

Masterpieces to Ponder

By Elsie Walker

When I was told that the First Presbyterian Church of Stanhope had some beautiful banners that I might want to photograph for the newspaper, I had no idea that what I would be seeing were beautiful thought-provoking paintings on a variety of topics. The banners, displayed in the church sanctuary, draw one in, as a certain image catches the heart and mind. The banners address a variety of subjects from Old Testament stories to events in the life of Christ to what humans have done to the world they received and more.

Created over a span of almost twenty years, the "banners" are the work of long-time congregation member Carol Barry of Byram.

"... I have always felt very privileged to be able to create banners to celebrate holidays and represent Christian beliefs for my church," said Barry. An adjunct at the College of St. Elizabeth where she teaches art methods, Barry uses her talents to enrich the worship experience in her church. It is clear to see that the church and art are important to her.

Barry taught art in Mt. Olive Township for 40 years, before retiring in June 2009. She taught in all the schools in the district, except for the high school.

"For my first 25 years, I worked under the direction of Lynn Dodson, the art department supervisor. She helped me understand clearly what I had believed innately - the importance of art education for all people. Art offers, not only the opportunity for self-expression, but to help develop parts of the brain that assists in learning all things. It is also the direct vehicle to develop creative problem solving skills and a good art program accesses a variety of human intelligences. Additionally, understanding world cultures of past and present, so essential in our increasingly global economy, should be an integral part of art educa-



Barry shows her piece which tells of the life events of Jesus.

tion as students gain a deep, humanistic, and unique understanding of the world. I was very fortunate to be able to combine my love of world travel with teaching art, offering many firsthand experiences of people and places foreign to most of my students. Over the years, I heard many times from parents that their children felt like they were 'traveling around the world with me.' Developing an understanding and appreciation of world cultures and history ties very strongly to learning

about art, one of the first humanistic expressions," shared Barry.

Barry's banners are painted using Tempura paint on Mural paper. Each one is 7 1/2 feet by 4 1/2 feet. She started painting them in the 1990's and finished the last one two months ago. The longest took eight months to paint; the shortest took two days. It is not only the painting that takes time, but the thought that goes into each theme. Barry reflected on that as she

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talked about her favorite piece: "God Gave Man Dominion on the Earth".

".....it demanded my personal reflection on all the things man has done throughout history and the world. Because of my own personal interest in world cultures and history, I 'enjoyed' the struggle in deciding what images to present. I made many lists of those I thought I would like to include over a period of almost two years, with continuous revisions. I tried to capture both positive and negative events and personalities, tried to cover main topics from the Stone Age to the present (a taunting task to try to cover about 20,000 years of the history of man....!) and include all parts of the world. I included images from science, the arts, personalities, and many that represent the thinking of specific cultures. My goal was for the painting to be thought provoking as each viewer pondered what we have done. The Aztec calendar was an extremely detailed image and it did take about two days to complete just that one little piece.

While often working for many hours at one time, I tried to be sure to stop work when I became too fatigued to keep to the standard I had set for myself. Because of the fine detail, I also found my eyes often became strained, and that also made it necessary to stop work for a while, " said Barry.

Barry's thought-provoking eye-appealing works inspire the members of the congregation, both old and young.

"The children are enthralled by the images, which are rotated on a regular basis. When a new banner is presented, the children know right away when they enter the sanctuary" said church member Christina Hornsby of Byram.

"The inspirational presence of her recent series of banners is a constant worshipful reminder of our Christian beliefs," noted Bette Van Patten of Mt. Bethel, Pennsylvania.

Currently, Barry's works hang in the church sanctuary. They will be taken down for Easter, but later will return, for all to enjoy and ponder.