

# WINDOWS ON THE FRONTIER

BY THE RT. REV. PAUL-GORDON CHANDLER

The renowned 17th century English poet, George Herbert, writes in one of his poems these profound words:

*A man that looks on glass  
On it may stay his eye;  
Of if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heaven espy.*

George Herbert was writing about the ability to see “through the glass” to a deeper dimension of reality. This truth is clearly illustrated in two extraordinary stained-glass windows in our churches in Wyoming. This is most apropos, as Wyoming is known for its deserts, and desert sand serves as the very foundation of glass. The first stage of glassmaking is the melting of sand into a liquid. Hence another celebrated 17th century English poet and artist, William Blake, wrote about “seeing the World in a grain of sand.”

The origins of stained-glass art are assumed to be in the Middle East, where alabaster ornamental window openings would sometimes have pieces of colored glass mounted onto them. Within many of the tall narrow buildings in the ancient city of Sanaa, Yemen, a World Heritage Site, one will find elaborate stained-glass windows embedded in ornate white plasterwork, using vibrantly colored red, yellow, green and blue glass. This age-old Middle Eastern art entails cutting the colored glass into small panes, or mullions, and constructing an abstract pattern separated by strips of gypsum, used for ornamental and decorative purposes.

However, it was when the stained-glass art medium traveled to medieval Europe, that 10th century pictorial stained-glass began to be used in churches to tell a Biblical story, while at the same time creating an atmosphere that sought to catch the viewer up into a world of contemplation, where the stained-glass melts away like a mist, opening out, or opening up, into a deeper dimension.

All stained-glass image-based windows tell a story. And two windows found in our churches in Dubois and Eden powerfully depict our Church’s story of ministering on the frontier.



## “Wyoming Eucharistic Prayer” window in Dubois

St. Thomas’ Church in Dubois is known for their “Wyoming Eucharistic Prayer” window, which visually brings to life the much-loved Wyoming Eucharistic Prayer that was written for use in the Episcopal Church in Wyoming by Linen Greenough, a member of St. Peter’s Church in Sheridan. Linen, who has been a rancher all her life, moved to Sheridan in 1964. In the early 1990s she embroidered a pillow with a prayer she had written. Two days prior to that year’s annual convention, the rector of St. Peter’s at the time, Rev. David Duprey, asked Linen to write a Eucharist Prayer based on the prayer she embroidered on that pillow which they could use at the convention. Linen recalls, “It was calving season at the time, so in the middle of the night, as I sat on a hill minding the heifers and admiring the midnight stars, and thinking about the Psalmist and the shepherds of past, I was inspired by the Holy Spirit.” She gave what she had written to Rev. Duprey, who helped put it into the below rubrics we use today.



*“We thank you, Creator, that we live in a place where the glorious revelation of yourself is all around us. The prairie bursts with song from the wind and birds and waving grasses. The abundance of animals roaming freely reminds us of our own freedom, and the many ways you provide sustenance in your kingdom. From the depths of the ocean floor you lifted your massive mountains and pointed them toward the heavens.*

*We, like your Son, our Lord, are called to these high places to get away and rest in communion with you. We marvel as we wander through stately pines and twirling aspen along the creeks, where trout dance on their tails above the rocks, and deer and elk sip from the water’s edge; and we remember that you have given us the Living water to quench our thirst. Our spirit is refreshed and our strength renewed.*

*We welcome the passing of seasons in broad circles of time, with anticipation of new things to come, and we recognize that same feeling of hope that encircles our faith. Our lives are lived between sunrises and sunsets and brilliant colors. But at night the limitless stars have a way of pushing back the boundaries of our lives and we dream of heaven and your wonder.*

*And with all these blessings of your creation around us, O God, we come together in communities on the prairie, by rivers and streams, on mountain tops, and in their shadows in the valley, to receive your Word, which has been sown in rich soil, and grown into a fruitful crop in the Body of Christ.”*

The below special blessing is often used to end the service whenever the Wyoming Eucharistic Prayer is used:

*“May your heart feel the song of the meadowlark, your mind the clearness of the mountain air, and your soul the freedom of the soaring eagle. May your faith be renewed as the creek in spring, may you celebrate the waving redemption of the Cross in all its mysteries, may you always feel the love of the community of Christ. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.”*

Years later, a member of the Dubois community, Joan Guthrie, who was a professional potter, connected St. Thomas’ Church with her daughter, a stained-glass window artist named Terra Parma living in Redding, CA. Terra and her husband Jeff, through their business, Stained Glass Images, accepted the assignment of designing a window based on the Wyoming Eucharistic Prayer, with input from St. Thomas’ Church. This magnificent stained-glass window was completed and installed in 2011, with funds given in loving memory of three former Dubois parishioners, Walter “Pinky” Bell, John Randolph and Bess Randolph-Strasser.

## “Oregon Trail Memorial” window in Eden

Our Oregon Trail Memorial Church, an historic log building, was founded in 1937 and originally was known as “The Garden Church,” due to its location in Eden, Wyoming. About the church, the bishop at that time said, “The Garden Church of Eden stands at the crossing of the Oregon Trail with a present important highway, that goes from Rock Springs to Yellowstone Park. Thousands will pause here at this memorial to early pioneers. It is a house of prayer for the Eden community and for all people, as well as an ‘Oregon Trail Memorial.’”



To commemorate the early pioneers who passed through on that celebrated western trail, a New York stained-glass artist named Jessie Van Brunt, designed and donated the window in 1942, and it today hangs in the East window, behind the unique wooden yoke altar. The church keeps its doors open for prayer, and thousands of visitors have been inspired by this moving window that depicts the brave women and men who ventured into the western frontier.

These unique stained-glass windows serve to remind us that God calls us, both as individuals and as a Church, into new frontiers.