Communicated Commemorabilia: A Creative Project Exploring Christian Recovery

by
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Dedication

To my God, who heals me.

To those who work healing, whether in hospitals or churches.

To those in recovery, who heal one day at a time.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all who have helped me on this journey. I feel that this project represents a season of my life, not just a graduation fulfillment. To all of those who have walked alongside me, I offer my sincerest gratitude.

Dr. King, thank you for the investment you have made in me over the last five years. You have challenged me to think, to grow, and to explore. Only the Lord himself has read more of my writing; I thank you for your patience and gentle encouragement.

My family, thank you for supporting me and letting me drag the patio table through the house. You've seen every late night, and I'm thankful for your sacrifices in helping me finish this well. I love you.

My friends, thank you for your kindness and presence. Some of you have kept me from failing nursing school. Some of you have kept me from forgetting priorities. I thank all of you for keeping me going.

To the men and women who invited me into their ministry and into their lives, I thank you. Thank you for your trust and your hospitality. I pray that I have honored your stories and honored you.

I would also like to thank those who made this project a possibility. Mr. and Mrs. Steakley, thank you for your generosity toward the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. I trust the Lord will reward your investment in us. To the Undergraduate Research Center, thank you for the Undergraduate Research Experience and Creative Activity (URECA) grant that funded all the supplies for this project. I am grateful for the support I have received from this university community.

Abstract

When people tell their stories, they often use spoken symbols to aid in memorializing important events, especially experiences of healing. In this way, people commemorate their healing in conversation. This creative project reflects on the experiences of men and women in Christian recovery groups. As these Christians heal, they tell stories of radical new identities, reimagined families, gradual healing, empowering practices, and novel perceptions of God. I have translated these spoken symbols into visual symbols, a long-established mode of communication in Christian tradition. Through a series of watercolor stained glass windows, the sacred symbols in these stories of healing are illuminated. These windows have been presented in an immersive gallery to further invite viewers to experience the symbols within these stories of Christian recoverees. Communicated Commemorabilia, as a creative project, reflects on the intersections of religion and health and the translation of language to art.

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A Note on Pseudonyms and Quotations

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this project to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of my interlocutors and in keeping with the standards of ethnography (Lareau 2021). The names of all persons, excluding that of the author, have been changed. The names of all locations and organizations have also been changed.

Quotations in this project are taken from interview transcriptions. The transcripts were edited to remove any personally identifying information. Some filler words and phrases ("um," "you know," "just," "and") have been removed without notation. When longer portions of a quotation have been removed, an ellipsis is used (…). To improve readability, some quotations have been rearranged, reduced, or have had words added, but only when the original intent of the statement has been retained. All edits are in keeping with standard ethnographic practice (Lareau 2021).

1. Let There Be Light

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3

Introduction

There is mystical beauty in light. Light is more than photons and wavelengths—it is a source of joy. I often stop mid-stride to stare into honey-yellow leaves above my head. I lie in grass, gravel, and dirt to sing with the silent stars in midnight skies. I kneel patiently in the painted sunlight streaming through stained glass windows. Stained glass is the matrimony between heaven's most beautiful gift and humanity's highest praises. Beyond the aesthetic beauty of stained glass, the medium has also captured sacred stories for centuries. Authors craft narratives, which artists convey in glass, which God illumines with light. With each sunrise, walls of stone, glass, and lead begin to worship, their beams of color gliding down nave aisles alongside priests in procession. I have sought to replicate this phenomenon of illumined narrative through the creation of five faux-stained glass windows that convey stories of the everyday miraculous.

I am a dual-degree student in Nursing and Religious Studies. As such, I am convinced that health and religion are inextricably bound. Religion—like health—is not a static goal one can reach but a lifetime of embodied decisions, communities, and rituals. Religion cannot be separated from the human bodies that practice it. For this project, I chose an area in which the veil between health and religion was already torn: a Christian recovery group. Here, participants in the group wrestle with their health and their faiths,

often without cognitive distinction. It is within one body, after all, that an individual seeks sobriety *and* sanctification. In the windows, I tell the stories of men and women dedicated to chasing wellness and chasing their God.

Recovery is common. It is estimated that 9% of the United States population live with a substance use disorder, defined as a "disease… of the brain characterized by craving, seeking, and using regardless of consequences" (Halter 2018, 408-409). As of 2019, 6.5% of the Tennessee population is living with a substance use disorder, a population equivalent to that of Rutherford County (SAMHSA 2020). Treatment regiments for persons with substance use disorders include initial intervals of stabilizing medications and monitored detoxifications followed by various forms of therapy and integration into new social communities (Halter 2018). Worth notation is the acceptance of Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs as viable adjuncts to biomedical recovery efforts (Halter 2018). There are many Christian twelve-step groups with similar stages and goals—and recovery can be broadly expanded to nearly any ailment within Christian circles.

Anthropologists of Christianity have identified many ways in which Christian recovery efforts mirror that of biomedical recovery. Anthropologists seek to study Christians as humans and Christianity as a human object—a significant challenge given the diversity of Christian expressions globally (Bialecki, Hayes, and Robbins 2008). Anthropologists reach their meta-theories of religion through ethnographic study or deeply connected research within local communities (Arrington 2019). Ethnographic vignettes inform larger, comparative theory. Anthropologists study individuals and their religious expressions but also surrounding cultures, politics, economies, and social

influences on religion (Klassen 2014). With this methodology in mind, Christian recovery efforts provide for the needs of recoverees: increased social capital (Hansen 2018), restorative imaginal spiritual practices (Csordas 1996; Luhrmann 2013), reimagined family structures (Hansen 2018), and empowered personal identities rooted in testimony (Stromberg 1993; Smilde 2007). Christians utilize religious tools and paradigms to achieve health (Hardin 2019), and Christians in recovery are no different.

As an anthropologist who researches healing via spiritual practices, Thomas Csordas uses the term c*ommemorabilia* to refer to an object or symbol used to commemorate a meaningful event (1996). Csordas conducted research within Charismatic Catholic healing ministries, which utilized visioning exercises to encourage participants to create symbols. Drawing on Csordas' concept of commemorabilia, I am interested in communicated commemorabilia: the symbols used in testimony to remember and celebrate healing. Humans use and invent symbols to conceptualize religion, healing, and personal identity; these symbols are revealed in speech and especially in ritual testimony. Anthropologist Peter Stromberg asserts that the transformation of a Christian's character is made manifest in the act of testimony:

> A conversion narrative [testimony], then, is a ritual that integrates unacknowledged purposes into a socially construable project—namely, being an Evangelical Christian... [I]n so doing, he or she may really undergo a personal transformation of social and personal significance. (Stromberg 1993, 30)

Stromberg argues that Christian testimony—sacred storytelling—is an active ritual to implement desired change in a Christian's life, and I suggest that Stromberg's "unacknowledged purposes" can be the aims of recovery. That is, spoken testimony is an integral process in recovery, and these stories shed light on the ways in which Christians imagine recovery from within a paradigm of faith. Christians tell their stories through

religious and personal symbols, and, in so doing, invoke the authority of their symbols to reinvigorate present recovery efforts. One can understand the Christian in recovery when one can understand their spoken symbols.

The communicated commemorabilia expressed in the recoveree's testimony reveals their conceptions of health and faith and what it is like to navigate the two. In addition to identifying the communicated commemorabilia in individuals' testimonies, this project visually represents my findings through faux-stained glass, welcoming light and aesthetic beauty into the already-beautiful stories of Christians in recovery.

Methodology and Project Overview

This project relies upon anthropological research and applied religious studies methodologies. Anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork methods are drawn from Annette Lareau (2021). Applied religious studies methodology welcomes experiential learning into conversation with broad theories (Nason-Clark 2002).

I began this project with a semester gathering literature and surveying the anthropology of Christianity and healing, with a specific focus on Central and South America. I have had mission experience in Guatemala and have studied Spanish language and literature at the collegiate level. Protestant forms of Christianity are also growing in the global South, and these areas invite my interest. One of the claims often leveled against anthropologists is that of Western bias. As the accusation goes, anthropologists force non-Western individuals and cultures to fit the checkboxes of Westernized epistemologies, methodologies, and theories (Kessler 2007). In spending time researching

the intersections of Christianity and health in Central and South America, I have distanced myself from purely Euro-American research baselines. However, I was jarred by the universality of my research findings. Individuals in recovery in Venezuela and Puerto Rico invoke the same religious tools as individuals in local United States communities. Again, these include increased social capital (Hansen 2018), restorative imaginal spiritual practices (Csordas 1996; Luhrmann 2013), reimagined family structures (Hansen 2018), and empowered personal identities rooted in testimony (Stromberg 1993; Smilde 2007).

I elected to rely upon fresh conversations with recoverees rather than historical ethnographies or case studies. While my literature survey set the stage for this project and my research expectations, I wanted to involve local populations and their testimonies. Religion and health are never separate from bodies, and it seemed apropos to conduct interviews with living, local, embodied persons who could share their stories of religion and health. I contacted a Christian recovery group held within an evangelical church in Tennessee. The recovery group, Thank God for Healing, was contacted through the hosting church, United Ministry Church (Please note that all names featured here of individuals and institutions have been changed. See the Note on Pseudonyms and Quotations). After obtaining permission from United Ministry Church, I gained approval from the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board to conduct human research (See Appendix 1). In preparation, I generated a survey instrument to use when conducting conversational interviews (See Appendix 2). The survey invited my interlocutors to discuss their perceptions of healing before explicitly inviting their testimonies. The interlocutor's testimonies always followed two processes

simultaneously—as these individuals experienced "salvation," they also experienced "recovery." I followed each testimony with questions designed to elicit communicated commemorabilia as interlocutors discussed their personal growth and perceptions of God.

I conducted five interviews, each lasting over an hour. Interviews were transcribed and catalogued according to five major emerging themes: reimagined personal identity, reimagined intimate communities and families, gradual change and sanctification, empowering practices and evangelical rituals, and reimagined perceptions of God. My experience performing these interviews is expounded upon in chapters two and nine of this honors thesis. Each of the five themes was then translated into visual form in my faux-stained glass windows, which are examined in chapters three through seven. Through the process of artistic adaptation, the communicated commemorabilia shared by interlocutors is memorialized in visual form. Finally, my works of art were displayed in an immersive exhibition on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University, discussed in chapter eight.

I have received visual art training at the high school level, and my art has won local and national awards. In preparation for the generation of faux-stained glass works, I visited seven local churches with stained glass or iconography, sketchbook and camera in hand. I also spoke with ministers and lay people about the art in these seven churches. Thus, the art pieces that I produced are the results of vast influences: global Christianity and iconographic traditions, local expressions of stained glass design and structure, and—most crucially—the communicated commemorabilia of my interlocutors in conversation with anthropological themes.

2. For this Interview I Have Prayed

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

The Research Site

The key source of information for this creative project is the communicated commemorabilia revealed during interviews with recoverees. As is often the case with ethnographies, I was able to contact a recovery group through personal connections. The Christian recovery group, Thank God for Healing, meets inside United Ministry Church and has done so since the group's conception decades ago. Thank God for Healing at United Ministry Church is one of hundreds of such groups that meet nationwide, boasting millions of participants globally. Although there is national and state leadership for the organization, groups are encouraged to submit to the authority of their local churches in all manners of administration. Thank God for Healing at United Ministry Church operates with a high degree of autonomy, given its longstanding partnership with and submission to United Ministry Church.

Thank God for Healing is a Christian twelve-step program designed to aid persons in healing from a myriad of ailments. Individuals with substance addictions, alterations in mental health, or those with "hurts" are welcome to attend. The group could be effectually compared to Alcoholics Anonymous, evidenced by the use of a Serenity Prayer, a twelve-step process, discussion-based group sessions, and mentor-mentee relationships. Thank God for Healing incorporates Bible passages into all written

materials, relies upon Christian theology for its messaging, and operates out of Christian churches. Of interest is the use of the Beatitudes, eight statements of blessing given by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, in understanding the twelve steps of recovery. For example, step one, which reads, "We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors [and] that our lives had become unmanageable," is paired with the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Several of the beatitudes are associated with multiple steps of recovery. By placing Jesus' Beatitudes and the group's twelve steps in direct conversation—and union—with one another, Thank God for Healing seeks to eliminate the distinction between Christianity and recovery. Jesus himself becomes the authority of the program and the guarantor of success. As one interlocutor would later tell me, "It's about living a surrendered, submitting, and yielding life to the one and only Higher Power out there. And that's Jesus Christ."

Thank God for Healing at United Ministry Church meets twice weekly. On Tuesday evenings, the group meets for a large-group session before splitting into conversational groups for men and women. In the large group, all attendees sit together in one open room. The male leader of this group directs the session, but speakers vary from week to week. The time can include sermon-like presentations, visual and experiential activities, songs, spoken word poetry, and testimony. Accomplishments among members are shared during this time, such as a woman receiving a Thank God for Healing chip memorializing a decade of sobriety. Prayers open and close this meeting time. Afterward, the group divides into nearby classrooms, men and women in separate rooms. This time constitutes a period of open share, in which members can discuss with one another their

progress and setbacks. On Thursday evenings, small groups meet for those who have committed to a year and a half of intense curriculum. The groups are separated by gender and meet in private classrooms, and group size is limited. The leaders of these groups are men and women who have previously completed the study material and have been generally successful in their recoveries. In addition to the Tuesday and Thursday night groups, members are encouraged to develop relationships with a "sponsor" who will mentor and support them through consistent communication and presence.

United Ministry Church is in a large city in the Southern United States, with a population comparable to that of Fort Collins, Colorado or Springfield, Missouri. The city's population is growing rapidly, and according to the 2020 Decennial Census, 20% of the city's population moved to the city within the last year. The city is considered a suburban city within a larger metropolitan area. Most of the city's population is White and English-speaking, and three-quarters of the state's population are Protestant Christians. The city's median income is equitable to the national median income. United Ministry Church is a megachurch, which are defined as "Protestant churches with regular attendances pre-pandemic of 2,000 or more adults and children" (Bird and Thumma 2020, 2). As with 74% of United States megachurches, United Ministry Church has a growing congregation (Bird and Thumma 2020), a trend that contrasts declining median church attendance nationally (Thumma 2021). In 2020, 45% of adult participants in megachurches were reportedly involved in some form of small group, which includes Bible studies, Sunday school classes, discipleship groups, and ministries like Thank God for Healing (Bird and Thumma 2020). Given these city, regional, and church

demographics, it is not surprising to see a regularly attended Thank God for Healing group in United Ministry Church.

The Research Process

In Spring 2023, I contacted United Ministry Church about conducting research with Thank God for Healing. After five months of communication, I received permission from the church and sought Middle Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix 1). Research then commenced in July 2023. I spoke with a couple, Dan and Sandy, who lead Thank God for Healing. With the express invitation to share testimonies and answer interview questions, Dan and Sandy agreed to participate and selected three additional group members for my research. I visited the church building on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when Thank God for Healing was meeting, and spoke with the five selected individuals. Each session, I arrived early, and these moments offered insight into the group.

Four of the five interviews occurred in the lobby of United Ministry Church, and one interview occurred in a classroom at the church. While I had procured permission to use private classrooms for each interview, my interlocutors overwhelmingly suggested that the lobby was comfortable for our discussions, to which I obliged, despite my fears of poor recording quality. Each of my five interlocutors is middle-aged and married. They are also all leaders within the recovery group. Dan and Sandy head the group and report to United Ministry Church staff. Maria, Steve, and Jessie report to Dan and Sandy. Maria is a Thursday small group leader, and her husband also volunteers, although I did

not interview him. Steve and Jessie are married, and Steve volunteers with the group's welcome team, while Jessie leads a Thursday small group. Each of the interlocutors had been involved in Thank God for Healing for over a decade, and each had experience speaking to the Tuesday large group. All leadership positions are volunteer positions, and the church funds the groups' physical supplies, such as books, curriculum, and chips.

I met many of the group's leaders, attendees, and one of the church's maintenance staff members. Sandy repeatedly greeted me with a smile and a hug, and Dan offered a hearty handshake. The couple welcomed me enthusiastically into their community, inviting me to attend Thank God for Healing meetings, offering me advise on caring for my leather backpack, and showing me pictures of family members. Maria, Steve, and Jessie were just as warm, treating me as if I were a long-time friend. In my five visits, I found places I felt comfortable while also making careful observations and conversing with many participants. One night, I sharpened pencils in a workroom, talking with participants and volunteers—and realizing that Sandy facilitates the logistical organization while Dan performs public leadership. In another instance, I unpacked the chips used for celebrating member milestones; these plastic medallions are the only public rewards given to members. At the welcome desk, I greeted both newcomers and old-timers, listening to members discuss new grandchildren and medical diagnoses as if they were family. I talked with a maintenance staff member about the role of United Ministry Church in facilitating the Thank God for Healing meetings; he described Dan and Sandy as "family" with genuine joy. It was evident that this group sought to foster familial bonds, and they welcomed me into that process immediately.

Thank God for Healing meets in a hallway of classrooms separated from the church's lobby by double doors. As the group began its official proceedings each night, I would quietly exit the doors with my interlocutor for our scheduled interview. I began by explaining the informed consent document to each of my interlocutors. All looked over the document and listened carefully, except for warm but fiery Sandy, who remarked, "Thank you for telling me everything you're doing, but you can move along." After signing the documents and receiving verbal permission, I started my voice recordings and initiated the interviews. Following the general outline of my survey instrument, I asked the interlocutors about their definitions of *healing* before opening the floor for the sharing of testimonies. Testimonies ranged from nine to thirty-two minutes. Each was framed similarly, however, walking me through lives of hurt, transformation, and redemption. After each testimony, I asked my interlocutors to think about their testimonies in three major time segments, and I questioned self-perception and God-perception in each of those segments. Lastly, I asked about the future and where my interlocutors hoped to be. Interview recordings ranged from an hour and nine minutes to an hour and twenty-nine minutes. I left the recordings running at the conclusion of the interviews as I parted ways with each interlocutor.

The sharing of testimonies is a common evangelical occurrence (Stromberg 1993; Smilde 2007). As such, my interlocutors were generally interested in participating in interviews, and they were willing to share vulnerable and personal information. Maria brought a typed, printed, and bound version of her testimony, which she read aloud to me. Jessie reported praying for our interview, explaining, "I was praying on the way over here that I just want to be able to really articulate truthfully from my heart and not be

confusing." Dan prayed aloud for me at the end of our interview, blessing my project and the art that I would create. Each interlocutor expressed excitement or encouragement at the interview's conclusion, which provided me with satisfaction.

Leaving the church and getting into my vehicle, I immediately took notes on key conversations, clothing items, social interactions, physical objects and spaces, and my impressions of the evening. When I reached home, I began writing ethnographic memos, which included all the key details I could remember from the evening. Each memo was concluded within twenty-four hours from the time of the interview. These memos allow for the examination of non-verbal communication and my own reflections on the ethnographic process. After every interview concluded, I transcribed the interview with transcription software. I edited each transcription for accuracy and the removal of all confidential information. After seventy hours of writing memos and editing transcriptions, I was ready to analyze my findings and identify the communicated commemorabilia.

Research Findings

Qualitative research involves the categorization of themes and ideas. I identified five main themes revealed in my interlocutor's interviews as follows: (1) reimagined personal identity, (2) reimagined intimate communities and families, (3) gradual change and sanctification, (4) empowering practices and evangelical rituals, and (5) reimagined perceptions of God. Each of these themes is the basis for a faux-stained glass window and the subject of chapters three through seven. Within the five themes, interlocutors utilized

symbolism, metaphor, and biblical allusion. These are instances of communicated commemorabilia, the spoken symbols used to remember and celebrate healing.

The first theme is reimagined personal identity. All interlocutors spoke of their pasts and the ways in which they thought of themselves. Often, their perceptions of past selves were shadowy, uncertain, and guilt-ridden. Traumas and abuse informed how they once identified themselves. Several indicated they lacked any real sense of personal identity at all. But in recovery, the interlocutors came to see themselves in new ways. Their new identities began with understanding the person of Jesus and his role in defining them, not as guilty but as clean, not as victim but as victor, and not as aimless but as purposeful.

In addition to reimagining themselves, all interlocutors discussed the ways in which they reimagined their intimate communities and families. Where fathers had failed, God became Father. Where mothers had been absent, spiritual mothers stepped in. Where love seemed all too far away, tender marriages invited healing. Where barrenness reigned, new life was born. And where life was lost, a community was formed to offer support. The members of Thank God for Healing considered one another family, often closer than genetic families, and this familial conception lends security and social capital to those in recovery.

Interlocutors described their healings as gradual changes, using the term "sanctification." Healing did not look like overnight, Damascus-road life change. Instead, healing looks like slow processes of feeling, forgiving, and strengthening. Sanctification is the Christian belief that one is progressively made holy as one increases in obedience to God. One interlocutor went as far as to say, "Healing is sanctification. It's a day-by-

day, step-by-step process that you walk out." The view of healing as gradual, rather than immediate, offers hope to those in recovery and suggests the genuineness of lifestyle changes that occur through recovery. Sanctification also necessitates discussions of Christian agency in the recovery process.

Empowering practices and evangelical rituals include Bible reading, kataphatic prayer, and testimony. Bible reading, even in the absence of serious study, strengthens the recoveree and provides a common vocabulary to utilize when discussing the recovery process. Kataphatic prayer, in which practitioners converse with God, provides the basis for a relational, intimate understanding of God and promotes wellness (Luhrmann 2013). Other forms of prayer include "praying in the Spirit," or glossolalia, a common practice among Pentecostals and some Charismatics and Evangelicals (Csordas 1996; Smilde 2007). Testimony, as discussed earlier, is a means of defining oneself, reflecting on the past, and organizing life events into meaningful structures. Testimony is an active component of Christian identity-making and healing (Stromberg 1993).

Additionally, a common theme was reimagined perceptions of God. My interlocutors spoke about previously understanding God as vindictive, uninterested, and distant. Through the recovery process, however, God became a loving, forgiving, and intensely close companion. My interlocutors described God in a myriad of ways, presenting him with adaptivity. Understanding God positively was directly correlated to the interlocutors' healing and recovery.

With these themes in mind, I began to gather the symbols used by interlocutors to display in visual form, the focus of chapters three through seven.

3. The Identity Window

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5

Artistic Process

While each window is unique in its content, I largely utilized the same creative processes in all five works of art. I began by surveying seven local churches with prominent stained glass or iconography (Figure 1). I attended services, spoke with attendees, and asked questions of ministers to gain a better understanding of how these works of religious art are viewed in their respective houses of worship. While I had encountered stained glass and iconography all around Israel, Canada, and the United States, these church visits offered time to seriously contemplate and examine stained glass form, function, and design within my local community. While at several of the

Figure 1. Observing stained glass.

Figure 2. Sketch of a church window.

churches, I completed sketches of the windows to practice generating ratios, linework, and color schemes appropriate to the medium of stained glass (Figure 2). I also surveyed literature on historic stained glass production and immersed myself in photos of famous windows (Arnold 1956; Crewe 1987; Kleiner and Mamiya 2005; Lee, Seddon, and Francis 1976; Mann 1993).

Simultaneously, I spent time experimenting with various media to produce art with a stained glass effect. I procured a synthetic, polypropylene paper with enough translucency to welcome light through its surface. I tested various kinds of watercolor and ink on its surface, concluding that watercolor allowed for greater control and ease of blending. I also tested five kinds of dimensional paint and glue for use as leading lines. I settled on a dimensional paint that is designed to simulate stained glass leading. I convinced my family to let me borrow our glass patio table, dragging it into my room and using it as a light box. Each window would have to be illumined from the back to achieve a true stained glass effect, and the glass table became my work surface.

After transcribing the interviews and organizing quotations into five themes, I generated lists of every potential visual symbol within each theme. These lists included

any metaphors, allusions, and imaginal spiritual experiences that interlocutors presented. I also consulted the rich traditions of Christian iconography and visual symbolism to identify connections between a theme and global Christianity (Klein 2000; Ware 1997).

With my lists of communicated commemorabilia in hand, I set to work creating thumbnail sketches and rough composite images. Some symbols were easily represented, while others would be nearly impossible to convey. But a sketch of each window eventually emerged from hours of pencil to paper. For the first window, I created a 1:4 scaled drawing. I copied and colored the drawing several times to ensure I had produced an image that appeared balanced, uniform, and beautiful (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Scaled drawing of the first window.

In stained glass production, full-scale drawings of each window are used to direct artisans (Lee, Seddon, and Francis 1976). These drawings are called cartoons, and they are considered works of art in their own right. Artisans then cut colored glass to match the sizes and shapes of the cartoon. At this stage, the pieces of glass can be further modified, glazed, and fired to add details. To connect the mosaic of glass pieces, leading strips are inserted between the glass, bent, and soldered into place. Inspired by this

Figure 4. Full-scale cartoon.

Figure 5. Dimensional paint.

Figure 6. Adding watercolor.

process, I created full-scale cartoons of my windows. These drawings were done on white paper thirty by forty-eight inches (Figure 4). Unlike stained glass production, I did not need to cut glass or solder anything together. I traced each cartoon onto the translucent paper with dimensional black paint (Figure 5). This paint would serve as my lead strips and solder. After allowing the dimensional paint to dry overnight, I added watercolor in each small section to resemble pieces of colored glass (Figure 6). Despite my initial experimentations, I quickly discovered that excessive water in my paints would warp the dimensional paint lines. As a correction, I increased the concentration of my watercolor pigments and ran a dehumidifier while painting. Aside from chapping my lips and heating the room, the dehumidifier prevented further damage to the dimensional paint and significantly decreased the watercolor drying time.

When everything was dry, I used permanent black pens to add necessary details, such as lettering. Each window required about twenty-eight hours of hands-on work to complete after planning.

Communicated Commemorabilia in the Identity Window

The Identity Window testifies to reimagined self-perception and rewritten conceptions of being (Figure 7). The recovery process does not merely alleviate addictions, mental health crises, or traumas. The recovery process invites participants to envision themselves in wholly new ways. For my Christian interlocutors, their reconceived personal identities became grounded in the person of Jesus. That is, their self-perception became largely based on what they imagined Jesus to say about them.

Every window is framed by a motif reminiscent of leaves, interrupted at regular intervals by Greek crosses. To unify all five windows, each shares this simple, repetitive framing. Each also shares in a limited color palate, containing only ten colors and white. A quotation is featured at the base of the first four windows; these quotations are from the interlocutors and offer insights into the windows' themes. Although each of the five windows depicts a different theme, they do so by using specific spoken symbols and important interlocutor stories as exemplars.

The bottom of the Identity Window depicts ways in which my interlocutors once described their past. The middle section steps into the moment of identity transformation for Dan, who exemplified identity shift. The top section connects this window to Christian tradition. These three sections will be discussed in turn.

Figure 7. The Identity Window.

The Identity Window begins in the past. For those in recovery, the past can be a place riddled with shame, trauma, and disappointments. As my interlocutors spoke, they revealed how they used to imagine themselves and how they currently perceive their pasts. Maria, who was in recovery to manage her depression, talked about her past as "the pit." She said of her pit, "This place is dark, it's confusing, it's overwhelming, stressful, hateful, and it's so painful." Reflecting on a moment of extreme depression, Maria shared the following with me:

> I remember laying in the floor, in the fetal position, and my husband was sitting there with me, and he was like, "What's wrong?"
> And I remember telling him that the voices in my brain just were so mean. And it was, "Not good enough."

Maria's pit is represented by a figure on the floor in a fetal position, storm clouds pouring out a deluge of darkness (Figure 8). Maria also spoke about her depression in terms of an illness she had watched take the life of her father: "My depressive episodes became more like a cancer, and it was consuming me and everyone around me." Her simile likening depression to cancer is represented by an individual in a hospital bed, an intravenous line delivering chemotherapeutic agents (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Maria's pit.

Figure 9. Maria's cancer.

Three of the bottom vignettes come from Jessie, who was in recovery after a troubled adolescence of self-loathing and the termination of a viable pregnancy after misdiagnosis. Reflecting on her past, Jessie described her unsupervised childhood as one of innocence and naivete, including walking up a staircase in

roller skates. Jessie talked about her childhood in terms of what she wished she knew:

> I have a picture in my mind. I was about seven years old, which is when my parents were divorced, and I was standing on the stairs of our apartment building. And I'm trying not to cry because she was so innocent, you know? I want to go back and tell her, "You're perfect. Like, you don't have to question who you are. God loves you. You don't have to wonder if you're loved."

Jessie's reflection reveals a complication in identity change. Past identities are not always negative, as in the case of Jessie's innocent child on the stairs. Here, Jessie remembers her childhood with fondness. I represented this moment with a pair of roller skates on a staircase (Figure 10). When Jessie spoke of her past in her adolescent and young adult years, she described a marked lack of identity. She described herself as ever-changing:

> I was a roller coaster. I had ups and downs in terms of how I felt about myself. I would sink to the depths of despair and then ride the, you know, waves of feeling like I'm making progress. I didn't know who I was. I would be whoever you wanted me to be… I was like a chameleon, you know?

Jessie's previous self-identity had been defined by what others expected from her, and she felt devoid of self-determination. These metaphors are depicted in the window as a rollercoaster and as a chameleon (Figure 11).

Figure 10. Jessie's skates.

The final three vignettes at the bottom come from Dan, who was in recovery from alcoholism and polysubstance abuse. Dan described his past in several interesting ways. When referencing feelings of childhood inadequacy when compared to his successful father, Dan described his past as having permanence:

Figure 11. Jessie's roller coaster and chameleon.

> It imprinted me kind of like wet cement. If me and you lay some concrete right here and we put our hand in it and take it away and it dries, what does it leave? An imprint, doesn't it?

This conception of the past leaves little room for adjustment. Dan's concrete is represented by a hand and its handprint (Figure 12). In another instance, Dan talked about his past as a tool of Satan to torment him:

Figure 12. Dan's imprint.

> The devil knows mine and your weaknesses just as well as we do. And he's real good about taking, like, an old eight-track tape and pushing it and hitting rewind and then punch play to where I'm looking at my past.

Figure 13. Dan's eight-track tape.

In this description of the past, Dan sees the past as a point of weakness. The past is not only permanent, but it is permanently disappointing. I represented Dan's past-on-repeat with an eight-track tape entitled *My Past* (Figure 13). With a conception of the past as permanent and shameful, Dan's final metaphor is apropos:

> The more that I grew in my relationship with Christ, it was hard for me to keep saying, "Hello, my name's Dan, I'm an alcoholic and a drug addict," because if I believed what God's Word said, I was a new creation. I buried that old man… That was just the diagnosis of my disease called addiction. That wasn't who I was.

Figure 14. Dan's burial.

Through his recovery, Dan came to understand his identity as being defined by Jesus and the Bible, not by labels or diagnoses. To do away with a permanent past, Dan invokes a permanent solution in speaking of his past as "buried." Dan's past is dead, and his current conception of his identity relies upon 2 Corinthians 5:17 and its statement of becoming a

new creation through Christ. This image is represented by a figure standing over a grave with a shovel in hand (Figure 14).

Moving into the central image of the Identity Window, we reach a turning point in the narrative. Whereas the bottom eight images depict conceptions of past identity, the central image testifies to Dan's moment of identity transformation. While driving home one evening, Dan decided to stop drinking. As he described his experience:

> I stopped right there and took my last drink and threw the bottle out the window. And when I looked at myself in the mirror, God showed me what he saw, not what I had been seeing. Because I had hated the man in the mirror looking back at me, I hated what I represented. I hated what I had turned into. I hated what I was doing to Sandy and my family…
>
> And I just broke down and I remember saying, "God, if you're real, you're going to have to show up and show me who you are. Here I am. I give up. I'm tired. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. So if you're who they say you are, you got to save me because my way ain't working no more."
>
> And, it was real cold that day. And I had the window up. And there wasn't this roar of trumpets or drums or this boom. I just felt this little, "Whoosh," move in that truck with me. And the presence of the Holy Spirit, I just felt like he wrapped his arms around me, and I just fell apart. I just fell apart and couldn't stop crying.
>
> It was just like in my spirit. It was like he was saying, you know, "I've been waiting twenty-some odd years to hear you say that. Now, let's me and you go rock this world together." And I've never looked back. And today I'm a blood-bought believer and follower of Jesus Christ. I have a diagnosis today of addiction called alcohol and drug addiction. But that's not my identity. My identity is in who Jesus Christ says I am. I'm a child of the living God and I'm adopted into his kingdom.

In telling this story, Dan accomplishes several things. He confirms the existence of a past identity, whom he had once hated seeing in the mirror. Dan also claims to now possess a new identity, which is rooted "in who Jesus Christ says I am." The transition between these two self-perceptions occurred during Dan's experience with the Holy Spirit. An essential component of recovery is the re-evaluation of identity, and Dan's re-evaluation

is caused by a religious experience. That is, a key moment in determining Dan's health was a fundamentally religious one. There is no separation between health and religion in Dan's testimony. Depicting this moment was challenging because it represents a transition (Figure 15). Dan sits in his truck, looking at himself in the rearview mirror. The Holy Spirit, denoted by a seven-rayed halo, sits in bodily form with Dan, wrapping his arm around Dan. This is a moment of liminality, in which Dan is stepping from one identity into another; as such, a bottle is still present to his left, but an open road beckons him toward new life. This transitory moment occurred in a truck cab, not a hospital bay, therapist's office, or church pew. It's a real moment of a regular man at his end, finding a God who knows no end.

In this work and in each subsequent window, I decided not to depict the face of God, either as Father, Son, or Spirit. This was a largely personal decision. I did so not to render God as impersonal but to preserve his mystery. I will reflect upon further religious tensions in my work in chapter nine.

The final and top section of the Identity Window pushes past the moment of liminal transformation and into my interlocutors' present perceptions of identity. It also

Figure 15. Dan's liminal moment of identity change.

Figure 16. New identities in Christ.

connects this window to broader discussions within global Christianity. In this section, I have depicted an image inspired by the Orthodox icon of the resurrection (Figure 16). Jesus stands atop a skull, representing his triumph over death. He reaches out to pull Adam and Eve from their tombs. By raising the protoplasts from death, this icon suggests that Jesus raises all of humanity from death. The implication is that humanity is brought to a new life, or new identity, at Jesus' bodily resurrection. Surrounding the figures are palm branches, traditional Christian symbols of salvation, victory, and martyrdom. Butterflies are traditional symbols of rebirth and regeneration.

There is no question that the person of Jesus is central to Christianity and its claims. So, too, does Jesus become the center of my interlocutors' new identities. Dan described Jesus' role in his identity clearly when he stated, "My identity is in who Jesus Christ says I am." Dan does not see a new identity apart from a connection to Jesus. Sandy offered a similar statement:

> Who I am today is totally different. I mean, when you're a Christ follower, you're not defined by your past anymore. You're defined according to how God's changed you and who you are as his child.

Sandy claims that the Christian identity is defined by God, not by self. Steve expresses a similar sentiment, although his statement is peppered with doubt:

> Part of that process is learning also, like, I'm not defined by what I think or what somebody else thinks or what the world thinks. I've got a different definition. I'm learning that. Cause we talk about that in recovery all the time. You're God's child. There's a point when I believe that for you, I believe that for others, but it's hard for me to believe it.

Steve acknowledges that personal identity being defined by God is a key concept in this recovery group, even if he has trouble accepting it. In our conversation, it was not apparent that Steve doubted the claim to be true, but that he had difficulty applying it to his own identity.

A new identity, as defined by Jesus, is radically different than previous identities. For Maria, there is freedom from the pit—her identity has become one of hope and resilience. For Jessie, there is no lack of identity when she now says, "I'm happy with who I am." Self-hatred and purposelessness have been turned into self-appreciation and intentionality. For Dan, his feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing have become feelings of contentment, leadership, and joy. Self-perceptions rooted in past addictions, traumas, and conditions are replaced by perceptions of belonging to a heavenly family. The Identity Window seeks to capture this transformation of the Christian in recovery from a shameful past into a glorious new identity.

4. The Family Window

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Matthew 5:6

The Family Window depicts my interlocutors' experience with reimagined family structures (Figure 17). I had difficulty planning this window, so it was the fourth one I completed. Community is essential in the recovery process; individuals in recovery must find meaningful connections with others who can support, encourage, and offer accountability. Community is the basis for social capital, or the resources that one can only gain through relationships. For my Christian interlocutors, community took many forms, including marriages, adopted families, and the recovery group itself. Past experiences with broken or abusive families also contributed to my interlocutors' need for recovery, and an essential component of their recovery was healing these familial wounds. Healing from familial duress meant offering forgiveness, grieving losses, creating new families, seeing God as a father figure, and identifying spiritual mother figures.

The Family Window is again divided into three main zones of imagery. The bottom zone depicts ways in which my interlocutors spoke of their reimagined families. The middle zone contains another key story, that of Sandy, and six smaller expressions of family. The top zone deals with God as Father and connects this window to global Christianity. As in the other windows, this window boasts the same leaf-like framing containing a key quotation at its base.

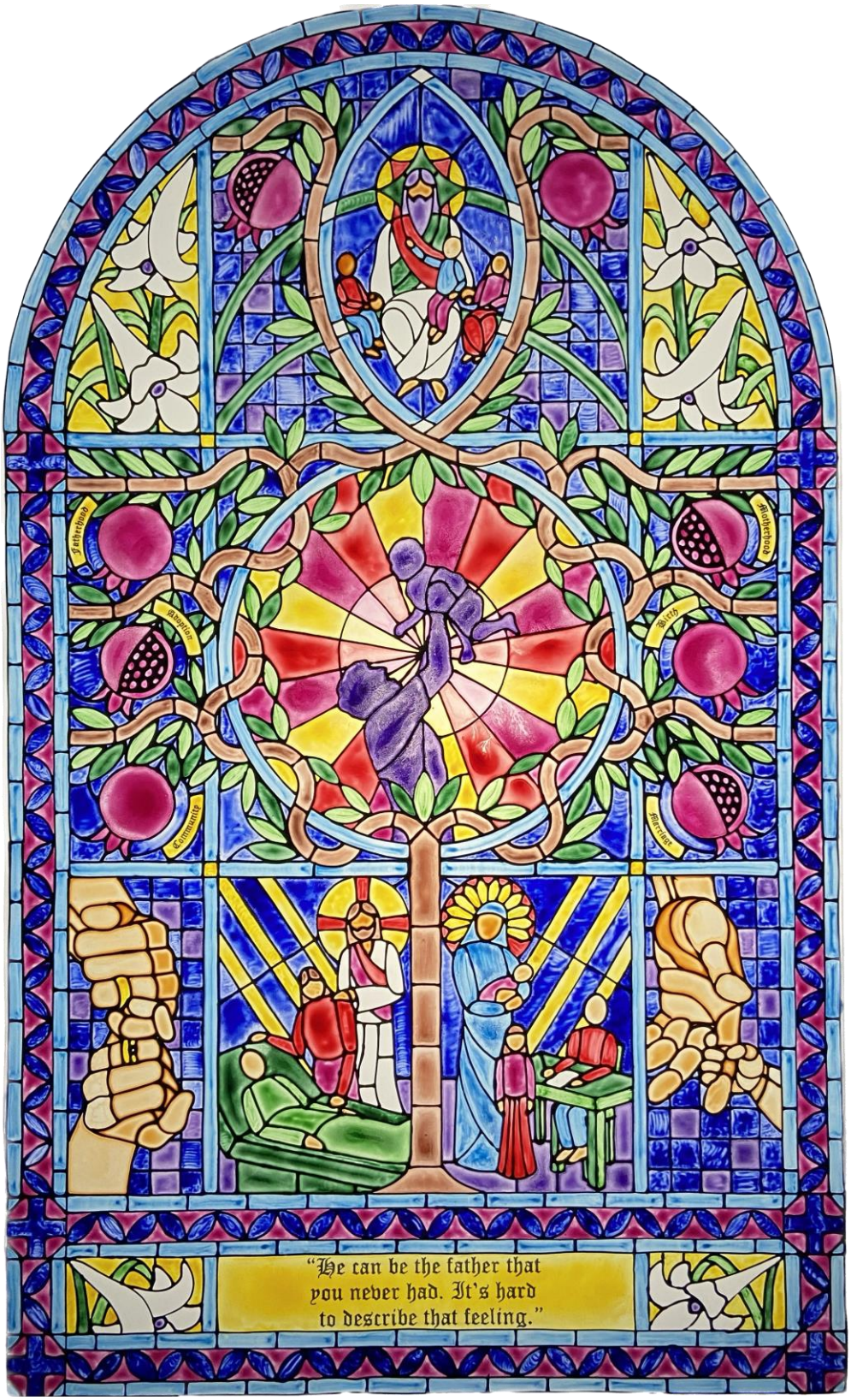

Figure 17. The Family Window

The Family Window's central tree is based on the Tree of Jesse, a motif common in Christian stained glass since medieval times (Lee, Seddon, and Francis 1976). Based on Isaiah 11:1, the Tree of Jesse depicts a tree sprouting from a reclining man, Jesse, and functions like a family tree diagram, highlighting key descendants of Jesse in its boughs, like David and Solomon, before reaching Jesus and his mother Mary in its canopy. Thus, a Tree of Jesse is a historical mode of depicting Jesus' lineage visually, highlighting the importance of family and genealogy in these communities. The Family Window does not depict a Tree of Jesse, but it does depict a tree that grows up through each layer of the window (Figure 17). Beginning at the base, its trunk emerges from my interlocutors' conceptions of new family structures. Its branches spiral and produce pomegranates, a symbol of fertility and rebirth. Six of the pomegranates are labelled with key relational concepts established by my interlocutors: fatherhood, motherhood, adoption, birth, community, and marriage. The tree continues into the top of the window, supporting a mandorla containing God the Father. The tree offers unity to the window and signifies the unexpected cohesion among various families and communities. While each interlocutor described family differently, each recognized the importance and centrality of family in understanding past wounds and facilitating healing.


Figure 18. Marriage.

The first of four images at the window's base represents marriage (Figure 18). All five interlocutors spoke of their marriages as being essential to their recoveries. When asked if he would like to share "anything else important" to him, Dan immediately began discussing his wife, Sandy, and the role that

she played in his recovery, remarking, “I couldn’t be the man I am today if it wasn’t for my wife… when I am weak, she is strong.” Dan and Sandy’s affection for one another was evident in their teamwork, in their communication, and in their interviews. Maria, who had been shattered by divorce, spoke of her remarriage as a place of healing:

> Six and a half years into the marriage with the love of my life, I felt safe to put aside my self-protecting tools and to learn who I really was. I was finally able to fall apart and allow God to put me back with his love and acceptance. God knew, I knew, I had a partner who would stand beside me through the darkness.

For Maria, her remarriage was the vehicle through which God could operate to heal her. Her husband was a source of strength and security that allowed Maria to begin healing the wounds from her childhood and previous marriage. I have thus represented marriage by two hands in a pinkie promise. Each hand wears a golden wedding band, and the woman’s hand also bears an engagement ring. The pair are physically joined to one another, linking pinkies in a sign of commitment. As will be further examined, familial healing often involves reexaminations of childhood. Thus, the pinkie promise represents this return to childhood innocence and purity.

Figure 19. Holding hands.

Another pair of hands, that of a parent and child, are depicted (Figure 19). Dan explained his relationship with God in terms of holding hands, “I can’t even walk without holding his hand. I mean, I’ve got to have him.” To Dan, God is a necessary father figure who guides a child in learning to walk. I intentionally portrayed a hand fit for a baby, as this pair of hands also reflects the stories of Jessie and Steve. The couple successfully had one child but found themselves unable to conceive again. When they did eventually conceive, a doctor

misdiagnosed the pregnancy to be ectopic and advised the termination of that pregnancy. Jessie and Steve complied, but only after administering the abortifacients was the doctor's error recognized. Jessie reflects on hearing the heartbeat of her child:

> The technician who was doing the ultrasound, she didn't know anything about what's going on.
>
> She goes, "Oh, look, listen, there's the heartbeat, there's a heartbeat in the uterus." And, I remember, Steve, I mean, he, he, um, he came apart. He had come apart in the room. I was, I think, just stunned. So essentially, we had just, you know, terminated a perfectly viable pregnancy. That's when we went to prayer. I mean, we got every, I mean, across the four corners of the globe. I mean, we had people, somehow we knew people in England.
>
> I mean, we had people praying, like, "Please let this baby live," you know. And, um. And, the baby did not… I've got a little baby in heaven… I still feel like God walked me through that to just get me through it, you know, because it was a hard road to walk.

Jessie and Steve endured the loss of their child, and a part of their recoveries involved finding forgiveness for the doctor and for themselves. In the Family Window, I also wanted the hand-holding image to reflect Jessie and Steve holding the hand of the baby they had prayed so fervently to save.

Another image in the base of the Family Window is that of a spiritual mother figure (Figure 20). Jessie and Steve both spoke of a Christian mentor in their lives as a "spiritual mother." Specifically, this woman taught them how to pray, and her role was also described as "teacher." I have shown this woman as both a mother and as a teacher, cradling a baby and offering instruction to a child. She is depicted in Marian style, clothed in Mary's traditional blue color with a twelve-lighted halo around her head. As Evangelicals, my

Figure 20. A spiritual mother.

interlocutors did not mention Mary, but their description of a "spiritual mother" is often applied to Mary by Christians globally.


Figure 21. Loss and comfort.

The last image at this window's base is one of loss and comfort (Figure 21). Most of my interlocutors had lost their parents. Sandy highlighted her absent father's death as a key moment of her healing:

> But this pastor had told me, "You need to go make sure he's right with the Lord."
>
> And so I went. I didn't want to. Because I had all that stuff still, I thought I'd kind of unpacked it, but I knew I was still angry at him. And so I went, and I sat at the foot of his bed for three days, just staring at him, before I could ever get up. And it was like God got me out of that chair—he had had a stroke, so he was paralyzed on one side—it was like he was in a coma. Sorta. Not one time outa those three days did he open his eyes or have any kind of life. But that third day regardless I got up, and before I knew it, I was standing up there holding his hand, and I was praying over him, saying the sinner's prayer. When I opened up my eyes, he was looking at me, and he was trying to talk to me, and he was smiling, and he was laughing, and he had tears going down his face. He knew what had happened!
>
> And, so that was a big deal about God—I would have never gotten out of the chair because I had a lot of hurt there, but God showed me who he is that day in a way that I'd never seen him before.

Sandy visited her father's bedside begrudgingly, but God helped her to pray with her father and understand him anew. I've shown this scene of loss and comfort with a woman standing at a man's bedside, her own support coming from Jesus.

The central image of this window expands on Sandy's story of loss (Figure 22). Her father passed away shortly after Sandy visited him in the hospital. Sandy described a vision at his funeral:

> And at that funeral, it was like all of a sudden, I didn't hear what the minister was saying anymore, but I saw visions of things from a baby that there's no way I would have ever remembered. And it seemed like it lasted forever, and it was all

> him and I. And it was in color. It was like you were sitting there watching a movie. And it didn't last forever—I'm sure it's probably only seconds, but all of a sudden not. That's all I saw—that's all I heard. And then all of a sudden, all that drowned'ed out, and that vision left me, and I was back at the funeral, and I could see the casket and hear the preacher…
>
> God gave me things about my father that otherwise I would have left with the woulda, shoulda, coulda's, and all the regrets, and I never would have had a lot of those memories. Because they were like, I can see it today, him holding me up in the air as an infant. And I woulda never had those memories to hang on to as positive, good, loving memories if God hadn't given them to me that day. What I felt was everything that he hadn't been for three-fourths of my life.

Sandy's visionary experience brought healing to her memories. She saw her father caring for her as an infant, redeeming his image from that of the absent father she had known as a girl and teenager. When telling her story of recovery and healing, Sandy intentionally chose to include these scenes around her father's death. In coming to understand her father differently, Sandy was freed from the mental turmoil and rejection of her youth. I depicted this vision with bright, warm colors to invoke joy and used radial symmetry to suggest balance and stability.

Figure 22. Visions of a father.

Figure 23. God the Father.

The top section of the Family Window depicts God the Father surrounded by children (Figure 23). This image is based on the Orthodox paternity icon, which was banned in the Orthodox church for depicting the Father's physical form. This decision was made at the Great Moscow Council of 1666-1667, but the image's use has persisted (Tarasov 2002). In this window, the Father sits on an emerald rainbow, encircled by a mandorla, or traditional almond-shaped aureole. His halo contains eight points, also a traditional element. He is the culmination of the family tree climbing this window; it is in God's family that my interlocutors find their place. Pomegranates again are featured, and lilies bloom along the window's borders. Lilies are historically Christian symbols of resurrection, new life, and Mary.

From the base to the apex of the Family Window, various forms of family and intimate community are displayed. My interlocutors chose time and again to talk about their familial hurts and familial healings. Where family had been lost, new families were

forged. Dan and Sandy never had children. In contemplating family, Sandy remarked that she and Dan were the spiritual parents of many in the recovery group:

> And I cannot begin to tell you on Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day how many texts we get. Because we've been that. They may have a mother, but they haven't been the spiritual parent that they needed to be. And a lot of times that's the role you end up taking in a ministry like this… I didn't have that with my father, and I had to learn how Christ could become that.

Sandy sees her own role as a mother within her intimate community. In turn, she sees God as the father that she lacked. In her recovery, Sandy found healing in her own family, which allowed her to become the family that she and others needed, too. She said of God, "He can be the father that you never had. It's hard to describe that feeling." And even if words cannot describe such a feeling, Sandy voices her experience with her very life, choosing to parent the parentless.

Sandy, Dan, Maria, Jessie, and Steve all discussed their families and the ways in which they achieved familial healing. Whether they formed new families or forgave old ones, reimagining family was essential to their recoveries, and reimaging families is the key idea behind the Family Window.

5. The Sanctification Window

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Matthew 5:7

The Sanctification Window is a testament to the slow, gradual healing that takes place in the lives of recoverees (Figure 24). My interlocutors spoke of many experiences in which life-changing events occurred overnight. However, when they discussed the process of healing, it was always described as the day-by-day process of "sanctification." Sanctification is the process by which Christians are progressively made holy as their obedience increases. That is, my interlocutors made no distinction between their spiritual growth and their physical and mental healing. For these individuals, healing requires patience, endurance, and time.

The Sanctification Window joins its sibling windows in its leaf-like border. This window contains images of onions at its edges (Figure 24). All five interlocutors made a comparison between healing and the layers of an onion, and Jessie offered succinctly, "It's not like either you're healed or you're not. It's like layers of an onion. We experience healing in layers." Just as onions reveal layer after layer to peel, cut, and cook, so, too, does one's life reveal layer after layer of healing to experience. The underlying suggestion is that healing never ends. While onions have a center—an end to the layers—there is no end of sanctification until one steps out of time and into eternity. There are, again, three zones of imagery: a top, middle, and bottom. The top and middle sections are best discussed together, as their messages are in dialogue. The bottom depicts a unique metaphor presented by Jessie.

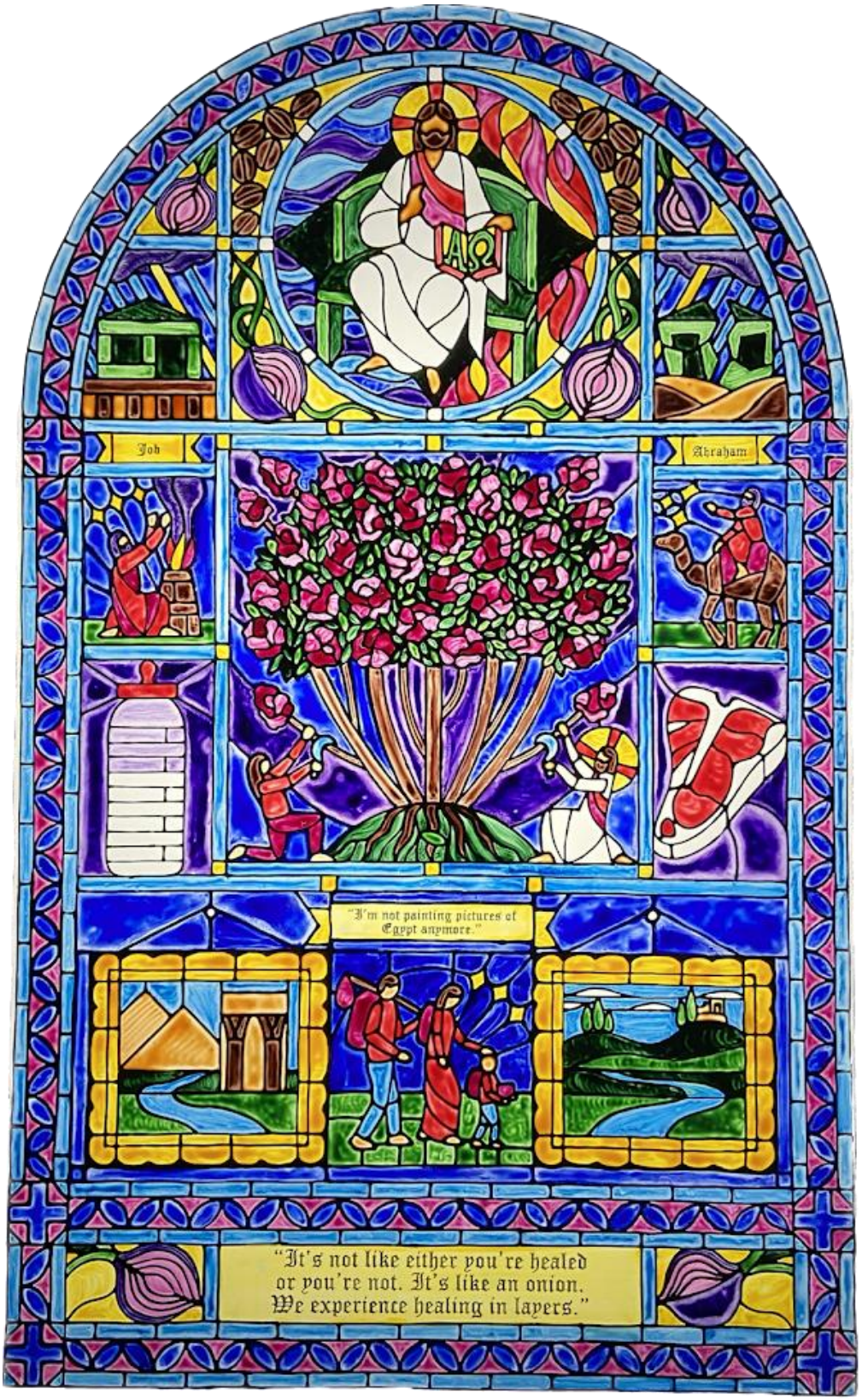

Figure 24. The Sanctification Window.

One of the aims of the Sanctification Window is to highlight the apparent complexity of Christian conceptions of agency. In their conversations about healing, my interlocutors attributed agency to God, to themselves, or to both parties, and sometimes did so simultaneously. Steve spoke of agency:

> Sometimes God will move when He sees me move. It's that mustard seed. Sometimes I have to have that faith, and it doesn't seem like a lot, but this is what I'm going to do because I feel like that's what I'm supposed to do, Lord. I'm going to trust You for the part that I can't do that only You can do.

For Steve, healing occurs when a "move" of God occurs. God is the one whose movement produces healing—God possesses agency over Steve's healing. In the same breath, Steve also claims that God's movement is dependent upon Steve's own movement in the form of "faith." Steve possesses agency in the process because it is his faith that initiates God's movement. After emphasizing his own faith, Steve then returns to the notion that there is a "part" of this process "that only [God] can do." Thus, Steve speaks of shared agency in action—both he and God possess individual abilities to act—but a single agency in attribution—only God can do the "part" where healing occurs. Both shared and attributed agency are depicted in the Sanctification Window and will be discussed throughout the top and middle sections.

At the top, the central image is that of Jesus enthroned, modeled after icons of Christ Pantocrator (Figure 25). This icon symbolizes Jesus' omnipotence and authority over the cosmos. Attributed agency is on full display; Jesus is in complete control. There are no challengers to the throne, and Jesus exerts authority over blessings and judgments.

Directly adjacent to Jesus' circular aureole are coffee beans. Jessie considers a part of her sanctification to be growing in wisdom or applied knowledge. Jessie

Figure 25. Christ Pantocrator.

describes this process like percolating coffee:

> It took me a long time to let all that sink down from my head to my heart. And I think a lot of times we can go after learning and make that an idol. Over the years, it's like a little coffee pot. It just keeps trickling down, but it's slow. So over these past thirteen, fourteen years, it's been a process of letting God have the ability to let that sink down into my heart. And I feel like as I do that and surrender to Him, He heals me, He's healing me.

For Jessie, healing requires time so that her acquired knowledge can become integrated into her heart and inner being. Again, agency is shared; Jessie allows the percolation to take place, chooses to surrender, and recognizes that God is the one performing healing.

Two houses are also pictured at the window's top. These are based on Maria's interview and on Jesus' Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders in Matthew 7:24-27. Maria spoke about her divorce and the fall of her house:

> Matthew says that "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down and the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash." When my house crashed, I could not eat, sleep, care for myself or my children… God knew that this was going to happen. So he

> placed the right neighbors by me to love me and my children through this time of my life.

Maria's story does not end with her home's collapse. Rather, the collapse initiates a tremendous healing. In Matthew Seven, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount ends with the fool's home crashing down, carrying a sense of finality. Maria's story is not finalized; there is hope and healing beyond the crash.

The center portion of the Sanctification Window contains several metaphors. My interlocutors made comparisons between themselves and biblical figures like Job and Abraham (Figures 26, 27). Both biblical individuals demonstrated faith in God despite extensive periods of difficulty. Steve expressed an affinity for Abraham in particular. At God's command, Abraham left his home to relocate his family from Mesopotamia to Canaan (Genesis 12:1-5). Steve felt a similar prompting from God to relocate his family across the North American continent:

Figure 26. Job.

> God had put these clear signs that were moving… and the story that spoke to me was when God asked Abraham to go. To go to a land that he didn't know, pack up everything and go. That was the story that spoke to both of us when we were trying to sort through that and praying about that.

For Steve, the biblical narrative is not one of historical value, but one of contemporary application and encouragement in his own literal and figurative journey.

Figure 27. Abraham.

Sandy made another biblical allusion now featured in the Sanctification Window. She described her journey of healing and sanctification as growing up and progressing in her diet, saying,

"That's not an easy fix, that takes years of unpacking and relearning to be able to grow and mature up from a baby on meal to a Christian on meat." Expressing a sentiment like 1 Corinthians 3:2, Sandy conceptualizes her sanctification as a process akin to human development expressed in diet. Her allusion is shown as a bottle of formula contrasted with a porterhouse steak (Figures 28, 29).

Figure 28. Baby formula.

Figure 29. Porterhouse steak.

The window's central image is that of a crape myrtle tree being pruned (Figure 30). Sandy talked about pruning a crape myrtle bush so it could become a healthy tree:

> You can take a crape myrtle bush, and it's a bush, and you can take all the limbs off the bottom, and it'll grow into a tree instead of a bush. But you have to constantly prune away the little suckers that come out on the bottom that you've taken away.

Sandy describes this process as one that requires repetitive, intentional effort, much like sanctification. I have placed this metaphor in conversation with Christ Pantocrator by featuring Jesus again, this time as a gardener working alongside Sandy. The pair—humanity and God—share agency over this pruning process. Thus, while attributed agency is shown at the top of the window, shared agency is displayed here.

Figure 30. Pruning a crape myrtle.

Figure 31. Between Egypt and the Promised Land.

The base of the Sanctification window depicts one of Jessie's metaphors (Figure 31). While reflecting on her journey of healing, Jessie relayed a recent sense of freedom, comparing her experience of sanctification to the Exodus from Egypt:

> *Jessie:* When the Israelites came out of Egypt and they were in the wilderness and they were like, "Man, it was so good back in Egypt." And it's like you're painting pictures of Egypt. You're remembering things about Egypt that were amazing, and the places that used to fit you—they don't fit anymore, you know?
>
> And so for me, I think about my life and I think, "I'm not painting pictures of Egypt anymore." But I did for a long time. Just being able to look back at my Egypt and my wilderness and just say, man, I really can sympathize with people. I don't have it all figured out, but I've got a little time under my belt. And so I feel more rested. Not in, really, the physical sense because I'm always tired. I feel rested in the sense that I'm done with the roaming around the mountain. In some areas I am still doing that, but a lot of my foot-of-the-mountain-roaming is done. And I can look back at that and just rest a little bit.
>
> *Eli:* I think it's a beautiful image. Egypt and the wilderness—working your way through that. Would you describe yourself as being in the Promised Land, then?
>
> *Jessie:* [Nine seconds of silence.] I don't think so. I feel like I am… [Eight seconds of silence.] I don't know. That's a hard question to answer. I think the symbolism of the Promised Land can be so many different things. You know, I think that there's lots of promised lands for us in different areas. But the pinnacle Promised Land, I mean—I don't think that we get there until we are with Jesus… But I do feel like over the last year, I had kind of a rough patch, like right after COVID. I really hit a little rough patch. And I'm not ashamed of that. I feel like that's part of our journey. We have to have those seasons of refinement, you

> know? And I feel like I've come out of that a little bit. And I feel like in the sense of that, I almost feel like I'm to the Promised—[Jessie laughs]. Because I've gone through that wilderness, and what's on the other side of the wilderness? You cross the river, and you get to the Promised Land. In that sense, I feel like, okay, I've made that journey in that area. And yes, I'm living off the milk and honey, so to speak.

Jessie easily described herself as being delivered from Egypt. Her sanctification at this moment is choosing not to dwell upon and glorify her past. Jessie is done painting pictures of Egypt. However, she hesitates to describe herself as being in the Promised Land. She first determines that the Promised Land is being with Jesus, referring to existence after human death. Jessie eventually claims to be eating from the produce of the Promised Land, enjoying its milk and honey, but she resists admitting to living in the Promised Land, evidenced by her hesitation, laughter, and verbal processing. Thus, Jessie imagines herself to be somewhere between Egypt and the Promised Land—somewhere restful but not yet perfect, somewhere with God's provision while still in process.

The final section of the Sanctification Window depicts Jessie's metaphor. Two golden picture frames boast paintings of Egypt and of the Promised Land. A family of three walks between the two frames, frozen mid-stride on their journey toward perfection. They have escaped the bondage of Egypt, but the Promised Land is yet out of reach. Three stars float ahead of the family, a motif shared with the figures of Job and Abraham in this same window. Just as stars accompanied Job's grief and reminded Abraham of God's covenant, so, too, do stars accompany the family on their journey and remind them of the land they seek. In the family, one can see the experience of sanctification, continuously moving forward but always existing between two destinations.

The journey to Egypt, the pruning of the crape myrtle, and the fall of a fool's house together reflect another subtheme of sanctification: often, healing feels like loss.

The journey of sanctification is lengthy, gradual, and arduous. Sometimes branches must be pruned away, sometimes homes must be left behind, and sometimes one must march through the night. Agency in this process can be shared between God and humanity, or it can be attributed solely to God. But in every case, healing takes place. Sanctification is not an emergency fix, but it is the process my interlocutors praise as the road to healing.

6. The Word Window.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

The Word Window depicts three evangelical rituals central to my interlocutors' experiences (Figure 32). The rituals include testimony, kataphatic prayer, and Bible reading. Interestingly, each of these rituals involves language. The window can be easily divided into four sections, one for each ritual and an additional section connecting this window to global Christianity.

A leaf-like border frames the window, unifying it with the others. Each corner features a scroll or an envelope. The scrolls represent the words of God delivered to humanity through scripture, while the envelopes represent the words of humanity delivered to God through prayer. Scripture and prayer will be examined in greater detail in later sections.

The first ritual, testimony, is depicted as a memorial pillar (Figure 33). Evangelical testimony is the act of speaking, writing, or otherwise communicating one's conversion narrative. Testimonies often describe what God has done in an individual's life and how one's life has changed because of involvement with Jesus. Jessie reflects on our interview and on sharing her testimony with me:

Figure 33. Testimony.

Figure 32. The Word Window.

> This was encouraging to me, and I think sometimes it's good to reflect on our stories. You know, we give our testimony here. I've given my testimony here probably three or four times. And it's always a good experience. And every time I give it, I add on to it, which is kind of cool. But sometimes I think we forget, and it's like when the Israelites put up their stones, their markers. It's like we have to go back and remember where we've come from. So, doing something like this is good for me to remember. It is encouraging for me because it reminds me that I have come a long way, and God has kept me around for a reason.

In her reflection, Jessie expresses encouragement. Jessie describes a testimony like an Israelite memorial pillar, a physical marker of the transition between wilderness and the Promised Land (Joshua 4:1-24). A testimony is not passive; it is actively "given" as a gift, and Jessie calls it "a good experience." In sharing her testimony, Jessie can evaluate where she stands on her imagined journey of sanctification. I've represented Jessie's simile with a twelve-stone cairn standing near the Jordan River. Egypt looms ominously in the distance, a reminder of the past, while the Promised Land unveils its grapes and grain in abundant contrast.

In sharing a testimony, the speaker achieves several functions. For one, the speaker can organize the past into meaningful patterns of understanding. Both tragedy and triumph are imbued with significance and placed into an orderly narrative whose author is God. In addition, the speaker can actively participate in the imagined story. The speaker can make claims about his or her identity from a spiritual zenith, presenting and coming to know himself or herself from within the organized narrative arch. Finally, the speaker can easily attribute agency to God. While daily life often consists of unconscious decisions and repercussions, a narrative allows for conscious assignment of events to the work of the supernatural.

Maria best exemplifies what a testimony can accomplish. Maria is the only interlocutor whom I interviewed in a private room. She carried with her a white, plastic

binder, which she set squarely in front of her on the table. I wrote the following about our encounter in my ethnographic memos:

> She opened the white binder, and it was filled with thirty or forty plastic page protectors, guarding at least two versions of her testimony. The story she shared with me filled over half the binder. In each plastic page protector was a white sheet of paper printed front and back in large, black letters, perhaps a font size eighteen or twenty. This was a manuscript designed to be read aloud. Maria's thoughtful testimony was written on these pages in narrative form paragraphs. As she read, references in the text made it clear that this manuscript was written to be read during Thank God for Healing meetings. To my surprise, Maria began to cry almost as soon as she began to read her testimony.

Maria valued her testimony enough to organize it, write it, print it, and carry it with her to events in which she expected to use it. She had prepared herself for the performance that is testimony. Maria later remarked, "The word of our testimony is healing." She sees her words as powerful spiritual forces that actively achieve healing. Maria's story was full of tragedies she did not expect in life, but in her testimony, each tragedy became a meaningful act in a larger drama. Maria is dealing with loss, renewed mental health issues, and unpredictability, but in her testimony, she has stage directions, lines, and plot resolution. Maria's decisions have impacted her for better or for worse, but in her testimony, the hand of God is at work. Testimony, then, becomes an active ritual of redemption and creation. That is, it takes unordered chaos and names it, ordering it into a meaningful existence.

Another key ritual is kataphatic prayer, in which the participant converses with God. Prayer offers direction and encouragement, and in my interlocutors' lives, prayer offers healing. Dan shared the following story of a prayer after the onset of withdrawals:

> I started praying and it was cloudy. And when I started praying, it was like the cloud opened up and this circle of sunlight was right around me, nowhere else. And I was just looking up, praying and thanking God for giving me one more day. And I said, "Lord, if Your will be done, I need You to deliver me from these

> crazy nightmares and these bed sweats. And, Lord, I'm tired of wrestling with this. And, Lord, I know you can, and if it's Your will, let it be done. Amen." Just simple and amen. As soon as I said, "Amen," it went, "Shweep!" It was gone.
>
> And I was like, "Sandy! Sandy! Sandy! Sandy! Did you see that? You see that?"
>
> She was like, "What?"
>
> I said, "You didn't see that?"
>
> She said, "I have no idea what you're talking about."
>
> I said, "You didn't see that spot of sun on me?"
>
> She's like, "I didn't see nothing."
>
> And I was like, "Am I hallucinating or something? Did I imagine that or—?" But I know it was God because after that night, I've never had another dream. And the withdrawals, the sweats, all, they were gone. And I know he took them from me.

Figure 34. Prayer.

Dan describes a moment of healing connected to prayer. He had an experience involving a ray of heavenly light, which he quickly associated with God's supernatural healing power. I have depicted this moment as a man kneeling in prayer (Figure 34). A ray of light surrounds him, dividing what is good and calm from what is dark and nightmarish.

The final ritual is Bible reading, depicted by an open book (Figure 35). My interlocutors referenced Bible reading in a myriad of ways. They often quoted scripture or made allusions to Bible passages. They also talked about Bible reading outright, such as Maria, who cited Bible reading as a source of joy:

> I know that being in the Word every day is a life thing that I have to do. It's where I find joy. And that's what the Word says, you know. And, I think I allow the school year to keep me so busy that I feel like I don't have time to stay in the Word as I should. And then it shows in me.

Maria delights in the Bible and can recognize a difference in her behavior and thought patterns when she does not spend consistent time in the Bible. Maria referenced “the Word” eleven times and recited several passages. Sandy cited “what the Scripture says” six times. Dan compared his circumstance to “what God’s Word said.” Steve talked about needing more time in “the Word” and learning to read the Bible. Jessie reminisced on leading several Bible studies and her love of learning about the Bible. For each interlocutor, the Bible was a sacred source of truth by which all else in life could be compared.

Bible reading is shown with an open Bible surrounded by flowers. This image is at the base of the window because several interlocutors described the Bible as a “foundation.” Life and fruit bud from its pages, and birds find rest in its abundant gardens of wisdom. A candle declares the Bible to be a light. The four symbols of the Gospels are featured to each side of the Bible. These traditional symbols have been used by Christian artists for centuries: Matthew is a man, Mark a lion, Luke an ox, and John an eagle. Each living creature is winged, so that the Gospels might fly to every corner of the globe.

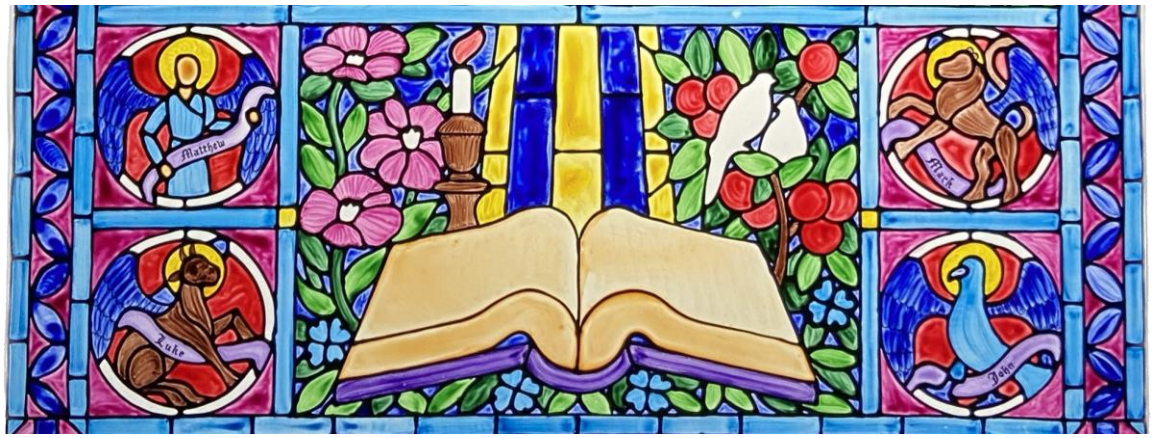

Figure 35. Bible reading.

The three rituals featured in the Word Window are connected by rays of light that emanate from the window's top. At the top, the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove (Figure 36). This image pulls several elements from Orthodox icons of Pentecost, in which a semicircle of early Church figures is shown with flames of the Spirit above their heads. The purpose of Pentecost is to equip the Church to evangelize to the world, and thus the globe is depicted here where the likeness of King Cosmos would be depicted in iconography. For my interlocutors, the Holy Spirit is integral to these rituals.

Figure 36. The Holy Spirit.

Prayer is especially influenced by the Holy Spirit, and this is nowhere more evident than in the practice of "praying in the Spirit," or glossolalia. Glossolalia involves praying in an unknown language. Jessie describes her experience with glossolalia:

> I don't know how you feel about praying in the Spirit or having a Spirit language or whatever, but I feel like I've kind of gotten to the point where my English prayers are so weak. I do pray, in the sense that there's things in my spirit I need to ask for, and I ask for it. But I do a lot of praying in the Spirit. Like, let me pray in the Spirit, because the Spirit is going to pray for the things that I probably need… I feel like I can't be trusted to pray for things sometimes… I feel like I know enough to know how to pray for things, but I feel like in my personal prayer time, I don't want to pray my own prayers. I want to pray the Holy Spirit's prayers. And so, that's kind of what I'm after. And I do it as much as I can. I sing in the Spirit. In my car, in the shower, when I'm by myself, any opportunity I can, I do that, you know?

Jessie finds tremendous pleasure praying in the Spirit to the extent that she feels her "English" prayers are "weak." When talking about the Holy Spirit with me, Jessie's eyes glowed with delight and her posture straightened. If the Bible is Maria's source of joy, glossolalia is Jessie's. Ironically, glossolalia is a ritual involving language that is unknown. Whereas testimony, prayer, and Bible reading involve cognition of symbolic language, glossolalia utilizes speech without the need for language cognition (McGraw 2011). It carries the authority of other language-based rituals but evades human amendment and interpretation, voicing the Holy Spirit alone.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, three rituals were highlighted by my interlocutors: testimony, prayer, and Bible reading. Testimony acts as a memorial of the past and a tool for invigorating present recovery efforts. Prayer offers a connection to a personal God and can become a conduit for healing and the Holy Spirit's power. Bible reading lays the foundation for understanding a Christian life. These tools are wielded by my interlocutors in their pursuits of healing, and these rituals are illumined in the Word Window.

7. The God Window.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Matthew 5:9

The God Window depicts, well, God (Figure 37). As my interlocutors spoke of their recoveries, their stories began with a disinterest or distaste for God. Dan described God as a "getcha God" who was continuously out to get him. Steve noted that God was "distant" and ambivalent. But through the recovery process, each interlocutor came to know God in novel, intimate ways. Knowing a God who sees, loves, and forgives was instrumental in my interlocutors' recoveries. Dan would call God "the man" and remark on God's mercy, grace, and compassion. Steve would highlight God's faithfulness and provision. Metaphors, symbolism, and descriptions of God were as diverse as those speaking to me, and this window seeks to highlight a few of these instances of communicated commemorabilia.

The God Window is a rose window, a circular aperture with radial symmetry and geometric beauty. Rose windows are often the crowning jewels of cathedrals, and I based the God Window's design on the infamous North Rose Window of Chartres Cathedral. These windows can represent eternity in Christian tradition and often depict Jesus, Mary, and apocalyptic scenes (Lee, Seddon, and Francis 1976). I spent more time on the geometry of the God Window than on its actual imagery. Like a twelve-petaled flower, images emanate from the central depiction of Christ. The twelve petals depict twelve descriptions of God given by my interlocutors. Twelve squares float around the grand flower, depicting the Beatitudes and other key symbols. The images within the petals and

Figure 37. The God Window.

the squares are rotated to remain upright, another common feature of rose window imagery (Lee, Seddon, and Francis 1976). Finally, stars encircle the perimeter, and the window is bound by the unifying leaf-like border.

The central image of the God Window is the only embodied representation of God in the whole window. Jesus is shown in a hard hat with a blueprint in hand (Figure

38). The universe circles about him as he directs the cosmos. Dan spoke about God as a construction manager:

> He's in the construction business. He's got the blueprints. And for him to refine us, it's like remodeling. He's got to tear down from the bottom up. And then mine and your job is to redecorate… God's in the blueprint business of restoration and restoring and reconstruction, and he's tearing down the old and the new.

Figure 38. Hard hat Jesus.

God is not uninterested or uninvolved—he is intentionally drawing up blueprints and bringing them to fruition. I enjoy this image of Christ in a hardhat; it presents a God who is involved in the lives of ordinary people, and it reflects the traditional trade of Jesus and his father as craftsmen. I included the sun, moon, and stars around Jesus to signify that he is the architect of the universe as well as of individual lives.

This symbolism of Jesus as builder is carried into the first of twelve petals, which shows a hammer and a compass (Figure 39). These tools represent God as a construction worker, involved in both careful planning and powerful execution. A compass requires precision, attention to detail, and mathematical precision. A hammer requires strength, dexterity, and persistence.

Figure 39. Hammer and compass.

Moving clockwise, the second petal depicts a cozy home (Figure 40). Every interlocutor spoke of God

as Father. As evidenced by the Family Window, my interlocutors understand God as a father and as the source of their families—actual and imagined. The home represents a place of security, rest, belonging, and love. Its front door is illuminated, an invitation to come home to the Father.

Figure 40. The Father's home.

The third petal contains a cornucopia spilling with produce (Figure 41). When asked about attributes of God meaningful to him, Steve commented that God is "a provider, and he's been faithful." I asked him to expand his answer, and Steve simply reiterated that God is a provider and faithful. God's provision is here expressed in a bountiful harvest, abundantly more than one might ask or imagine.

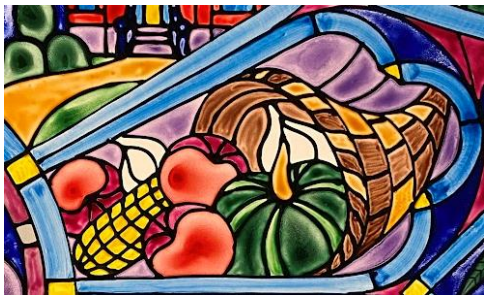

Figure 41. Cornucopia.

The fourth petal depicts a stethoscope and a pair of forceps, tools fit for a surgeon or physician (Figure 42). Dan described God as his "master physician" and later spoke of his own need for a spiritual heart transplant. God is perceived as a healer who can operate on even the dead to bring them to life. Dan had previously spoken about God's miraculous healing of his physical withdrawal symptoms. God is, then, a healer of the body as much as he is a healer of the spirit.

Figure 42. Stethoscope and forceps.

The fifth petal is lit with candles (Figure 43). Maria described God as her light, illuminating dark places of shame and offering direction in the night. Light offers vision in moments of blindness, and sometimes submitting oneself to God's investigative light requires vulnerability.

Figure 43. Candles.

The sixth petal contains an electrical outlet, energy surging around the panel (Figure 44). Jessie mentioned God's "power" twelve times, using the term frequently discuss the Holy Spirit's ability to enact powerful change. Jessie was adamant that the power of God was necessary for recovery and that God's miraculous power was too often neglected. The electrical outlet represents God's unlimited power, available to humanity through cooperation with him.

Figure 44. Electrical outlet.

The seventh petal features a pair of gardening shears cutting a branch (Figure 45). Sandy spoke of pruning a bush as a metaphor for refinement. God, as refiner, is also, then, the gardener who works to prune and tend to his people. This is an image shared with the Sanctification Window and a reminder of shared agency.

Eighth is a red telephone under glass, that of an emergency hotline (Figure 46). Dan made this connection when speaking of Jesus' consistent availability:

> He's there whenever you knock. Kind of picture the—you remember, the old Batman years ago—Gotham City—and the commissioner had that red phone under the glass dome when we're going to hit the hotline for Batman. So we've got a hotline for Jesus today, straight to him.

For Dan, Jesus is always within reach, a call or prayer away. The hotline phone is under glass, reserved for a specific contact. God is that contact, the one for whom prayer is reserved.

Figure 45. Pruning shears.

The ninth petal is a scenic seascape (Figure 47). Tall trees give way to rolling hills that run down into a deep blue sea. Jessie talked about the depth of God as an ocean, saying, "When I experienced the presence of God… I had this thought, 'There's more than what I am getting. I am lapping at this tiny little puddle when there's an ocean to be had.'" Jessie sees God as vast, deep, and unending. One can experience him in part, but it would be impossible to know him in full.

Figure 46. Hotline for Jesus.

The tenth petal shows a knife cutting onions (Figure 48). All five interlocutors used onions as a metaphor for the healing process, comparing layers of an onion to layers of healing in one's life. God is the chef who peels back the layers of our oniony lives.

Figure 47. Seascape.

The eleventh depicts three doors, each unique and freestanding (Figure 49). Dan spoke about God opening and closing doors of opportunity in his life. God becomes a doorman, guiding Dan's life decisions by generating or removing opportunities. Dan specifically used this metaphor when discussing a previous employment decision; he was able to discern God's will through the open and closed doors of opportunity.

Figure 48. Cutting onions.

Figure 49. Doors of opportunity.

The final petal shows a pathway meandering through fire (Figure 50). Steve spoke of God as someone who walked with him through the fires of life. For Steve, God had the power to put fires out but also the love to walk through fire with Steve. In either case, it was God alone who could sustain Steve through the fire.

Figure 50. Path through fire.

Around the petals dance twelve squares. Eight of these squares show beatitudes (Figures 51-58). The Beatitudes, eight statements of blessing made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, are central to the teachings of Thank God for Healing. Each of the Beatitudes is associated with one or more of the group's twelve steps of recovery. In the God Window, the Beatitudes are

Figure 51. Matthew 5:3.

Figure 52. Matthew 5:4.

Figure 53. Matthew 5:5.

Figure 54. Matthew 5:6.

Figure 55. Matthew 5:7.

Figure 56. Matthew 5:8.

Figure 57. Matthew 5:9.

Figure 58. Matthew 5:10.

paired with flowers. Steve explained that God's handprint can be seen in nature, so flowers here and stars beyond were apropos for this window. Each flower is unique and

can be symbolically linked to its beatitude. For example, the cactus is paired with Matthew 5:6 and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The final four squares depict sources of nourishment. Jessie claimed that seeing Jesus was the ultimate Promised Land, and she described herself as enjoying the milk and honey from the land. Milk and honey are therefore included in the God Window, for here one comes unto the face of Jesus (Figures 59, 60). I have shown these as products of the Promised Land, milk flowing from goats and honey from dates. For Christians who see the Hebrew Bible fulfilled in the New Testament, the milk and honey of the Promised Land are overshadowed by bread and wine—the body and blood of Jesus. Grain and grapes are shown with a Eucharistic wafer and a chalice (Figures 61, 62). Here, then, we see symbols old and new collapsing into one image of a sustaining, nourishing God.

There are more symbols of God than could be depicted in any window. I sought to convey the most striking, repeated, and significant symbols shared by my interlocutors. They speak of a God who is present, powerful, intimate, and creative. In his power, my interlocutors experience unparalleled freedom and healing.


Figure 59. Goat milk.


Figure 60. Date honey.


Figure 61. Bread.


Figure 62. Wine.

8. The Glory of the LORD Filled the Gallery.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10

The Gallery Space

Creation is inherently spiritual. But for the viewers of art, theirs is a spiritual experience, too. Like worshipers before a murti or pilgrims before an icon, gallerygoers lean forward, staring into gilded images in hopes of glimpsing and encountering the divine. Like health and religion, art is embodied, too, for art is another form of human expression. In displaying the stained glass windows I produced, I sought to create a space that would facilitate meaningful experiences with the art, where bodies and minds journey together.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers are greeted with a display chronicling my research and creative process (Figure 63). In two minutes, the viewers can trace the

Figure 63. Explanatory display.

rough journey that you, having read this thesis, have trekked. Included is an artist statement, a discussion of the anthropology of Christianity and healing, a summary of my interview process, and an explanation of my artistic experimentation. In these two minutes of reading and looking, the viewers have unknowingly quieted themselves to enter the sanctuary.

Figure 64. Doorway into the sanctuary.

The sanctuary hangs like a tent from the heavens, white voile cascading from wires strung across the gallery. There is one entrance and one exit, and viewers pass through a doorway into the sanctuary (Figure 64). Doorways offer a chance to pause, leave behind that which is heavy, and enter a space with expectation. Illuminated from the outside, the sanctuary glows softly within. Although its form is architectural, its edges are soft to the touch and to the eyes. The sanctuary demands nothing of the viewers, but in its white color, it offers itself as a canvas for the mind.

The stained glass windows hang in the sanctuary, warm light streaming through their polypropylene panes (Figure 65). Viewers can process through the sanctuary like acolytes in worship. The viewers become pilgrims, journeying through the stories of those in recovery with their minds and with their bodies. The windows are hung seven

Figure 65. Inside the sanctuary.

feet in the air, and viewers cannot observe the whole display at once. As they near each window, details appear, and as they walk through the space, the windows sing in a united chorus of purples, blues, and reds.

As the viewers approach the rose window, they have an opportunity (Figure 66). An altar stands below the God Window, and perhaps God himself has provided the treat. On the altar rests a glass bowl, filled with candy (Figure 67). There are hard, honey-filled candies and chewy, milk candies. As the viewers contemplate the face of God, they can enjoy the fruit of the Promised Land. It's an act of communion,

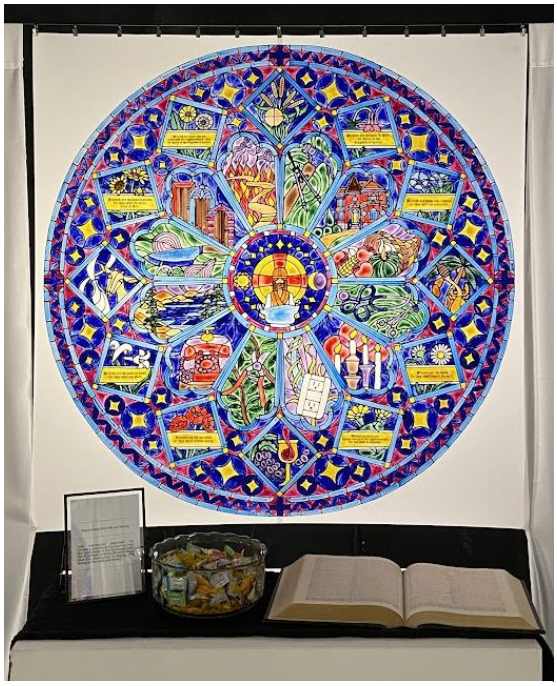

Figure 66. The rose window and altar.

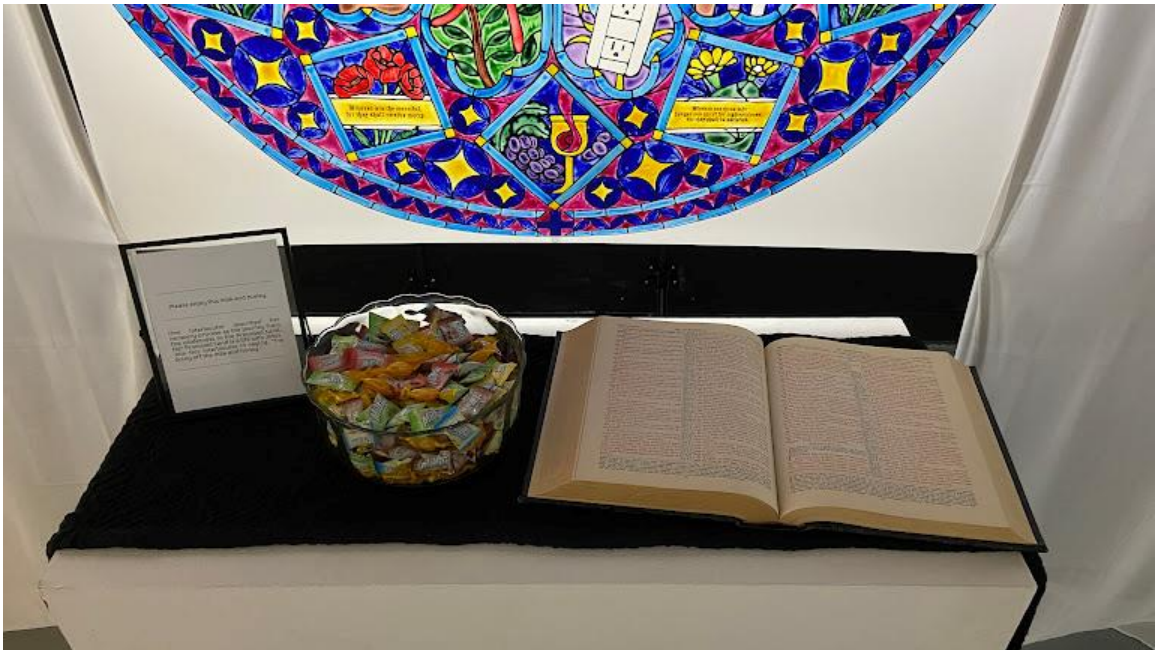

Figure 67. Milk and honey on the altar.

celebrating all that has been commemorated in this space, and all that is yet hoped for as the viewers prepare to leave. A Bible also rests on the altar, open to the Beatitudes in Matthew Five.

Viewers can exit the sanctuary through the single exit, and they are at once back in the world from which they first arrived. The journey has been a pilgrimage, defined by separation, liminality, and reintegration. The sanctuary becomes a significant—and perhaps even sacred—place. The gallery is a reliquary, not for bones of saints but for the communicated commemorabilia of my interlocutors.

Responses to the Project

I could not be more pleased with the setup or how viewers interacted with the space. I hosted an opening reception in the gallery, inviting friends, family, and former

Figure 68. Visitors in the sanctuary.

teachers to experience the exhibit (Figure 68). I was genuinely surprised by the responses I witnessed. One man hugged me and said in a near-whisper, “This is holy.” I smiled, now knowing that the space would indeed serve its intended purpose. Several men and women cried, necessitating the procurement of tissues. Two young women teared up at the explanation of the Family Window. Another woman cried at the stories of life transformation, which she found inspiring. Yet another woman cried after walking through the sanctuary, telling me the symbolism of sunflowers in her life. Having seen two sunflowers in the God Window, this woman was reminded of the flower’s significance during her father’s recent illness. One man sent me a text message afterward, saying, “I am writing this pulled over to the side of the road just to weep.” He relayed that butterflies—featured in the Identity Window—are reminders of his mother, who had passed away years ago. The man further reflected on the Identity Window and the Sanctification Window: “Thank you for inviting me today. Thank you for touching my heart and reminding me of the man God has molded me into and that HE sees me. I’m

glad I'm an onion." For these men and women, they responded emotionally to the space and to the stories captured within it, even choosing to use the language and symbols of the exhibit. They also began to share their own stories with me and identify the symbols that carried meaning for them.

One last woman cried after walking through the gallery. She stood facing the God Window, and I stood adjacent to the altar, turned toward her. One of her sons stood at the other side of the altar. She began to tell me about her second son who had recently been incarcerated on a devastating charge. This woman spoke of her son's transformation in prison and highlighted the positive changes she had seen in him: he was reading the Bible, praying publicly, and bringing his shameful past into the light. While his sentence had years remaining, this woman was optimistic that her son was in his own kind of recovery. I ended the conversation by praying for her son. My time with this woman was wholly unexpected but wholly delightful. I should have considered that Christians hearing stories of recovery would want to share their own stories. I should also have considered that many of these symbols are already meaningful for viewers in different ways, such as the sunflowers and butterflies. When encountering these images, viewers can connect the images to their own meaning systems and experiences.

The six individuals who responded with emotion and tears are Christians. Five are evangelical Protestant and one is Catholic. Another young man, a Methodist, talked with me about his personal use of the icon of the resurrection and hymn recommendations based on the flowers of the God Window. For Christians of many stripes, then, this was a space imbued with meaning and emotions that easily became palpable.

The gallery was in place for eleven days, and I visited daily. In the mornings, I ensured the door was unlocked, all lights were on, and there was sufficient candy for the day. In the evenings, I cleaned, darkened, and locked the room. And as long as I was not in class, I made every effort to sit in the gallery and guide visitors through the space.

Each day, I was moved by the responses of viewers. Many Christians streamed through the space, and they expressed encouragement, gratitude, deep emotion, and began sharing their own stories. In elevating the stories of everyday men and women, visitors felt able to add their own stories to the conversation. One Christian visitor declined a guided tour but told me afterward, “I understand the symbols.”

Art students also streamed through the gallery. Their responses often reflected on the creative use of the room and on the beauty of the pieces. One young woman hung an original painting on a wall just outside the gallery; her painting was of the undressed backside of a female figure. While talking with her, she remarked, “We have nothing in common. I make art about religious trauma, and you make art about healing.” I invited her into the space, and she graciously walked with me through the gallery as I explained my work and the stories of men and women who found healing, often after great traumas. We were not so different after all. She and I talked several additional times, and she shared another of her art pieces with me which contained religious symbolism. One evening I returned to the gallery to lock the door, and I was surprised to see this artist in the sanctuary, and she had brought two friends. No longer were we divided.

Another evening, I walked through the gallery with several art students and a few of their friends. One student was Jewish, another agnostic, another atheist, and two were disenchanted Christians. As I began speaking about the third window, I was surprised as

the group sat down to listen. This was the only group who sat on the gallery floor. The Jewish woman relayed that the space felt "sacred." One man explained that the gallery had challenged him to consider religion to be helpful for some people, not always a harm. Just before leaving, the agnostic began to share her story with me through tears. She had recently lost her father, and we spent a priceless moment crying together, ending with a hug. The air was heavy with emotion. Here stood a group of artists from various religious and non-religious backgrounds, but we shared a moment of humanity, mourning, and hope.

One art student had visited the gallery while I was installing the space, and he returned almost every day. Each time, he brought someone new with him. He would bring a friend to the room, walk them into the sanctuary, and then grab a piece of candy and leave his friend with me. On a weekend when no visitors were present, he appeared in the gallery and invited me to see some of his work. I was delighted at the opportunity, and he led me around the art building and through three studio classrooms in which he worked. He shared insights into his creative process and showed me several past works and works in progress. As a friendly gift, he gave me one of his screenprints with the instructions, "Respect it, but do whatever you want with it." I was thankful for this kind act, and I left a bag of candy for this new friend when I uninstalled the gallery. I now have his original screenprint displayed above my desk.

Two individuals who visited the gallery had family members in recovery programs. One was in a Christian recovery ministry, and another was in Alcoholics Anonymous. One woman shared photos of the gallery with her mother in recovery, and she texted me, "My mom said you represented recovery in such a beautiful and

Figure 69. Closing reception.

meaningful way and that she knows your work is going to bring hope to people just starting their journey." I am thankful that this work could be an encouragement to her, and I am grateful for the opportunity to support those in recovery.

Before the show was concluded, I hosted a closing reception and invited my former and current professors to attend (Figure 69). Early in the evening, a gaggle of my nursing professors visited the gallery, including the school's director. I had been looking forward to sharing this project with them, as I had hoped it would encourage dialogue about the place of religion in bringing about healing. The director of the school of nursing ordinarily intimidates me, but on this night, I watched her eyes well with tears, and I was reminded of the humanity we share. Another professor spoke with me afterward and relayed that she felt it difficult to discuss religion without breaking the "separation of church and state." We had a productive conversation on the difference between teaching about a religion and religious instruction. I hope that these kinds of conversations will continue to unfold.

I could not have hoped for a better reception of my work. For Christians, the gallery inspired testimony and offered hope. For non-Christians, the gallery allowed an exploration of emotion and invited storytelling. For those in recovery, the gallery was a kind encouragement. For those in nursing, the gallery was a gentle challenge to ponder the role of religion in healthcare. And for me, the gallery was a source of friendships and new relationships. The communicated commemorabilia of five men and women reach far beyond these individuals only—their stories have now been introduced to over two hundred gallery visitors, and God only knows what an impact these stories have had.

9. And There was Light

"Blessed are you, when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12)

Communicated Commemorabilia: Nursing and Religious Studies Meet

In this project, I see a clear bridge between my two areas of study. Nursing involves the study of wellness and of the human body, offering me the skills to communicate with patients, assess their needs, and perform life-giving interventions. Religious Studies involves the study of humans and their lived experiences and traditions; I have learned how to ask hard questions, look beyond the surface, and respect others with great differences from myself. Communicated Commemorabilia pulls these two worlds into conversation. As I interviewed people about their health, they talked about their faiths, and as I asked about their faiths, they talked about its impact on their health. For my interlocutors in Christian recovery, there is no separation between health and religion.

These two fields have not always existed in their apparent conflict. Some of the greatest scientific minds in history were also religious minds. One visitor to my exhibit, a former teacher of anatomy and physiology, signed my guest book and included a quotation attributed to Charles Darwin:

> I don't remember if in Anatomy we talked about Charles Darwin but, even though he is viewed unfavorably by many, he stated at one time: 'Don't just revel in the word of God, revel in the works of God.' You have done a wonderful job at including them both.

This man was able to see the apparent representations of both natural sciences and religious study at work synonymously in the windows. More specifically, the field of nursing has not always been separate from religion. Monasteries and convents were once places in which the sick could receive care, and many pioneers of modern nursing were driven by their faith. This project examines a point at which these two worlds meet. Alternatively, this project could be a window into the undivided reality of our universe; perhaps there is no genuine division between health and religion.

The Value of Religious Art

There is no history of Christianity without an examination of great works of art. Although I do not claim to have produced anything great, I do propose that my art enters the centuries-long discourse on art and the church. Art has adorned Christian tombs, halls of worship, and manuscripts for two thousand years, but it has also been the source of great debates and damage. I present my stained glass windows as works of educational, narrative art, not as works intended for devotion. I will examine two of my site visits to local churches to demonstrate how art is currently used in the church.

In one Protestant church, I slipped into the building just after a Sunday service had concluded. I spoke to a receptionist who eagerly paraded me through the church's sanctuary. She sent two other staff members to locate a pamphlet on the church's stained glass, delighted that I had come to admire their windows. The sanctuary boasted eight

illumined depictions of biblical scenes from Genesis to the Gospels to the Acts of the Apostles. My giddy guide remarked, “We do a class with our kids where we walk them through the windows, and they learn the Bible stories from them.” I could easily picture a pack of children encircling a window, letting the blue and red light dance on their fingers as they heard about David’s psalms and Daniel’s lions. While I imagined historical stained glass to serve this purpose—teaching an illiterate congregation the stories of scripture—I had not considered that windows would do the same today. But here, a church boasted of children coming to know their faiths through stained glass.

In a Greek Orthodox church, I arrived early for Orthros—which precedes the Eucharistic service—for more time to take in the abundant icons. Unaware that it was also a feast day, I was gifted even more time in the lavish sanctuary. A cantor strolled with me around the sanctuary after the service’s completion, pointing out his favorite saints and directing my attention to several relics. Approaching the altar of the church, my gaze was swept up into the apse, where an icon of the ascension floated above an icon of the Theotokos. Both Jesus and Mary held a spool of red thread in their hands. The cantor began to describe the significance of this red thread; Mary had woven the veil of the temple, so this thread represented her earthly work. Jesus also held the thread because he eternally carries Mary’s humanity in his dual-natured being. I had heard this explanation for the red thread before, and I thanked the cantor for his guidance. Mary’s time as a weaver is not biblical but is found in the Protoevangelium of James, an early New Testament pseudepigraphal work. Thus, imagery borrowed from an early church text was translated into visual symbolism in this icon, just as had thousands of other

symbols in the infinite history of icons. And yet, the symbol could still be understood and even imbued with new meanings beyond that of the original textual allusion.

Perhaps visual art is as much storytelling as words on a page. Even the language used around the production of icons is that of language. Icons are not "painted" but "written" (Hales 2017). There is a historical, iconographic tradition of understanding visual imagery in terms of written and spoken language (Maniura 2016). My stained glass windows function in the same way. They display visually the symbols that my interlocutors convey in language. As viewers approach my windows, they do what centuries of Christians have done with religious art, and they look to understand what the windows have to say. I am not doing something new, but something profoundly old.

The Value to my Interlocutors

All five interlocutors visited the gallery. The first to visit was Jessie, and she brought her father, too. We laughed together when I revealed her pseudonym, and we walked together slowly through the gallery, talking through each story and symbol. We soon needed tissues. Jessie had the longest interview with me, and she had shared several of the most thoughtful metaphors, but as we finished our time together, she was speechless. I had been anxious about my interlocutors coming to visit, but now I felt nothing but joy and gratitude. As Jessie left, I knelt on the gallery floor and thanked God. Steve visited later, and he brought his daughter and her boyfriend. Steve, too, laughed at his pseudonym and cried at the windows' stories. He expressed his gratitude, and I expressed mine.

Dan and Sandy visited with Maria and her husband. Sandy was preparing for surgery and avoiding crowds, but she was determined to see the gallery. Dan, always one to talk, began to tell me a story while Sandy walked ahead into the sanctuary. Sandy called to Dan several times with increasing volume before emerging to grab his arm. "I said, you have to see this!" Dan joined his wife in the sanctuary, and Maria and her husband followed after. We walked through the space, and I talked about the symbols, highlighting each interlocutor's place in the windows. I expectantly held the box of tissues for Maria, who needed several. I had not anticipated Dan's tears, but he was deeply moved, too. Sandy would plant herself two feet from a window and gaze with determination at its surface; a small smile informed me that she was pleased.

When we had concluded the tour, the group prayed for me. Dan and Sandy also extended an invitation to bring the show to the recovery ministry; they wanted everyone in Thank God for Healing to see their stories of healing. "It's not a matter of *if* but *when*," Sandy added. I am humbled that they see these windows as a ministry tool.

Maria's husband commented, "The only thing you could have done to make this better would be if you had us take our shoes off before we came in." In his statement, he acknowledged what many visitors had noted before: this could be a sacred space. I returned that night and closed the gallery door behind me. I doffed my shoes before stepping into the sanctuary. I began with a whispered song, and I ended prostrate on the floor. The space was indeed sacred, for in it was honored the God of Sandy, Dan, Maria, Steve, and Jessie.

This sensation of the sacred is at the heart of iconography. When Christians look toward the saints and figures depicted in icons, they are reminded of the holy God who

has worked mightily in that saint's life. They are reminded that God is also at work in their own life. The icon is a declaration that every human is the image of God and therefore is "infinitely precious" (Ware 1997, 221). Icons also signify that every human has the capability to change, to grow, and to be sanctified—there is no ground for hopelessness or defeat in icons (Oliver 2020). As I reflect on my interlocutors' visits to the gallery, I see that my windows have become icons of sorts. The windows tell the stories of living saints—men and women transformed by God to live changed lives—and the windows invite every viewer into the story. Every viewer can see their own stories etched into my work and be reminded of the infinite value their own journeys have in the sight of God.

The Value to Me

This thesis has been a labor of love (Figure 70). After reading about anthropologists and their ethnographies of Central and South America, I wanted to try my hand. I've been blessed with the opportunity to travel globally, I've participated in mission work in Guatemala, and I hope to travel as a medical missionary after college. But the stories of local people are just as valuable as those across borders or seas. I was looking for healing far away, and in the process, I found it in my neighborhood.

The anthropologist can be understood as a translator, working to observe expressions of humanity and translate them into organized theories and epistemologies. As they translate, their own values and theoretical constructions are renewed within and projected onto their work (Bell 2009). I would argue the same of artists. Artists work as

Figure 70. Thesis Defense: Dr. John Vile, Eli Ward, and Dr. Rebekka King.

translators between ideas and visual representation, and their own lives, personalities, and methodologies become infused in their work. There is great difficulty in attempting to separate an artist from his artwork.

In these stained glass windows, I have infused my own story and values throughout. In the God Window, the blue stethoscope is modeled after my own stethoscope, a nod to my study and work in nursing. I see my job as a nurse to be a partnership with God in his ministry of healing. Two brown candlesticks in the Word Window and God Window are based on olivewood candlesticks that I acquired in Jerusalem from a pair of Aramaic-speaking brothers. I use the candlesticks when burning Shabbat candles, a reminder of the rest I have found in Christ. Date honey, too, is an

acknowledgement of my time in Israel. I enjoyed heavenly date-honey chicken in a tent in the Judean desert after obtaining a camel driver's license. While I have forgotten the scent of the camels, I have not forgotten the taste of the honey-coated chicken.

The leaf-like border around each window resembles a vine. Vines became a symbol of the Holy Spirit to me years ago. Several paintings of mine contain the image of a vine, often climbing heavenward in growth and strength. I think of each of my windows as being surrounded by the Holy Spirit, just as the vine-like border surrounds the windows. Flowers, too, are significant to me. When my house was crumbling under my parents' divorce, I would venture outside to pick and press flowers. Their beauty delighted me. I heard from the Lord one day, "Do you know why I have given you the flowers? So that you would know I love you." I have clung to that promise, waiting each Spring for the flowers to bloom after even the harshest of winters. I carry pressed flowers in my phone case, in my Bible, and hang them on my walls. Every flower included in the stained glass windows is a reminder to me of the love of God.

Finally, the red home on the God Window features a front door glowing yellow with light. When praying one day about my relationship with my father, I saw a front door illuminated by a porch light. The message I received was to leave the porch light of my heart lit. That is, I was to be a man who would welcome my father back into my heart. A porch light lit in the dead of night is a statement which seems to say, "I don't know when you'll be home, but the light is on for you." The porch light becomes a symbol of hope and forgiveness. Thus, in the watercolor home that represents God as Father, I left the light on as a nod to my father.

I have been on my own journey of healing. I, too, have been in recovery. I've learned to see myself as God sees me, to embrace family in its many forms, to wait patiently as my character grows, to read and pray and minister, and to imagine a God who invites me to rest. I chose to start this project because I am no different than Sandy, Dan, Maria, Steve, or Jessie. I chose to finish this project because our stories are worth sharing.

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Appendix 1: IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Compliance
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd.
Sam H. Ingram Bldg (ING) Room 010A
Box 124
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
www.mtsu.edu/irb

Date: June 8, 2023
PI: Eli Ward
Department: Middle Tennessee State University, Philosophy and Religious Studies
Re: Initial - IRB-FY2023-200
A Creative Project Exploring Christian Recovery

The Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved by Expedited Review the above referenced project. The approval is effective starting June 8, 2023.

Decision: Approved
Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Findings: Audio recordings of personal experiences on sensitive topics related to recovery will be collected from 5 adults and examined for the purpose of extracting themes for an art project which will be publicly displayed.

Please note:

Any **modifications to the approved project must be submitted for review through Cayuse IRB.** Please note, as well, that according to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. If you add researchers to an approved project, please add them to the project within Cayuse IRB for approval **before** they begin to work on the project.

Any unanticipated harm to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance, and any subsequent changes to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review before implementing this change.

You must submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your project. Completed research means that you have finished collecting data.

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

We wish you a successful research project,

Appendix 2: Survey Instrument

Before interviews:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and talk about your story. I am excited to hear the ways that God has moved in your life. Before we begin, I have an Informed Consent document that we will go over, and you can ask me any questions that you may have. At any point you would like, you can end this conversation. I will not be recording any part of our conversation until we have both signed the Informed Consent. You will get a copy of this document to keep.

Interview Questions:

My main goal in this time is to listen to you and allow you to share any part of your story that you would like. I would like to ask a few questions and then open the floor to you to share your testimony. After you have shared your story in any way that you are comfortable, I would like to ask a few more questions. You can share anything you please, and you do not have to share anything you are uncomfortable with. And again, you may end this conversation at any time.

What does the word *healing* mean to you?

Would you describe yourself as someone who has experienced healing or is experiencing healing? In what ways?

Would you be willing to share your testimony with me, or any part of your story of recent healing? Your story does not have to involve Thank God for Healing, but it can. You may have as long as you'd like to share your testimony.

(After the interviewee has shared his/her story, or if he/she refuses, the following can be explored, time permitting).

How long have you been participating in Thank God for Healing?

I am going to ask some questions about the beginning of your time with Thank God for Healing, about the time between then and now, and about your time now. Some people may have different answers for these time periods, and some people may not. (*If the interviewee's earlier testimony does not involve Thank God for Healing as a period of change, then these questions can be modified to match the timeline given in his/her story*).

How would you describe yourself when you began participating in Thank God for Healing?

Probes: How did you spend your time when you started participating (work, school, family)? What kind of feelings were frequent for you? What kinds of thoughts did you have about yourself (Did you see yourself as important? Were you proud of yourself?)? Can you think of a time when your thoughts about yourself impacted another part of your life; maybe work? How did other people in your life see you? Would you describe yourself as a different person now, and can you give an example of a way that you are different? When you think of who you were at that time, what emotions come to mind?

When you started Thank God for Healing, how would you describe your perspective on God?

Probes: If you were going to describe God to someone else at that time, how would you describe him? What kind of character traits did he have to you? If you prayed to him, what kinds of prayers did you pray? If you were to picture God at that time, what would you see? Did you feel that other people saw God differently than you saw him? Can you give an example of a time when this was clear?

What has been impactful for you during your time in Thank God for Healing?

Probes: Are there any conversations that were particularly impactful? What about anything that you read? How did the community here affect you? Have any of the people here been important to you? What has been a favorite moment of this program? What has been a least favorite moment of this program? What have you learned in this program? What have you learned about yourself? At any point in the program, did you notice you had new thoughts about yourself? Can you give an example of a time when these new thoughts about yourself came up?

How did your perspective on God change or stay the same while in Thank God for Healing?

Probes: Did anything surprise you about God in this process? Can you give an example? Did anything frustrate you about God during this process? Can you give an example? Did you notice any new prayers? Did you feel that God had anything to say to you? Did you learn anything new about God? How did any of these developments impact you?

How would you describe yourself now?

Probes: How do you spend your time now (work, school, family)? What kind of feelings are frequent for you? What kind of thoughts do you have about yourself (Do you see yourself as important? Are you proud of yourself?)? Can you think of a recent time your thoughts about yourself impacted another part of your life; maybe work? How do other people in your life see you? Would you describe yourself as a different person now, and can you give an example of a way that you are different? When you think of yourself now, what emotions come to mind?

How would you describe your perspectives on God today?

Probes: If you were going to describe God to someone else today, how would you describe him? What kind of character traits does he have? If you have prayed to him recently, what kinds of prayers do you pray? If you were to picture God now, what would you see? Do you feel that other people see God differently than you see him? Can you give an example of a time when this has been clear?

Where would you like to be in the future?

How would you like to know God in the future?

Is there anything else important to you that you would like to share with me?