

Illuminating Our Lasallian Heritage

By Christine Loughran

A COLLECTION OF STAINED GLASS WINDOWS now enshrined in the Chapel of De La Salle and His Brothers is as arresting in beauty as it is emblematic. Together, the masterpieces immortalize Manhattan College's Lasallian Catholic heritage by chronicling the Life and Work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, whose spirituality, excellence in teaching and unparalleled commitment to social justice provide students, as well as the Manhattan community, with an ideal role model for character. They also highlight moments significant to our community's faith, such as the Nativity of Our Lord. However, the windows themselves have their own story to tell. Before their installation at the College in early 2016, they had already lived more than a hundred years.

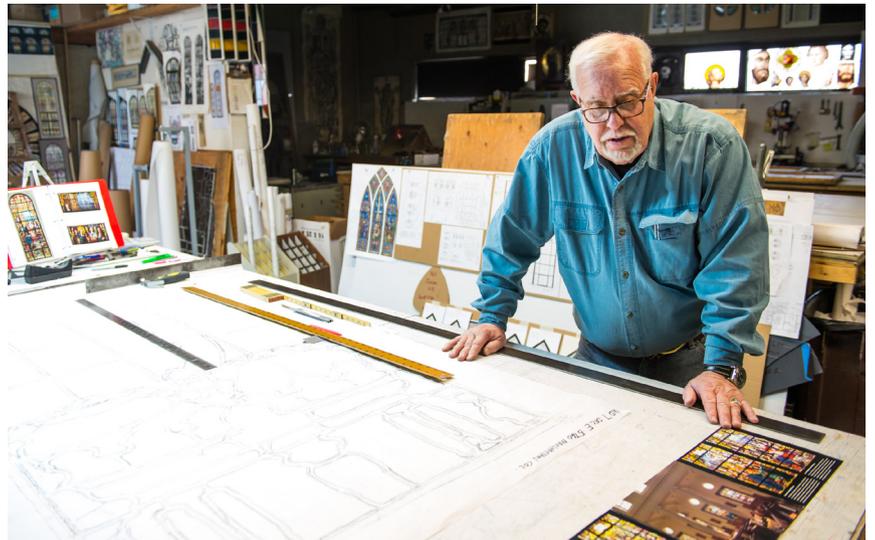
Created in the early 1900s by renowned French workshop, L. Mazuet et fils of Bayeux, the De La Salle windows were originally located at the Christian Brothers' Novitiate in Pocantico Hills, N.Y., from which they were transported in 1930 to the chapel of the Brothers' Novitiate in Barrytown, N.Y. After this property was sold by the Brothers' community in 1974, the windows suffered years of neglect.

Their long journey back to the Lasallian community began in 2002 when James Casey and John Hannaway, who knew and loved the windows from their time in the Novitiate, worked to bring these hidden gems back into the light. During the next five years, the leadership of the College worked closely with the District Council of the District of Eastern North America in the complex process of reclaiming and preserving these treasures, and installing them where they belong, in the heart of the College's campus. The faithful generosity of so many members of our Lasallian community is recognized on plaques in the lower righthand corner of each window and in the chapel's main vestibule.

Ten of the windows tell the story of our founder, who was proclaimed Patron Saint of Teachers in 1950. Shown in the series are embodiments of De La Salle's childhood in Reims, France, and the vows he took to the Brothers, as well as his service to the poor (represented in the window to the right). Two additional windows help to provide the Gospel context for the De La Salle narrative, including the depiction of Jesus as a teacher.

Following a yearlong restoration process by Rohlf's Stained and Leaded Glass Studio, the newest additions to the College's chapel were unveiled at a Mass and dedication ceremony on April 7, 2016. Here, where they can be cherished and displayed, the De La Salle windows connect present-day Manhattan firmly with its rich past. As powerful works of art, they also tell the story of De La Salle in ways that touch the heart and mind, and inspire a deep appreciation of the life and work of De La Salle, as well as that of the Christian Brothers.





REMOVAL AND RESTORATION

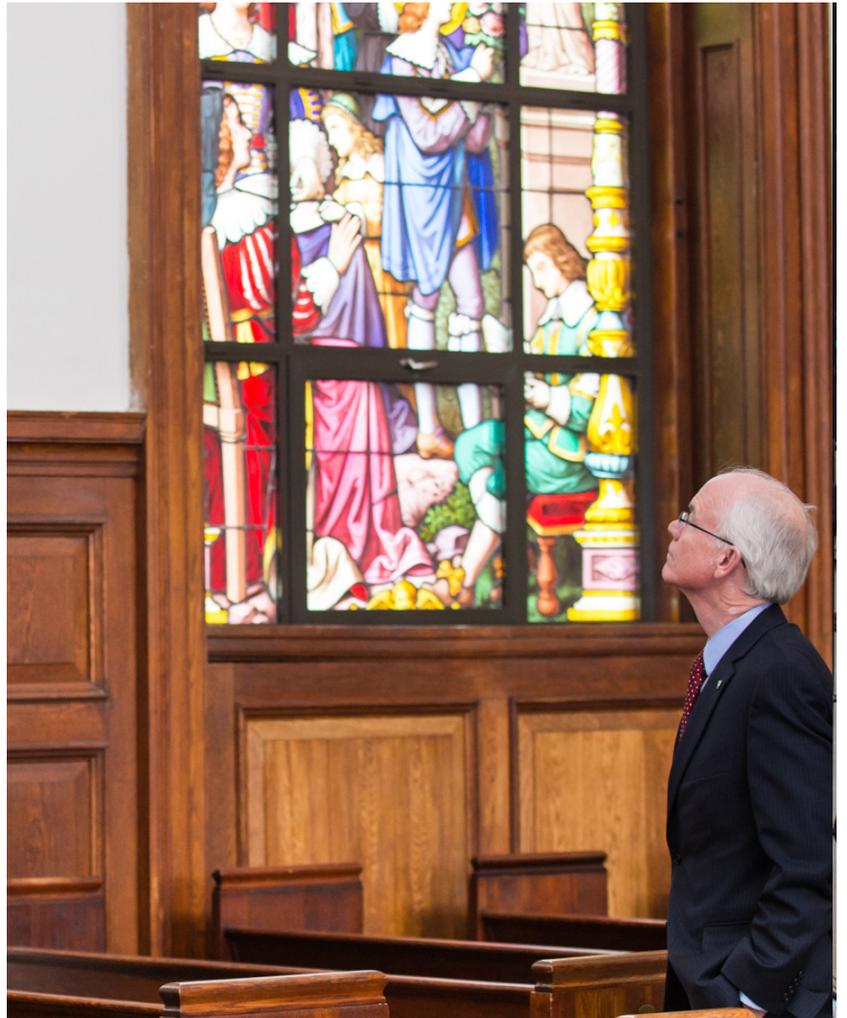
In rehabilitating the De La Salle windows to their former magnificence, Manhattan commissioned Rohlf's Stained and Leaded Glass Studio, a family owned and operated firm that has been in business since 1920. In that time, the studio has completed projects for Grand Central Terminal and the Basilica of Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral, among other iconic landmarks in New York City and throughout the U.S.

To begin their work with the De La Salle windows, Rohlf's transported the pieces from Barrytown, N.Y., where they resided since 1930 at the Brothers' Novitiate, to the studio's headquarters in Mount Vernon, N.Y. There, a team of artists, craftsmen, conservators and designers spent a year re-leading each of the window's sections with sodder, putty and reinforcing bars. They were then re-framed with triple-glazed aluminum frames that fit inside the College's Chapel of De La Salle and His Brothers. The last step was adding a one-inch layer of insulated glass on top of each window to ensure longtime preservation.



THE WINDOWS ARRIVE AT MANHATTAN

The De La Salle Stained Glass Window Collection arrived on campus in early 2016, and the whole installation process took about six weeks. Since then, the collection has been admired on a regular basis for the first time in 40 years. Prior to that, the windows had fallen into a state of disrepair after the Barrytown property was sold by the Brothers' community in 1974. At Manhattan, they're not only visible; they're also the backdrop for all major campus events and weekly Masses held in the chapel. (Bottom right) President Brennan O'Donnell views The Childhood of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, a scene that takes place in Reims, France, where De La Salle grew up as the eldest of 11 children. De La Salle, his parents and siblings can be seen in the foreground, and his childhood home is illustrated in the background.





THE DEDICATION CEREMONY

More than 400 guests attended the Mass and De La Salle windows dedication ceremony on April 7, 2016, the Feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. To unveil the collection, blackout curtains that covered the chapel windows were removed one by one, and the significance of the scenes displayed in each were described to the audience. (Center left) Brother Dennis Malloy, FSC, gives the ceremony's invocation and acknowledges John Hannaway and James Casey for their perseverance in reclaiming the collection. (Center right) Brother Gustavo Ramirez Barba, FSC, Ed.D., General Councilor for Lasallian Higher Education at the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, was awarded a Doctor of Pedagogy from the College at the ceremony. (Bottom right) The Most Rev. John J. Jenik, Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of New York, presents and blesses each of the windows, along with the Rev. Erwin H. Schweigardt '61, Ph.D. (not pictured).



Photos: Christopher Taggart