

Fairfield Community Church  
**Photographing the Stained Glass Windows**



The windows we are so accustomed to seeing in the Sanctuary every Sunday we may not realize, as beautiful as they are to look at, are not particularly easy to photograph in their true brilliance. Our cameras have gotten very sophisticated, even our smartphones, but they can be fooled when we photograph a scene containing various light sources. This is particularly true when some of the light is entering from outside the building and some inside.

Our eyes adapt to these lighting patterns much more easily and give us the views we are used to seeing. Our cameras with their electronic sensors and internal computers make compromises, assumptions about what we want to see in a displayed image. Technical experts refer to this as the rule of “50% gray”, where the camera measures the average brightness in the scene, then shifts the range of light the camera can capture so most of the highlights and the shadows appear natural. This can be very effective in most conditions, but the stained glass windows provide a situation where the brightest parts of the image (outside lighting) get “washed out” in order to display other parts of the scene (inside lighting), say, the pastor standing at the pulpit or the choir in the loft, or the altar area.

When I prepare photographs of scenes from the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, I often combine multiple shots and “photoshop” them together as one - some taken much too dark and some at the correct amount of light so that the stained glass windows do not “wash out” so much in the final picture.

I am always looking at the images I process that contain the stained glass windows, but rarely am I completely happy with the results. The above photo was one I took recently on an early Sunday afternoon during one of the Fellowship Dinners, when the lights in the sanctuary were turned off and the walls and ceiling appeared relatively dark. These conditions allowed me to take a photo that seemed to describe the windows without compensating for the other lighting inside the church. I wanted to share this image with you and give you a sense of the complexities in preparing the image. These windows are magnificent and deserve the very best appearance in print.

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