. Bullock	

Figure 7 Chart identifying the figures on the panes.

Epochal clustering. The unfinished, reclaimed wood is in sync with the sandblasted pine timber frame of the factory space.

The signature, crowning pane, originally set to the peak of the ogee arched transom, remains the highest icon, but symmetry is aggressively rejected and replaced with a dynamic array that places raw materiality in balanced asymmetry. Redefinition of the salvaged wood's antiquity is achieved by having all cut sides polished, revealing the clear heart of the wood between the untouched weathered edges of each piece of reclaimed lumber.

The planks are shifted to become unaligned, providing stiffness but also creating a visual barrier when seen from an oblique, angled encounter. The metal frames surrounding the salvaged panes act as compression



The Church in America

Memorial to Clergy or Lay Persons who have served the National Church.

E-1 Consecration of Bishop Sweeney Gift of the Church Club of Connecticut				
E-2 The Rev. Thomas Goodale Gift of the Rev. Sherman Bassie in memory of his great great grandfather, the Rev. Thomas Goodale.	E-5 Bishop Charles H. Brent Gift of Mrs. Robert M. Hatch in memory of The Rev. Dr. James T. Addison.	E-8 Bishop William Hubert Herr Gift of Mrs. Fred O. Williams	E-11 The Rev. Dr. Zebulon T. Phillips Gift of the family of Zeburney T. Phillips	
E-3 Jonathan Davis Gift of the Diocesan House Staff in honor of Bishop Arthur E. Walsley.	E-6 The Rev. Dennis Baskin Gift of the Diocesan House Staff in honor of Bishop Jeffery W. Rowthorn.	E-9 President George Washington Gift of St. John's Church, East Hamford, in memory of Amos T. McCook.		
E-4 Philip Beards	E-7 The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Gift of the Diocesan House Staff in honor of Bishop Jeffery W. Rowthorn.	E-10 Bishop Henry St. George Tucker Gift of Mrs. Robert M. Hatch Staff in honor of Bishop Arthur E. Walsley.		

Figure 8 Chart identifying the figures on the panes.

members with threaded rods running through to connect the vertical wood armatures into a stable assembly. The bases are newly milled birch under raw planks and have casters for movement, with shims to create static positioning. The bases are filled with lead shot to prevent tipping.

These movable partitions can sit along walls, be grouped to define space or be set to celebrate their own identity as sentinels of human and cultural legacy. Glass, once only appreciated from one side, is now seen from both sides. There is no front/back, no inside/outside. Icons once trapped in a traditional grid are now distinct images grasped in a dynamic context that rejects a pat stylistic definition.

The wood is simultaneously honestly old, but now freshly renewed. The faces are cut and sanded smooth and receive a clear high gloss finish,



Figure 9 Photograph by author.



while the edges of each board are left raw, gray and overtly impacted by the passage of time. Despite a thin aged skin, each piece is materially exposed via selective refinishing, revealing the same characteristics of wood used in new construction every day.

This choreographed dance between old, new, renewed and repurposed is a celebration of new life for collectively reinvented pieces and parts. The acknowledgement of history held in a conscientiously modern dynamism is energetically symbolic. All these aesthetic decisions embody the non-aesthetic fact that an abandoned ball bearing factory, like the church, like the Epochal Panes, and for many, the spiritual reality within our lives can be renewed.

In their salvage, these panes of glass become heirlooms of a time that venerated antiquity as foundation for faith. In their reinterpretation these allusive vestiges are proffers of hope in a future of inspiration and change.

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