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by Eleanor Nash

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Sr. Ann Therese Kelly creates stained glass that inspires prayer and contemplation from her studio in the Felician Sisters' Central Convent in Buffalo, New York. An artist and educator, Kelly has been working with stained glass for almost 40 years.

Kelly became interested in art during high school with the encouragement of her art teacher, a Felician sister. Going on to study drawing and painting in college, Kelly discovered stained glass in 1980, when she took an introductory class on the weekends. After graduation, she took her final vows as a Felician Sister and later earned a Master of Fine Arts at Rochester Institute of Technology, the highest degree in her field.

In 2000, Kelly joined the faculty at Felician University in New Jersey, where she established the stained-glass program and served as an art professor and administrator for 10 years. She now teaches stained glass in Buffalo, New York, to Villa Maria College students, adults who are disabled, and middle school girls. She serves on the board of the Stained Glass Association of America.

Kelly spoke to Global Sisters Report about the influence of St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun, contemplation through art, and sharing her gift of stained glass with students.

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***GSR*: What was your first stained-glass project?**

Kelly: I went to the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1991, and I studied printmaking, but I had elective credits, so I took a class in glass. For one of my projects, I used my little skill in making stained-glass windows to design and build a set of six stained-glass windows for a small chapel in North Tonawanda, New York. I used the theme of St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun, about nature: Brother Sun and Sister Moon. My windows were based on the promise of that poem.

In many of your windows, you translate the Canticle of the Sun into art. How do you see faith and art connected in your work?

I am not only a visual learner, but I'm also a visual pray-er, and prayer is often connected to the visual. So that poem has inspired me for many years, and many of my windows contain the canticle. The canticle connects perfectly with Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*' initiative on protecting God's Earth.

This canticle has become more and more powerful in my work since I started in the 1980s. Here is a 12th-century poem that speaks to the 21st century because now, more than ever, we must protect the Earth and its environment.



The stained-glass windows Felician Sr. Ann Therese Kelly created for Our Lady of Hope Chapel in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, installed in 2012 (Provided photo)

That is a 40-foot window that is in our provincial chapel in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. You see a tree of life on the left and the sun, which moves to the right through the moon and the stars and the water across the bottom, and the air flows through it.

On the wings are four painted saints who are instrumental in my community of Felician sisters: St. Francis of Assisi, St. Felix of Cantalice, St. Clare with the Eucharist, and Blessed Mary Angela, who is our foundress. This window shows the canticle with the four inspirational people of my order. The window is inspirational not only to my prayer, but to the people who pray through these images.



From left: Felician Sr. Ann Therese Kelly; Bishop Matthew Gyamfi of Sunyani, Ghana; and Sr. Barbara Marie Juszkiewicz pose with the in-progress stained-glass window Kelly is creating for the Christ the King Cathedral in Sunyani, Ghana. (Provided photo)

How do you see the process of creating windows as an act of prayer?

When I create artwork, I am focused not only on the finished piece. It's about the process of creating a piece of art, particularly in stained glass, which is focused on these tasks of making the artwork like doing the painting, doing the drawing, and

doing the cutting of glass and painting glass. You are drawn to a contemplative and meditative mind when you are creating artwork. The process itself is a prayer.

What are you working on now?

My latest project is the 8-foot-tall eucharistic window for Christ the King Cathedral in Sunyani, Ghana. It shows African designs in the background with the Holy Spirit with a whole circle around its head and the Earth on the bottom.

In the full window, you can see the Earth with the Eucharist over the Earth and encompassing Ghana. This has been a little over two years in process because it takes a long time to design the windows, get approvals and raise the money to build the windows.

Doing the work for this project, I liked the research. I traveled to Ghana to see the cathedral and study the culture. I find it energizing to do the research because it gets me in touch with other parts of the world. I see the Holy Spirit moving through all of it, I do, because how could this ever happen to me that I do this work?



: Felician Sr. Ann Therese Kelly, far left, with some of her adult art students who have disabilities (Provided photo)

You have had a long career in arts education. What is that like teaching students to make glass? How do they react?

Oh, they love it. My glass course became one of the most popular courses in the Art Department at Felician University. When I had to leave in 2010, I trained one of my students who had gone on to her Master of Arts to take my place teaching as a professor at that university. The glass program grew and grew. Stained glass grew in my life. It grew and grew.

It's always a memorable day when, at the end of the semester, some of my students ask if they can come to my studio and do more work. That's always the greatest prize in my teaching, to have people do more with the craft.

Recently, I have started doing projects with some of my college students that have taken my course in glass and want to do more. The Felician Sisters run the St. Felix Centre in Toronto, and I'm having some of them work with me to donate windows for their dining room where they feed the poor. The students then become inspired to work with underprivileged people. I am starting to connect this work to people who can't afford beauty like this stained glass.

[Eleanor Nash is a student at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, studying English.]