

Annual camping supplement • Nominees for Moderator • Black history month

# PRESBYTERIAN Record

February 2005

## Africa's face

What does her future hold?  
a special, six-page photo essay

Presbyterians reach out  
to tsunami victims

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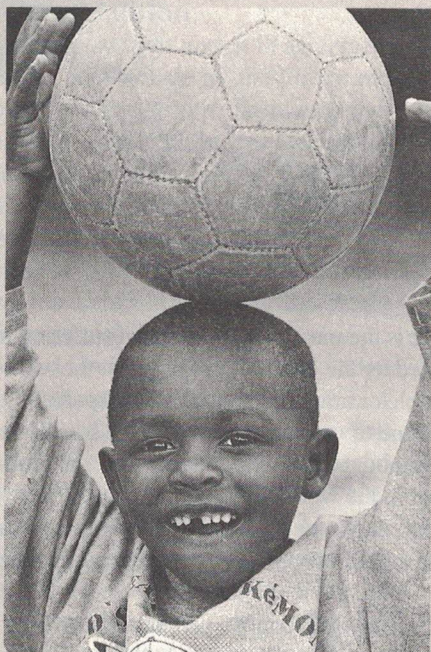


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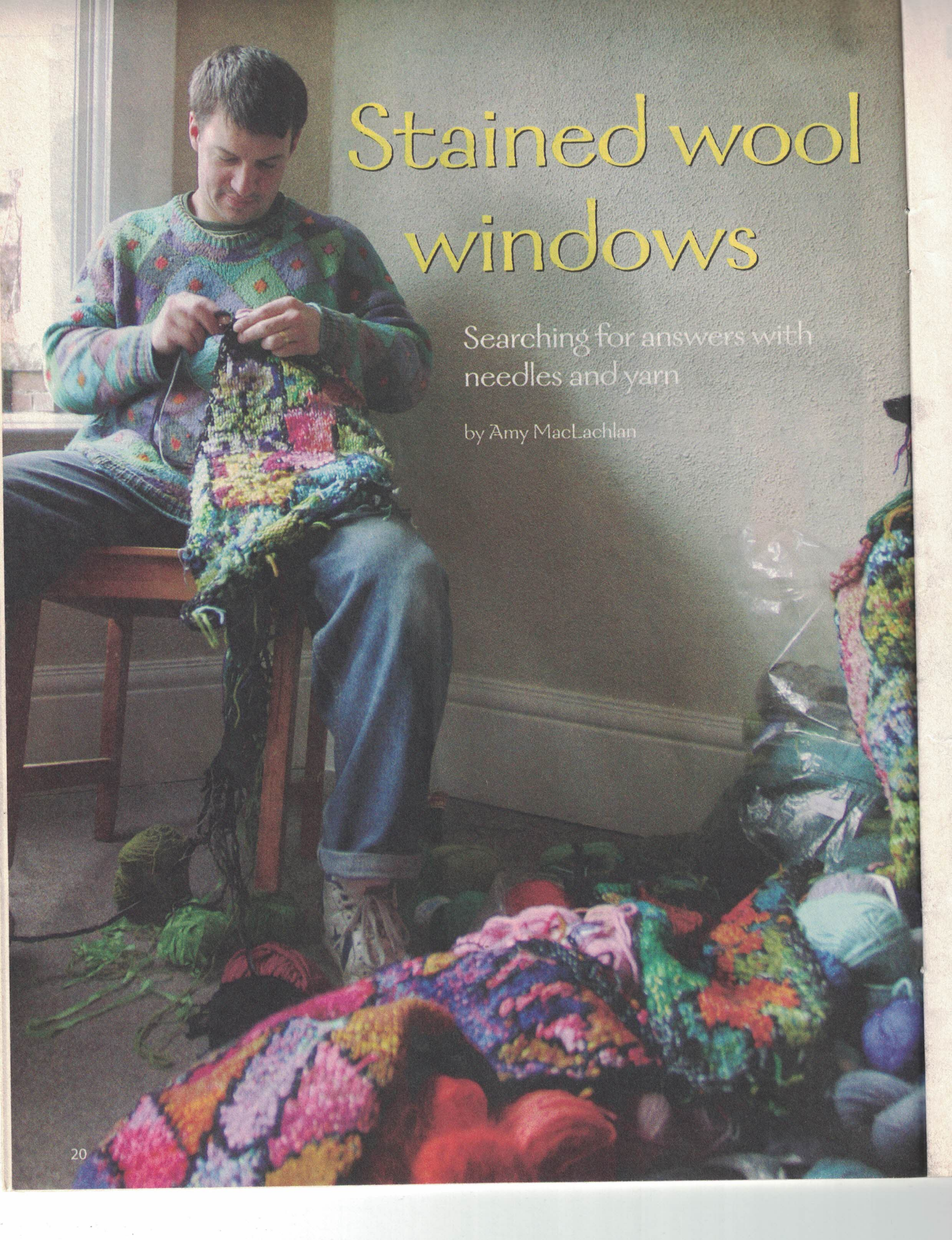
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our cover

Carl Hiebert saw this young girl walking on a village road in Malawi while he was taking pictures for PWS&D's AIDS programs. "I was struck by the tranquility of the shot," said Hiebert, "and how she found delight in the simplicity of her own village."



# Stained wool windows

Searching for answers with  
needles and yarn

by Amy MacLachlan

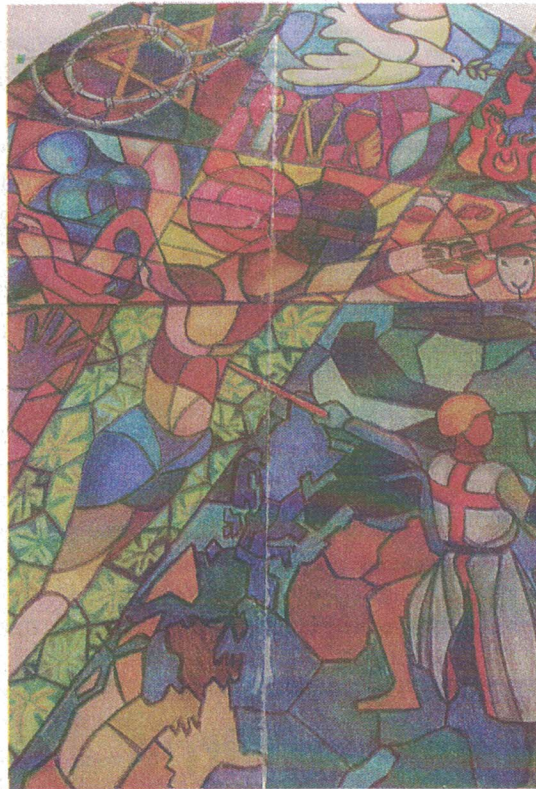
The task is far from finished. Pieces of *Stitched Glass* lie incomplete on the floor, knitted art waiting to become stained glass windows of wool. The brightly coloured yarn is woven together to form both images of old — Christ on a cross, a Catholic crusader, the Star of David — and new — an American army helmet, a pink triangle, barbed wire from a Holocaust camp. The play between positive and negative imagery is unmistakably mirroring the ups and downs of the church through time.

The design of *Stitched Glass* and the knitting itself is the brainchild of Kirk Dunn, a Christian artist, husband and father, and a man who struggles with the two sides of the church he grew up in.

He thinks there is a schism between what Jesus Christ said and did and what the organized church throughout history has done. "I've always been uncomfortable with this and embarrassed by it," said Dunn. "Of course, it's not only Christians who can be like this. It's a human thing. It runs through every religion."

The son of a Presbyterian minister, Dunn has thought about religion and its ironies for years. *Stitched Glass* — four, five-by-eight-foot knitted "windows" that mimic the colour and style of stained glass — was born from those thoughts.

The finished product will consist of four separate windows: three depicting Christianity, Islam and Judaism in positive and negative lights, and the fourth



Photos by Andrew Faiz



Details from *Stitched Glass* showing a Crusader in WWI helmet piercing Christ on the cross.

containing favourable aspects of all three faiths. The project will consume \$10,000 worth of yarn, enough to fill 25 large Rubbermaid bins. The materials would barely fit into an eight-by-twelve-foot office.

The window on Christianity is the only one started so far. The design of the other three windows has yet to take shape. "I have no idea when it will be

done," he said, whose young family, a recent move and renovations, and part-time jobs that help put food on the table, occupy valuable knitting time. "I take some cheer that other artists take years to finish a project!"

The finished windows will mirror Dunn's view of how religion should be seen; something that came to him as he researched his faith's history. "There were people who disagreed in the past," said Dunn, just as members of various religions and denominations disagree today. "It makes me see Christianity and all religions as works in progress. If there have been any realizations on my part," he continued, "it's been around that idea."

Dunn started to knit in 1988 as a macho attempt to outdo a female friend with whom he shared a competitive relationship. In a game of "anything you can do, I can do better," he completed his first knitting project — a sweater he gave to his girlfriend. It was a big hit and one year later, he had been convinced to knit eight more sweaters for family members. In awe of the beauty of

stained glass from a young age, he embarked on his present project after being urged by his wife, Claire. He applied for and received a \$45,000 Chalmers Arts Fellowship that is enabling him to complete the massive piece.

While some knitting enthusiasts perfect intricate stitches and patterns, the beauty of colour is what steals Dunn's attention. He also loves creating

a functional piece of art. "You can make something where there was nothing before," he said. "It's useful, functional and of real value and it's made with love and care. It can outlast people and even become an heirloom."

An actor at heart, Dunn often knits in public — much to the delight of female onlookers. "I was out with a friend once and he said to me, 'I can't believe you're doing that in public!' And then a beautiful woman came up to me and started talking." Women often approach him with their husbands, or mothers with their sons, trying to show them that despite popular opinion, men can knit. "They come up to me and say, 'That's great!' And then to their husbands they say, 'See? You can do that!'"

His wife knows his knitting skills are a chick magnet. Married for 13 years, they have two children — Emmett, age four, and Findley, six. And his father, Zander, who has returned as minister to his very first charge at St. Paul's on Amherst Island, Ont., isn't surprised by the negative references to Christianity in the knitted works. This is a response that Dunn hopes will repeat itself in the larger church population. "My family and I have studied Christianity a lot so we know its history and its weaknesses, so it's not so shocking."

Such acceptance may be hard to come by from people of other faiths. Dunn's criticism of a faith that isn't his own may be difficult to swallow for some. In the Jewish window, there will be a bulldozer

knocking down Palestinian settlements, and in the Muslim window, planes will be crashing into skyscrapers. "I've tried to offend everybody equally!" he said. "But it will be more offensive to people whose faith I don't share."

His criticisms come from the conflicting messages Dunn has received about Christianity throughout his life. "Both *Stitched Glass* and my experience with Christianity have the same root," he said. "My experience has been very positive; one of inclusion and pro-action. But I have seen a lot of other people's experience not being that." Even within the various congregations he has been a part of, Dunn has witnessed views, words and actions that left him shaking his head. "I thought, 'no wonder some people have a bad view of Christianity and look at you sideways when you say you're a Christian.' It's equated with, in the worst cases, hypocrisy."

Judgmental attitudes, standoffishness and exclusion are other things he balks at — characteristics Dunn calls "the antithesis of what Christianity should be about."

Such contradictions make up the meat of *Stitched Glass*. "It's an ironic thing," said Dunn. "You have religions that are derivative and incredibly close...that have a tumultuous history. And that's still being played out today."

"What I hope to do with *Stitched Glass* is explore that, and hopefully demonstrate that there is no villain — or maybe that we're all villains and heroes. There is good and bad in all religions."

During his research for *Stitched Glass*, Dunn realized that doctrine, knowledge and opinions are always changing, and faith followers should keep such potential for change in mind. "It would be a much better place and make things much easier in this world if everyone saw their religion as a work in progress," he said. "That self-centeredness, that idea of 'I've got all the answers,' and 'I'm the one who is right,' if we got rid of that, there would be hope."

Despite the negative images contained in the first three windows, Dunn wants to use the fourth window to inspire such hope. "The window that has images of all three religions shows the common ground," he said. "That's what is important and our individual faith preferences shouldn't get in the way." **R**

## Join the Record Readers Circle

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