

For More Information

www.jlsloan.com

Consultant in stained glass conservation and project manager

www.churchconstruction.com/stainglass.htm

Nationwide directory of stained glass fabricators, restorers, and conservators

www.stainedglass.org

Website of the Stained Glass Association of America

www.nysparks.state.ny.us/field/fsb/stainedglass

Compendium of stained glass conservation resources

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*How are you
preserving your
stained glass?*

**Care &
Preservation
of Stained Glass
Windows**

**Conservation of
Church Art**

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Many Episcopal churches incorporate a variety of stained glass windows that glorify God, memorialize benefactors, and beautify the worship space. The value of these windows—financially, historically and sentimentally—is significant. Thus, caring for and preserving them is an important aspect of church facilities management. Although they are durable and designed to withstand normal operational and environmental stresses, stained glass windows deserve additional attention.

Research

The first step in caring for stained glass windows is to research all available information about their original design and installation, and any subsequent restoration work. Identifying a window's designer or fabricator is a key to determining its market value (as a work of fine art) and replacement cost. Moreover, historical information may prove valuable when undertaking faithful restoration.

Physical Evaluation and Condition

The next step is to evaluate the physical nature and condition of the window to determine if repair or restoration is needed. This calls for a trained eye—ideally, a conservationist experienced in the care of stained glass windows. Alternatively, a stained glass artisan or historian may be able to help with the assessment.

Deterioration

Only an expert can determine the extent of deterioration and what corrective measures should be taken. However, church property managers should be alert to several conditions that may indicate a need for repair or restoration:

Glass

Breakage, cracks, and missing pieces are clear indicators of a need for repair. Light leaks in the seams between the glass and the lead, brass, or zinc used to hold the

glass panels together also indicate a need for repair. They will usually appear when putty has deteriorated and the glass is sagging away from the seams. Check for flaking paint—but do not remove flakes by touching or rubbing them. Even old paint is a vital and historic part of the window and it must be left in place for proper decorative restoration.

Support System

Inadequate support is the most common cause of damage in stained glass windows. Improper support will cause a window to sag and bulge, stressing the glass and joints, eventually causing them to break. The most common cause of this is frame deterioration due to wood rot or improper installation. Such conditions should be professionally corrected as soon as possible to prevent further damage to the window.

Cleaning and Maintenance

Proper care of stained glass windows includes periodic cleaning, examination, and repair. A maintenance plan should include yearly inspections by the property custodian, coupled with professional assessments by a specialist every three to five years. Moveable panels—those in doors or operable windows—should be inspected more often because they are subjected to greater wear and tear. Document the timing of inspections, conditions noted and remedial action taken, including specific names of products used in repair or restoration processes.

Window frames must be carefully maintained. Wood, iron, and steel frames should be painted regularly to inhibit rotting or corrosion, with special care taken not to paint on the glass. Stone frames should be repaired as necessary. Operable vents must be lubricated regularly but sparingly to ensure smooth operation; they should never have to be tugged open or slammed shut, as such stresses will increase the likelihood of glass breakage.

Stained glass is readily soiled and can be very difficult to clean after years of neglect. Windows in poor condition are often the dirtiest, as cleaning has become difficult, ineffective, or has been discontinued to avoid causing further damage. Some deeply textured glass can be especially troublesome, requiring strong cleaning agents and hard work to remove all dirt.

Heavy-duty cleaning should always be undertaken by a professional.

Cleaning should be performed gently with liquid glass cleaners intended for stained glass, such as Kem-O-Pro. Never spray the windows directly with the cleanser, but apply it to a soft, clean white cloth and gently wipe the glass. Dampened cotton swabs may be used for detail work in the corners. The zinc and brass seams used in a majority of windows are hollow and vulnerable to corrosion when infiltrated by dripping cleanser. Do not scrub metal seams with abrasives or wire brushes, as this will hasten deterioration of the metal and detract from its beauty.

If the glass is fairly clean, the cleaning protocol described above may be undertaken semiannually. Between full cleanings, the windows should be gently dry-wiped monthly. Remember that these windows may be very fragile and delicate—the cleaning process must be gentle and meticulous.

Protection

One of the greatest problems in stained glass conservation is protecting windows from vandalism and the natural environment. The favored method of window protection in the United States is a form of glazing, available in a variety of materials and styles. All glazing should be external, unless interior vandalism is a concern. Polycarbonate (Lexan) sheeting is the most commonly recommended covering because it will not break on impact—making it an excellent defense against vandalism. Plate glass or leaded panels may deter vandalism but do not afford the same protection as polycarbonate; however, they allow greater infiltration of natural light and may be aesthetically preferable.

Bear in mind that the central concern with protective glazing should be function, not appearance. Although the primary purpose is to protect windows, a secondary benefit is energy conservation. Note, however, that all protective glazing should be ventilated to prevent the buildup of condensation between the stained glass window and the glazing, which can be detrimental to the window's structural integrity.