

The lively needle

Church decor takes planning

By MARY KAY DAVIS

For hundreds of years, needlepoint has graced churches and synagogues. Cushions, rugs and wall hangings wear well, can be worked in appropriate colors, and are infinitely variable in design.

Needlepoint can tell a story, fit in with a building's architecture, or do whatever you want it to.

Having just finished designing needlepoint for my own church, I have a few hints for those of you who may be contemplating such an undertaking. Like all other needlework, it helps to know how you'll finish before you begin.

First, does anybody but you want to do this? How much will it cost and who will pay the bills? Are the clergy enthusiastic about the project? And most vital of all, who is going to do the stitching? Until you can get definite, positive answers to these questions, don't start.

But when the congregation, the clergy and the cash are all behind you,

get ready for the first step. Locate both a designer and a finisher to work with you.

THERE ARE MANY professionals available. Like any artists, some will please you and some won't. All will cost money. It's cheaper to find designers and finishers within your congregation, but investigate their work thoroughly before you ask them to be on the right track, contact those professionals. The best way to find one whose work pleases you is to visit other places of worship. When you see designs and finished pieces that seem to be on the right track, contact those designers. You'll want to know an approximate price and a date by which you can expect the completed designs or finished articles.

Designers should work with you in clarifying your ideas. They will expect you to veto some preliminary sketches, but don't keep them at it indefinitely. Their time is valuable and you should plan to make up your mind after three or, at most, four preliminary designs. Two would be better and a first draft choice is heaven.



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Have a designer and the finisher contact each other. Both will produce better work if they're in communication.

Try to get the materials at wholesale cost. A yarn shop owner who happens to be a member of the congregation is invaluable here. If you're not so blessed, see if the designer can help. If all else fails, write directly to yarn companies and see what discount they'll give you.

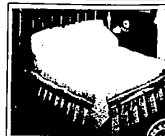
AND NOW to the heart of the matter—who will do the stitching? There are two schools of thought on this, neither of which please me. School one says that only the best stitchers should be allowed to touch the work. This eliminates the majority of the congregation, produces good needlepoint at a predictable rate, and intimates that nobody beneath the level of Erica Wilson has a chance of getting into the charmed circle.

School two says that everybody in the congregation should be free to participate. This produces both good and bad needlepoint, at an unpredictable rate, and usually ends up with some pieces being lost, left incomplete, or lying forgotten in the Arizona condominium.

We're trying a third way. Every parishioner who wants to, can stitch. And everyone has both the opportunity and the obligation to attend one or two classes every month. Wait a bit and I'll let you know how the Great Experiment is working out.

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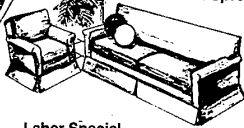
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