



Painter Patty Ward discusses her story of the Creation mural, which covers one of the walls inside White Salmon United Methodist Church.

# Modern-Day Michelangelo

*Painter covers the walls of a White Salmon church with stories from the Bible*

**By Jeanie Senior**

Most every Tuesday morning for the past two years, Patty Ward has painted murals in the downstairs hallway of White Salmon United Methodist Church.

“We have the stories of the Bible on our walls now,” says the Rev. Bonnie Dyer Frey, the church’s minister.

Patty, a retired elementary schoolteacher, started with the Old Testament, painting one wall panel with an exuberant, swirling circular depiction of the story of the Creation. The murals carry through the New Testament, ending with Christ’s ascension.

Patty was inspired by murals painted in the basement of Hood River Valley Christian Church—a much newer building

with large, uninterrupted wall space.

At White Salmon United Methodist Church, she found herself painting around—or incorporating—the structural details of the old building. She painted around a circuit breaker panel, for example, and used a stone pillar as a background for the Tower of Babel story.

Patty, whose references included an illustrated Bible published by Reader's Digest, says she tried to pick subjects "that would be interesting." Before she started, she measured the walls and wrote down the stories she wanted to tell.

"I tried to get the more meaningful stories," she says. "I am not a student of the Bible. I am learning."

Patty painted the scenes on the top part of the walls, above green paneling and red-maroon molding. To keep them in

scale, she edged each panel with a coordinating border: pine cones and holly for Christmas, lilies for Easter and thorns for the crucifixion.

Patty is a watercolorist who, apart from the mural project, calls herself "a Sunday painter." She used acrylic paint for the church project, a first for her.

Her winter painting garb included two wool sweaters.

"It wasn't really that cold,"

**Children at the church will grow up with Patty's paintings, "and they will remember them."**

— The Rev. Bonnie Dyer Frey

she says of the basement, "but when you're standing in one place for two to four hours ..."

Patty is still adding details to the biblical scenes. She makes plaques for each scene that include a reference to where each story is found in the Bible.

An Aberdeen native, Patty has lived in Glenwood, Klickitat and White Salmon. Besides Whitson Elementary, she also taught school in Lyle and in Klickitat, where her husband, Bill, was mill manager.

Bonnie says Patty has earned a summer sabbatical, but the painter says she is not finished. She is planning another mural that depicts the settlement of the area and the historic role of the church, which celebrated its centennial in 2008.

Children at the church will grow up with Patty's paintings, the pastor says, "and they will remember them."

The pictures also are a gift to the community, says Pam Morneault, who first saw them when she came to work at the Backpacks for Kids program after it moved to the Methodist church basement.

Pam notes the basement is heavily used by community groups, from Boy Scouts to Habitat for Humanity, which means the murals will gain an even larger audience.

"They are just wonderful," she says. ■

Inside the church, from top, Patty and the Rev. Bonnie Dyer Frey wander the mural-covered halls. Jesus convinces four fishermen, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, to become his disciples. A scene from Palm Sunday.

