



PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDS OF STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

For centuries stained glass has been one of the many ways in which stories from the Bible and the lives of the saints have been conveyed to the faithful. A complete photographic record of the stained glass windows in your church is a valuable asset. It can greatly assist the appreciation of these works of religious art, especially if coupled with a list of the artists, studios and dates and some background information. All of this will be of interest not only to the members of your church but also to visitors, possibly through a new guidebook. Good quality slides can be used for education purposes and to form the basis of postcards or Christmas cards.

Another important use to which a photographic record can be put is to assist with the repair of damaged windows. By the very nature of the material from which it is made, a stained glass window is particularly vulnerable. Whilst having a vital architectural function, it is also a valuable and unique work of art. Experience has shown that faithful repairs to windows following damage can be carried out more effectively if photographs of the window exist.

Several DACs and EIG are now strongly recommending that it is in the interest of all concerned for you to make a photographic record of these important items of ecclesiastical art (and indeed of all items of value in your church), of which you are the custodian.

You may wish to undertake the photography yourselves or you may prefer to employ a professional photographer or stained glass studio. There follows notes that will help, whichever path you prefer to undertake. The first part is for the 'do-it-yourself' approach and the second contains more advanced advice for the enthusiast or professional photographer.

Stained glass photography – elementary advice

- ❖ Plan of church - Make a simple plan of the church including the windows and number the sanctuary east window as W1 then proceed with W2, W3 etc. in a clockwise direction through south, west and north.
- ❖ Film - Transparencies (slides) are preferable to negatives and prints and will turn out to be more useful in whatever use you put them to.
- ❖ Processing - For slide film, send to the manufacturer's processing laboratory in a prepaid envelope. For prints, use a laboratory that is prepared to adjust the automatic exposure of their machine to give better prints for this application. The main requirement is that the highlights (e.g. the faces) should not 'burn out'. Postal laboratories will not in general do this but many high street laboratories will (e.g. Bonusprint and Boots).
- ❖ Labelling - Label each slide, or each print, with the name of the church and the window number.

- ❖ Numbers of copies and storage - Make at least two complete sets, stored at different locations. The best and cheapest way to obtain two copies of a colour slide is to press the shutter twice, rather than to have duplicates made. Store prints or slides in a dry, cool, dark place for longest life.
- ❖ Framing - For large windows, do not attempt to show the whole window in one frame.
- ❖ Lighting - Turn all church lights off. Do not use a flash or photographic lighting.
- ❖ Focus - The most common problem seen in photographs of stained glass is poor focus, possibly due to having to deal with transmitted light in a relatively dark environment. Careful use of automatic focus is of great help here.
- ❖ Weather - Choose a day, or time of day, when there is not direct sunlight. The ideal conditions are bright but overcast.

Stained glass photography – advanced advice

The elementary advice should be read first. The following provides *additional* information.

- ❖ Film – Transparencies make for the best record of stained glass. If any prints are needed for a particular purpose, these can now be made very effectively direct from the transparency.

Using a slow (low ASA transparency film. Agfachrome 50RSX is ideal, having accurate colour and widest dynamic range. Some photographers prefer Kodachrome 25.
- ❖ Storage and processing of films – for best results, keep new films in the fridge and allow them to warm up for two hours before use. Having carried out the photographs, send the slide film the same day, by Special Delivery, to a professional colour laboratory.
- ❖ Tripod – use a tripod – the taller the better – and a cable release.
- ❖ Lens – use long-focus rather than wide-angle lenses to reduce perspective distortion. A good quality 100-300 zoom is ideal for most purposes.
- ❖ Framing – take both overall shots and details. In many ways, details are more useful.
- ❖ Aperture, shutter speed and metering – if first-rate results are wanted, the choice of exposure is crucial. This is a complex matter and cannot be dealt with in any detail in this brief advice note. The best results are obtained by using a specially calibrated hand-held spotmeter in conjunction with the Ansel Adams Zone System.

If the meter within the camera is to be used, the exposure that it proposes is seldom of use. As a guide, for darker windows give a shorter exposure than the camera meter suggests and for brighter windows give a longer exposure than it suggests. Use bracketing if unsure (i.e. several alternative exposures).