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## Banner years at St. Andrews

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The colorful banners adorning St. Andrews United Methodist Church in Charlotte might come from divine inspiration, but they get a lot of help from a group of volunteers.

Banners have a long history in the church, but the St. Andrews banner committee started making banners in 2003 “to bring the outreach mission of the church and an extension of the sanctuary to the new addition of the church,” says Ruth Mauldin, the “stitcher-in-chief.”

That new addition included a Family Life Center and facilities to accommodate outreach programs. “The inspiration for all of our banners comes from the scripture or from church history and tradition,” Mauldin says.

Mauldin, 78, started sewing as a child, making book bags, aprons and dresses for children in the sewing room at the Oxford Orphanage (now the Masonic Home for Children) where she lived after her father died.

Mauldin suggested that life center banners depict the story of the Bible with the Old Testament on the left and the New Testament on the right. Then, with “blessings of the staff,” Mauldin says, the banner committee was born and consists of Betsy Grooms, chair of worship; Patti Huss, graphic artist; and Mauldin.

Before beginning work on the banners, the committee visited other churches. The process of creating the banners starts with group discussion. Once the committee decides what they want on the banner, Huss designs a thumbnail draft on her computer. After Grooms, Mauldin, and others critique it, Huss might make revisions and then develop a full-size pattern.

“I do a lot of research looking at pictures or paintings; this helps me formulate the designs in my mind,” Huss says. “Once the subject is decided on, I draw it out in pencil. Then I scan the image into my computer and redraw it in color using an illustration program. Then a color thumbnail is reviewed by all. They let me know if anything needs to be altered, added or taken in another direction.”

Once the pattern is developed, the committee goes to Mary Jo's fabric store in Gastonia to purchase fabrics.

"The history of our shopping is a story in itself and has resulted in a lifetime friendship," Mauldin says.

From inception to hanging, banners require several months of work. An intricate process is used to craft them.

"There is a tightly woven background fabric on which the pieces of the design fabric is attached, much like a picture puzzle, via a permabond backing, with the intersections then being satin-stitched in place. One major difference is that the pieces have to overlap in order to secure the pieces when stitching," Mauldin says. Mauldin is responsible for the majority of the new banner construction, but often gets help.

"I like to say that once we come home, it is mine until it is finished, and I indeed do all of the ironing, placing and stitching. However, Betsy has helped with cutting and Patti is frequently called in to advise, redesign, or add a painted touch," she says.

Many decisions need to be made regarding the creation of the banners. Consultations need to be made with church staff and relevant committees for specific banner locations and seasonal designs.

"The fabric cost has averaged around \$100 per banner and has been funded by memorials or the worship budget," Mauldin says. "Once they are completed, they are the property of St. Andrew's. Most are permanent hangings. We have created seasonal banners to hang on the stage in the FLC but otherwise all banners hang permanently. "

So far, the committee has made 30 banners and eight sets of paraments, which are decorative coverings for the lectern, pulpit and altar. The new paraments were created during 2008-2009. Now, Mauldin says, we "have paraments for use in all liturgical seasons as well as weddings and funerals."

Says St. Andrews Pastor Dan Hester, "They are wonderful works of art."