

Forty years of needlework

By [Carol Zaleski](#)

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After more than four decades of untiring work, the [Plymouth Needlers](#), of Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, have finished their work: four giant embroideries, each made to a design created by Pauline Baynes, legendary illustrator to J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. The needlers are a most amazing group of women, all volunteers, all sharing the labor, none taking personal credit, all ages, combining their individual talents into a seamless whole, supporting one another through the years as co-workers and friends. (For more on the project, see this [Faith Matters essay](#).)

Each embroidery marks a season and sanctifies it: “Churchmen in the New World,” “Christmas Radiance,” “The Renewal of Life.” Now the final one has been unveiled: “The Summer of the First Amendment,” a timely celebration of religious freedom featuring Washington, Jefferson and Madison, Johnny Appleseed, Amish farmers, American Indians, children at summer games, emblems of American religious history and much more—all brought together in a unified, yet exuberant, whole.

I frankly can’t imagine how the needlers managed to transfer Baynes’s delicate, playful, radiant designs to the vast scale on which they had to work; I can’t imagine the patience it must have taken to show up week after week and labor over a tiny patch of color and form, year in and year out. Now they can rest and celebrate, and the rest of us can marvel at this new landmark in American sacred art.