

The Collector

The Rev. Stanley Stiver has been traveling abroad since 1967. And from each place he has visited, he has brought home some type of religious replica.

We may have the Six Days War in Israel to thank for the presence of the Rev. Stanley Stiver at the Southern Christmas Show for the past three years.

In 1967, Rev. Stiver and his wife were supposed to go on a Holy Land tour. Because of the war, they decided to go to Germany instead, since that year was the 450th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

"We got so intrigued, we've taken at least one trip every year since," said the Rev. Stiver, pastor of St. Marks Evangelical Lutheran Church in Claremont, N.C.

And everywhere that the Rev. Stiver has been, to more than 30 countries, he has collected crosses and other religious replicas. Since 1975 he has shared parts of his collection with the people who have attended the Southern Christmas Show.

This year the Rev. Stiver's collection at the Village Church in Olde Towne features a display of church replicas from different countries and a collection of items depicting the faces of Christ from birth through the Resurrection.

A replica of St. Basils, the Moscow church with brightly colored domes; a carved face of Christ, in linden wood, from Germany; a silver nativity scene from France, and Bulgarian monastery plaques are just a few of the items to be found in the Show's Olde Towne Church.

(In past years, the Rev. Stiver has featured his collection of crosses and his nativity scenes.)

Although he has collected replicas of churches, nativities, icons, madonnas and prints of great religious paintings, the major part of his collection consists of crosses.

"We are unusually looking for crosses of the particular country we are in," the Rev. Stiver explained. "But if we see something we like, we try to secure it."

The collecting started because the Reverend thought the children of the church would enjoy seeing religious items from different countries. As it turned out, civic, school and club groups through out the area have enjoyed the collection as much as church members.

The Reverend says he has so many requests to give talks and show his collection that he can't possibly fill them all.

One of the most interesting things about the Rev. Stiver's collection is that he knows where everything came from and he knows the explanation-- or history-- of everything. A gregarious and enthusiastic soul, he delightedly shares all the information he has about his collections.

But if you're a dyed-in-the-wool sour puss, you'd better stay away from the Rev. Stiver; for he's an infectious person. Even recent jaw surgery, which altered the shape of his face and required his jaws to be wired closed for about two months, didn't destroy his effervescence.

The Rev. Stiver has been pastor of St. Mark's since 1959. The 900 member congregation outnumbers the population of its tiny town. Each year during the Christmas Show he adds about 90,000 persons to his flock.

"It's been a tremendous experience," the Reverend said of his stints as pastor of the Village Church. "I have such opportunities to witness. We receive interesting letters and comments from all over. One year a 100-year-old woman in a wheel chair came to the show. She wanted to see, in person, a specific cross. She had underlined its name in a newspaper clipping."

The Rev. Stiver chuckles about his travels and his collections. "We're not going to have anything to retire on if we keep up all these trips."

But we're not worried. The Lord likes a cheerful giver, and through his collection, the Rev. Stanley Stiver has given enjoyment to tens of thousands of people.

