

# DENVER CATHOLIC REGISTER



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## HOME IMPROVEMENT

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### Annunciation Parish needs help preserving treasure

Deterioration of frame places Rose Window at considerable risk

One of Denver's most beautiful churches is also located in one of the area's poorest neighborhoods. Parishioners are seeking assistance to help preserve stained glass windows said to be among the finest ever produced by the famed Mayer and Zettler studios in Munich, Germany.

With its vaulted ceiling, ornate marble altar and golden oak pews, Annunciation Church in northeast Denver is so beautiful that it has been described as a "jewel box." Its sacredness and warmth led to its selection as the site for filming the hit television series "The Father Dowling Mysteries."

As filming was taking place, no one realized that real danger was lurking from above.

Recently, workers repairing the church's exterior found that the wooden blocks used to secure the giant Rose Window had deteriorated after years of exposure to the elements. When a worker pressed against the window to test its stability, he was startled to find that it swayed back and forth several inches.

Work immediately stopped

as two iron bars were placed on the exterior and interior of the 11-foot window to hold it in place. Once secured, the parish community set out to preserve the artistic treasure in their beloved church.

"First of all we are thankful that the problem was identified before a storm or a strong wind caused the window to fall and possibly injure someone," said Father Gene Emrisek, pastor at Annunciation for the past eight years, recently assigned to a new post in the Diocese of Colorado Springs. "Now that the window has been secured, our concern is to find a way to preserve it and other windows in our church."

Father Gene has a pat response whenever someone remarks about the fact that the exquisite windows are in one of Denver's most disadvantaged areas.

"I always quote Father Thomas More Janek, a former pastor, who said, 'the poor need beauty too,'" quipped the pleasant-looking Capuchin Franciscan wearing his brown friars robe secured by a knotted white cord.

An anonymous donor has stepped forward to help the parish offset the cost of pre-



Photo by James Shaw

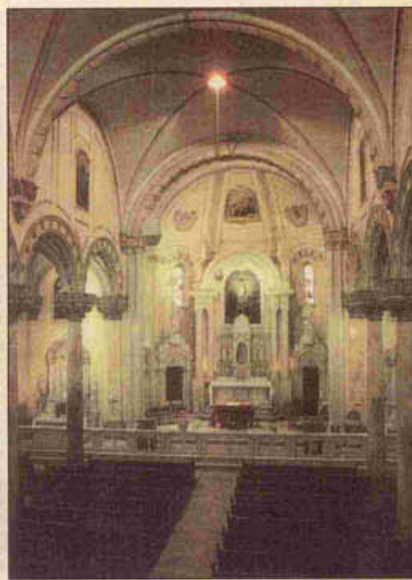


Photo provided to DCR

Left, stained glass from Annunciation Church in northeast Denver, and right, an interior view.

serving the stained glass, but the community was shocked to discover that the giant ornate frame containing the image of Christ the King in the Rose Window would need to be completely rebuilt.

Rebuilding the frame and reinforcing the structure of the church will cost \$62,600. Restoring the glass will cost an additional \$36,350, for a total cost of \$98,950.

"In a lot of places, the frame

of the window is rotted nearly all the way through," Father Gene said. "Not restoring the window is not an option, so we are trying to determine the best way to approach the problem,

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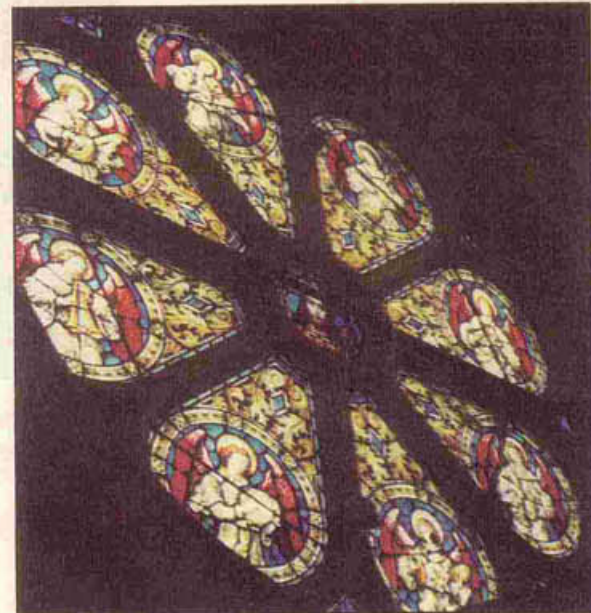


Photo provided to DCR

The giant Rose Window in need of restoration at Annunciation Church in Denver.

## Threatened treasures

Stained glass windows at Annunciation Church need repair — 11

### Annunciation windows among finest in West, artisan says

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given our lack of resources."

Since being established in Colorado in the 1800s, the Watkins Stained Glass Studio has been operated by a family that is legendary in the trade of creating and restoring beautiful windows.

The current owner, Phillip R. Watkins, Jr., says that the windows at Annunciation rate as among the finest west of the Mississippi.

Gazing around the interior of Annunciation during a recent visit, Watkins pointed out the face of St. Agnes in a window on the north side of the church.

"It's almost as if you would expect her to turn and look at you," remarked Watkins.

Known for their extreme attention to detail, the artisans at the Meyer and Zettler Studios were able to create picture-like compositions that have an almost life-like appearance, Watkins explained.

From the lovely image of St. Agnes, to the dramatic visages of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Peter, Annunciation Church is filled with remarkable works

of art. Wire mesh grills on the outside of the church protect the windows from hail and street damage and disguise the amazing beauty inside the church.

The windows were the legacy of Father Michael Francis Callanan, a native of Ireland who served as pastor from 1916 to 1934. One of a long line of immigrant pastors, he remodeled the interior with the stained glass windows and other noted pieces of sacred art.

Watkins confirmed that the window is in urgent need of attention.

"The frame itself is ready to fail and as it does it will crack and crush the windows," he explained. "The windows in the Rose Window were installed with putty. Most of the putty is gone and the rest is cracked with little integrity.

"Daylight can be seen around the edges of many of the windows and are held into a frame that could fail at any time," he added.

While the Colorado Historical Society has restrictions on funding certain types of restorations, the parish community is hopeful that some funds may be

secured to help offset the cost of removing the frame before it collapses.

Restoring the Rose Window will require scaffolding to be set up outside the church. The stained glass panels will be removed, followed by the frame itself. The brickwork around the perimeter of the frame will be restored, and the hole plugged with plywood until the restored window can be replaced.

Watkins will replace the broken pieces and fix those that are cracked. Master glass painter, Joan Chandler, who has been working with fine stained glass for more than 11 years, will assist in the restoration.

Individuals or groups interested in helping Annunciation Parish preserve the artistic treasure of its stained glass windows are urged to call Michelle Pierson, project coordinator, at 303-296-1024. Donations may be sent to: Annunciation Windows, 3621 Humboldt St., Denver, CO 80205.

Tours of the church are available on a limited basis. For more information, call Michelle Pierson at the number listed above.