



Artist

guided by fearlessness and faith

A person's hands are shown holding a large, vibrant blue stained glass panel. The background is a workshop filled with various other stained glass pieces in different colors like green, purple, and orange, some mounted on wooden racks. The lighting is warm and focused on the person's hands and the blue panel.

S

heets of richly colored glass line the handmade wooden racks in Richard Hanley's studio next to his home north of Muskegon.

Look around and you'll see images of Christ on the walls and prayer cards here and there, including one of John Paul II tucked in a box of shims.

Nothing fancy or high tech, this pole-barn like structure is where Hanley creates the stained glass that adorns hundreds of churches. He sees himself as an interpreter, his work a reflection of people's deepest beliefs and faith stories.

"You're all artists," he tells people when he meets with them to discuss a new project. "Open up your hearts and minds and give me images and thoughts that I can put on paper...."

"I'm able to piece those answers together and create images. That's my art form."



>> Richard Hanley in his New Era studio

H

e brings his Catholic faith to every work, spending time in prayer before he tackles a new project. “I feel that one of our partners is God the creator,” said Hanley, sitting at the dining room table with his wife Anne in their New Era home. “We give the reins to Him all the time, and out of this come these great windows.”

For 37 years, Hanley has been creating stained-glass art as the owner of Omnibus Studios, Inc. He and his wife Anne, a registered nurse, have put their trust in God as they have raised a family and weathered the ups and down of not always knowing when the next project will come.

“We just believe God leads us,” says Hanley, 62. “We believe that God has a great purpose in our lives. We’re not afraid to totally trust in him and let him lead us.”

Early years

Hanley started sketching as soon as he could hold a pencil. The second of six children of Jeanne and the late Edmund Hanley, he looked forward to Sunday family dinners when his well-to-do aunt would visit. “I always had a picture to sell her,” he recalls with a smile.

Born and raised in Muskegon, Hanley attended St. Francis de Sales Catholic School. The Bernardine sisters “recognized my artistic ability,” he recalls. “They saw my potential and would have me create posters and other art for our classroom. The

good sisters helped me recognize the value of my gift.”

He even dabbled in “stained-glass” art. His sixth-grade teacher, Lois Moore, asked Hanley to turn their large school windows into a stained-glass depiction of the Nativity. So he stayed after school painting them. This work was photographed and appeared along with an article in the Muskegon Chronicle.

Hanley’s family encouraged his art, as well. On Christmas when he turned 7, his parents gave him an art supply kit that he treasured. He has a book compiled by his mother with his earliest drawings.

A major turning point came one day around 1960. His grandmother pulled out a weathered book that looked “ancient” to his 12-year-old eyes.

She handed him a pencil sketch of swans created by her father in 1873. An artist, like his great-grandson, he had wanted to study in Paris during the height of Impressionism but his parents would not let him.

“She gave me permission to be an artist – right then,” recalled Hanley. “She said, ‘You know, you’re going to be a great artist.’”

No fear

Hanley attended Muskegon Catholic Central High School. At age 16, with the encouragement of a former associate pastor at St. Francis, Hanley entered a Christian art show. He won fourth place for a crucifix he created by soldering together hammered pieces of tin that he cut from coffee cans, a work still on display at Peace Lutheran Church in Sparta.

He would go on to Michigan State University, where he pursued an art degree. "I was poised to be an industrial designer headed into designing automobiles," he said. "But honestly I wasn't very excited about it."

One day in the early 1970s, Mark Talaba approached him. Talaba, a recent MSU graduate, told Hanley he planned to open a stained-glass studio and asked him if he'd like to be the designer.

"So I made a major decision in about 10 minutes," Hanley said. "I basically dropped out of school and it began. It really was the fulfillment of something that was many years of things falling into place."

He could have said no, stuck with the practical goal of working in the automotive industry. But that's not Hanley, a man who believes that faith and fearlessness go hand in hand.

"One of the focuses of my life has always been trying not to be fearful," he explained. "I'm sort of a radical in a good sense. I'm swimming upstream. I'm not doing what normal people do all the time."

They rented studio space in Okemos. Then they heard about a stained-glass studio in Fort Wayne, Ind., that had gone out of business. Thousands of square feet of stained glass were up for auction. They bid and won.

Hanley and Talaba hired friends to help collect "thousands of dollars worth of glass" that would fill their 25-by-50 foot studio wall-to-wall.

Up to that point, Hanley had only a little experience with the stained glass craft.

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The two did what they could to survive – creating stained-glass lampshades, windows for new homes, everything from candle holders for a local restaurant to MSU memorabilia. Six or seven months after starting the business, they were handed a Detroit Free Press with a front page article about Detroit's stained-glass master, a Sicilian named Andrew Maglia. The elderly Maglia was seeking an apprentice who could take over his famous studio.

Hanley and Talaba went to meet him, and learned that he was dying of cancer and looking for apprentices. They worked with Maglia, helping him build windows for St. Scholastica Catholic Church in Detroit. Maglia had

also designed a stained-glass canopy for a mansion in Monroe, Mich. He asked Hanley to create a second design so that the owners could have a choice. They selected Hanley's.

"That was my first significant stained glass design and project," he said. "I helped cut the glass and assembler the twelve stained glass panels."

After that, Hanley and Talaba began doing more church work, and, in the late 1970s, he and Talaba parted ways.

Hanley took over the studio. A major turning point came when he learned that First Presbyterian Church in Brighton was looking for a studio to do stained-glass windows for a new sanctuary addition.

Led by multimillionaire and former U.S. Congressman Richard Chrysler, the church committee had flown to a few of



» (from top clockwise); Hanley (center, front row in bow tie) with his kindergarten classmates at St. Francis de Sales Catholic School in Muskegon. Hanley (standing left) with his mentor (in beret) Andrew Maglia. Hanley, 9, in fourth grade. Hanley at age 3.



Each stained glass window created by Richard Hanley begins with the people in the congregation.

"I tell people, 'When you were in kindergarten you were all artists. By the time you were in fourth grade you weren't, because you were afraid.' You have to figure out a way to get people past their fear."

Invariably, he does. The ideas begin flowing, then Hanley goes back to his studio. Often, he'll read the Bible then begin sketching. Once the committee approves of the drawings, the next phase begins.

You'll find no computers in Hanley's studio. Instead, he uses a projector to enlarge the image, which he then traces on huge sheets of vellum. Using carbon paper, he then transfers the image onto brown pattern paper, which he cuts into pieces with pattern shears. The individual glass pieces will be cut following the shape of each paper pattern. There are thousands of square feet of glass to choose from in his studio. Some has been hand-crafted in Germany, others by hourly workers in Kokomo, Ind.

"When we begin a project, I ask for the Lord's help as I scan the many glass choices and the large pattern that sits atop the light table," said Hanley, of the process of selecting the right glass. "This beginning point can be critical because one color builds on the next. It's a very complex puzzle at first."

From there, he and his employees cut the glass using the patterns and a glass-cutter. They wrap the pieces in lead to re-create the image in the sketch, then solder them together.

"This started out as words from people on a committee," Hanley said of the richly colored panels on his light table depicting Christ's Passion and Resurrection, the Holy Spirit and God's bounty. "It ended up with what you see."



the best studios in the country. One committee member was Mary Arnold, the mother of Scott Arnold, who worked for Hanley. They laughed when she suggested using Hanley's small Okemos studio, but invited them to come before the committee anyway.

Hanley created a sample panel and presented it to the committee. They got the job. Looking back, he credits "no fear and God" with giving him the pluck to get the commission. "Those two go together. I was fearless."

He and his crew of five craft workers created 24-foot high windows for the church, working 70-hour weeks over four months. "That was the turning point where all of a sudden I realized I could be as big as I wanted to be in this. From that point on we began doing nothing but churches."

“As a Catholic, my focus in my life is to be a loving person and to bring peace and to be fearless so that I can really express myself.”

God is their business partner

Until that point, Hanley was basically "married to my studio." But he was lonely, so he started praying for help finding a wife. A year passed and he became impatient. "I said, 'OK, Father, I'm always a man of peace but you know what I'm getting angry with you ... why don't you hurry up?'" His prayerful musings were interrupted when a young woman sat next to him at St. John's Student Center in E. Lansing.

"So I said, 'I know you have a sense of humor and maybe this is someone I should meet,'" recalled Hanley of his conversation with God. "Just show me a way. You're a God of miracles."

After Mass someone got up and encouraged everyone to attend a dinner dance to raise funds for St. John. Hanley, ever fearless, asked Anne to go with him. She accepted.

A few weeks later, Hanley turned up driving his pumpkin-orange work van. Fortunately Anne was able to look past that. "I liked him a lot," she recalled.

Two years later, they were married, on April 27, 1982. They have been partners since, in marriage, business and faith. "We felt like we were in business with the Lord," Hanley recalled.

At one point the two had \$1,000 in the bank and did not know when the next paycheck would come in. Anne was not working at that time because their children were young. "I said, 'since we're trusting in the Lord, why don't we go ahead and take 10 percent of our income even though we can't afford it and give it to the church,'" Hanley said.

"So we just stepped out in faith and we did that," he added. A year later, they had \$10,000 in the bank.

Anne remembers years when Richard would be finishing a job and nothing would be on the horizon. "We prayed and it came. God provided step by step. We couldn't always see the next step, but he was there all the time. It's amazing."

'Not just windows'

Ten years ago, the Hanleys decided to move back to the Muskegon area. They designed and built their home in New Era.

The Hanleys have three grown children: Katelyn, 23, who recently married and lives in Chicago; Josh, 22, a student at Ferris State University; and Peter, 19, who lives at home and attends Muskegon Community College.

Since the move, Richard has done many projects for both Catholic and Protestant churches. He is especially proud of the windows he created for First Presbyterian Church in Muskegon. He created 16-foot-tall windows depicting the Good Shepherd that provide a backdrop for the services.

Whether creating windows for Protestant or Catholic churches, Hanley brings his faith to the project. "I don't go in there judging. I go in there and I try to give them something great. ... I'm giving you something that hopefully will mean a lot for many years."

Before sketching the windows, Richard reads the Bible. When working with Protestant denominations, he often consults a Protestant minister. Regardless of the project, his Catholic faith underlies his work. "As a Catholic my focus in my



>> Hanley (left) with his partner Louis Lorenz at their studio in New Era.

life is to be a loving person and to bring peace and to be fearless so that I can really express myself."

He and Anne see the Mass as "the core of our life," said Richard, who often attended daily 6:30 a.m. Mass with his father Edmund growing up. He and Anne attend Our Lady of the Assumption Church in nearby Rothbury. The pastor is Father Phil Witkowski, who graduated from Muskegon Catholic Central with Hanley.

Father Witkowski described Hanley as "a good parishioner and a good friend." He has sketched windows

for Our Lady of the Assumption; the church plans to commission him after paying off some existing debt.

Richard is a true artisan, his work a reflection of his faith, said Father Witkowski.

"All you have to do is give him an idea and he'll bring back sketches and we'll say, 'Oh wow, that's exactly what we were thinking,'" said Father Witkowski.

"He has that faith ability to take your thoughts and ideas and put (them) into stained-glass form," he continued. "It speaks to your faith. It's not just windows. It's not just colored glass. It's a piece that speaks." +