

Banner team rose to the occasion

By Bill Hart

It began as a simple comment one Sunday after service.

Calgary Bishop Barry Curtis, filling in as incumbent while the parish searched for a new priest, was chatting with parishioner Liz Sutherland, looking at the narrow column of drywall that stretched to the highest point of the church directly behind the altar. “He said to me, 'I have an idea for you,'” Liz says, recalling the day in 2001. “'You see that blank space? We need some colour there, and I think you're the person to talk to about that.'”

Liz worked as a costume cutter for the Calgary theatre scene, taking a designer's sketch for a character and creating a custom-fit pattern for the costume and the actor. She'd created banners before, but nothing on this scale: just shy of six feet wide and 26 feet tall. “I looked at the space and thought, 'That's a lot,' she says with a smile, “but I thought about it, prayed on it, and came up with a proposal for vestry.”

Psalm 46 came to mind, and the references to God being our refuge and strength; mountains shaking; streams making glad the city of God; and the glorious holy tabernacles of the most high struck a chord with her. “That turned into the concept of earth at the bottom, water, flames, air, and the glory of God above,” she remembers. With the basic idea in mind, “I just started drawing” Liz says. “It did take a while to coalesce the elements.”

Planning and gathering the elements

The concept, design and proposal came together, and the vestry was asked to agree and to cover the cost of materials. Once approved, the next while was filled with creating the detailed plan, and shopping/scrounging for fabric. “Then I had to find the right fabrics – it's challenging to get the colours right.” Multiple trips to fabric stores were supplemented by finding scraps at work that would never find a home in a theatre costume. And with the banner of this size, Liz started with a cotton canvas backing to ensure the piece wouldn't wrinkle or stretch out of shape. More than 32 colours of fabric, as well as ribbons and net, went into fashioning the design.

The banner – built as appliqué, not a quilt – comprises three distinct eight foot, eight inch by five foot, 10 inch sections. The multi-shaped pieces of fabric that create the design are stitched on to each backing section, and fabric segments that overlap each section disguise where the three pieces are joined.



“I looked at the space and thought, 'That's a lot,'” Liz remembers fondly.

The actual “construction” was a true team effort: Liz used an overhead projector transparency to draw the design on to each segment, then cut the fabric pieces to fit. The assembly team – parishioners Cari Hart, Joan Lord, Jo Gair and Liz’s friend and work colleague Michelle Latta – would then satin-stitch each piece into place, giving them a finished edge. The construction came together in a week- one that Liz had no theatre work- with a great team of volunteers.

The hardest part, Liz remembers, was making sure all the pieces lay smoothly against the backing, especially where they overlapped between two segments. “That actually went pretty well,” she says. The bottom segment, which had the most intricate design, definitely was the most challenging (“Fabric pieces don’t always co-operate”), so they crafted it first, then worked their way up. “We had time for some chit-chatting while working but sometimes we had to really focus on the trickier parts.”

Planning, preparing, fabric shopping and assembling the 35-pound banner took about 65 person-hours.

Hoisting the banner

Then came the fun part – hanging it in place. Liz’s husband Colin (a Telus lineman) and his ladder were recruited to attach a length of 2x8 lumber to the top of the wall, then secure the banner to it. “We all held the banner and fed it to Colin,” Liz says, “and at that time there was a decorative screen above and behind the altar that helped support the banner as Colin attached it.

“The most rewarding part of the project was hanging it,” she says, “and working with the team of women who were so excited to tackle the project.” It remains the largest single project Liz has crafted: the next-closest is the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come costumes she created for one of Theatre Calgary’s productions of *A Christmas Carol*. “The actor was on drywall stilts, so he was 10 feet tall, and hockey shoulder pads supported a large headpiece that topped off the costume,” she says. “It took a lot of black waxed linen!”

Was she pleased with how the banner turned out? “Yes – it was a great collaborative effort.” Are there any glitches or things she would do differently today, more than two decades later? Liz smiles. “There is one little thing I don’t like,” she admits ... then chuckles. “But I won’t tell you what it is.”



Top photo: Jo Gair (rear) and Joan Lord hold up the nearly-finished banner. Lower photo: Liz’s husband Colin put his lineman skills to work hanging the piece of art. The decorative screen (removed some years later) added some challenges in design ... and hanging!