

Brooklyn stained glass studio creates windows for Liberty Heights church

St. Junipero Serra. St. Kateri Tekakwitha. St. Martin de Porres. St. Rose of Lima. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Mother Mary Lange.

Saints from the Americas constitute half of those depicted in new stained-glass windows at New All Saints in Liberty Heights.

“I wanted to reflect the cultural and racial diversity that is a part of our history ... of the church in America,” said Father Donald A. Sterling, pastor. “There are people typically we may know by name, but you never see them anywhere.”

In commissioning the work, Father Sterling found a local business familiar with the territory: Terraza Stained Glass, located in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Baltimore but founded by a native of Argentina.

Opened 11 years ago by Roberto Terraza, the studio completed the New All Saints project, which included stained glass for 12 large and seven smaller windows, in early November.

The studio’s process begins with Terraza’s 28-year-old daughter, Melina, the first hire of a company that now employs 20. She has a background in art and design and, from her home in Mendoza, Argentina, creates a custom design for every piece.

That template is then sent to the studio, where glass is cut and grinded, then painted with care and attention to detail by Mohammed Alkurdi, an artist with 25 years of

experience.

The shaped pieces are placed on the template - all numbered to keep them straight - and each is wrapped with copper foil. An acid solution is placed on the edges and they are soldered with lead.

Terraza has gone as far as California to install his company's work, which all began when he made his home in Locust Point.

A decade or so ago, Terraza, a machinist by trade, created a stained-glass piece for the door of his home. A neighbor offered to pay him to make one for his own door. Not wanting to take on the project, Terraza gave a high price - one that was willingly accepted by that neighbor, and another who liked his work.

That spurred Terraza and his wife, Donna, to open a business dedicated to stained glass. Four years ago, they moved it from their basement to Brooklyn. In September, they opened a second location, in Kansas City, Mo.

Terraza's older daughter, Florencia, runs the business's online Etsy shop, which has more than 300 five-star reviews.

Mily Lara Wolking, the production manager at the Brooklyn studio, said the larger windows for New All Saints took approximately two days apiece to create.

She studied architecture at a university in her native Mexico, where there was a Catholic church seemingly on every corner in her hometown of San Luis Potosí. She admired the ornate stained glass that filled many of the windows, and draws on those memories as she works in a medium in which she had little previous experience.

"This is my dream job," Wolking said Nov. 1, during a break in the Brooklyn studio.

“It’s like a candy store, but with glass.”

Though she lives in Brooklyn, Wolking likes to frequent the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Cathedral Street for Mass.

“I feel like I’m doing a good job,” Wolking said of work destined for Catholic churches. “It makes me think about religion a little bit more.”

Her favorite of the New All Saints windows is the Blessed Virgin Mary. She made it, and besides, Mary is her favorite saint.

“She always is my favorite,” said Wolking, whose home has depictions of the Blessed Mother throughout.

She initially thought the New All Saints window was too dark and had too much green, but that was before she took it outside.

“I like the way it looks in the light,” she said. “When you put it in the light - it changes everything.”

That window was placed alongside five others lining the northwest side of the church, all portraying familiar figures from the Bible and the Gospels, during their installation Nov. 5-7. The six on the opposite wall feature the American saints.

According to Father Sterling, the parish replaced the framing, and the previous windows, with clear glass about three years ago.

“You had no opportunity to see beyond the walls or the inside (of the church),” he said, of a choice that gave the parish more time to consider options for new stained glass.

Father Sterling said he had not seen many saints from the Americas depicted in

stained glass before. He likened the depictions to “masterpieces” on a wall and said they chose to make just a section of the windows stained glass to “keep the building somewhat open.”