Tileman and Professor Restore Saved Mosaic

A priceless mosaic that was removed from the sanctuary of Sacred Heart Church in Bridgeport in 1966 when the building was demolished to make way for the construction of Route 25, has been found and is being restored to its original beauty under the careful surveillance of two craftsmen at Sacred Heart University.

Working in an underground restoration room, Placid Beninco, retired "Benny the Tileman" of Bridgeport, and the Rev. William Fletcher, an expert on mosaics and professor at SHU, are restoring the art work that had been stored in a campus garage, unattended and unnoticed for nearly 14 years.

The mosaic, "Christ in Blessing," was designed and executed by the Benedictine Monks at Beuron, Germany. The work, measuring four by 10 feet, was completed in shades of blue, green, rose, yellow and gold tiles portraying the Risen/Ascended Christ with hand raised in blessing in Oriental gesture and feet resting on a cloud of blue. It was inset in three panels for the marble altar reredos when the restored church was rededicated on October 20, 1920.

The two artisians began restoration of the art work shortly after Easter, working with tiles that ranged in size from 1/64 of an inch to 1/4 of an inch long. Broken or lost pieces were replaced with older tiles purchased from a mosaic studio in New York City.

If the project proceeds on schedule, the restored mosaic will be permanently installed on a wall of the University library and dedicated in late September.

With a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council and other gifts, Rev. Fletcher plans to complete the project with a series of four lectures by American scholars during the fall: 'Theology of Images,' 'Mosaics as Art Forms,' 'Contemporary Christian Art,' and 'Mr. Gothic: Ralph Cram Adams.'