

A Brief History
of the Stained Glass Windows at
St. Francis Lutheran Church



152 Church Street, San Francisco, CA 94114
www.sflcsf.org

San Francisco Historic Landmark No. 39

Fourteen stained glass windows at St. Francis were original to the church upon its dedication in 1906. The windows have been repaired and restored several times over the past 100+ years. A brief overview is provided here.

The Sanctuary

The south and north walls each have a large center window framed by two smaller windows. The center window design features two arch-shaped panels. Shown below are the glass medallions from these four panels:



The Sanctuary – South Wall

The center window on the south side of the sanctuary (shown on the cover) is in memory of Mrs. Charles Nelson, widow of Captain Charles Nelson, a well-known 19th Century coastal vessel owner and lumber merchant who died in 1909. Together with the Ladies of the Scandinavian Ladies Benevolent and Relief Society, and with funding organized by the recently widowed Mrs. Charles Crocker, Mrs. Nelson organized and opened The Old Peoples Home of San Francisco in 1874.

On Good Friday, 1964, the Great Alaskan earthquake broke the small south window on the right. It was repaired and dedicated to the memory of Joseph Langensand by Mrs. Aneli Langensand and her four children who were active in the Sunday School. During the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake all of the south windows were damaged and had to be removed. The restoration was completed by the Great Panes Company of Calistoga, with support from The San Francisco Victorian Alliance.



The Sanctuary – North Wall

The center window on the north side is dedicated “In Memory of our Five Little Ones.” The tribute was probably commissioned by Captain Charles Nelson, whose first wife, the former Miss Metha Clausen (see above), died in 1896. The couple had six children, five of whom died in infancy.

The left side window, shown here, is the only one of the smaller windows that bears an inscription, in memory of Mrs. Carrie Jensen, a person unknown. In 2003, all of the north windows were removed and restored.

The Narthex and Choir Loft

The “Jesus” window in the narthex was first restored as part of a 1992 church renovation project. A Danish inscription from the Gospel of John on the bottom of the window was not replaced. In 2015, the “Jesus” window was re-leaded and given a new frame. On the Feast of St. Francis in October 2015, the recent restoration will be dedicated to the memory of Eugene Clark[†].



A plain glass window in the choir loft (not shown) was replaced with stained glass in 1999. It was a gift in memory of the Reverend Spener Petersen by his widow and daughter, Alma and Donna Petersen. An historic photo of Pr. Petersen by the narthex window is displayed above.

Entry

The window over the front doors on Church Street displays Martin Luther’s coat of arms along with the inscription, “Come Unto Me.” These same words appear in Danish under the Christ statue in the sanctuary. This window was partially covered by a ceiling until the 1992 renovation project, when it was



fully exposed and restored. In 2015, broken glass was repaired, the window was re-leaded and the frame replaced. The 2015 restorations were completed by Lost Art Stained Glass Works of Pleasant Hill.



Memorial Terrace and Stairwells

The stained glass images of St. Francis and St. Clare, as seen from the entry court of the Memorial Terrace, are the original work of the Reverend Ruth Frost. The window was a gift from Pr. Frost, her partner, Pr. Phyllis Zillhart and their daughter Noelle in 1999.

The four windows in the stairwells were also restored as part of the 1992 project. They mirror the design of the side windows on the north and south walls in the sanctuary, although each has a unique top motif:



The St. Francis Stained Glass Preservation Fund

St. Francis Lutheran Church, located near the corner of Church and Market Streets, was built in 1905. The historic landmark structure boasts a Gothic style of architecture, modified in the Danish tradition. The beautiful stained glass windows described above are among the many charming features of St. Francis, especially at night when they grace the evening with their sublime light. The maintenance of these windows requires regular care and repairs can be very costly. In order to defray these expenses, the congregation recently established a preservation fund for receiving charitable donations. For more information, please visit our website at www.sflcsf.org.

+ Eugene Hoyne Clark (1929–2013) moved to San Francisco in 1959, after receiving his master's degree in music from Northwestern University and serving in the US Army during the Korean conflict. Professionally, Gene taught choral music in the San Francisco Unified School District for over twenty years. Throughout his career he also held part-time music positions at several Bay Area churches. At St. Francis, Gene was much beloved as organist and choir master. He was also active in the senior center and served on the congregation council. Gene is fondly remembered for his ministry of music, gentleness of spirit and generosity of heart.

Historical commentary based on A Century of Faith 1906-2006, The 100th Anniversary Celebration of the Dedication of Ansgar Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church on December 2, 1906. Compiled by The Reverend James DeLange, December 6, 2006.