

For the love of God —

art

Diocesan artists add unique beauty to churches and chapels

By **DIANE SCHLINDWEIN**
Managing Editor

Churches in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois are home to a gorgeous variety of artwork — some created locally to remind the faithful that talents are to be shared when at all possible. Earlier this year, *Catholic Times* reached out to parishes and other diocesan places, asking them to provide leads about individual pieces that can be found in their churches or chapels. Here are highlights of what was shared with us. All the various pieces are labors of love by the artistic parishioners who have left their mark on their beloved places of worship.

“

In 2015, I visited and fell in love with the Gem City. My parish was St. Rose of Lima. It wasn't long before I discovered Father Tolton's historical life in Quincy and was inspired to honor him with a portrait.”

”

Isabel Lewis

Quincy University Chapel — Quincy

Isabel (Armengol) Lewis feels she was meant to paint the remarkable image of Father Augustine Tolton that now hangs in the Quincy University Chapel.

It took Lewis about a year to complete her painting, but before she even began, she had a real connection to Quincy and the first black Catholic priest, who is now a Venerable, the second step of four to becoming a saint in the Catholic Church.

“In 2015, I visited and fell in love with the Gem City. My parish was St. Rose of Lima. It wasn't long before I discovered Father Tolton's historical life in Quincy and was inspired to honor him with a portrait,” Lewis said. “At the encouragement and with the financial support of family and friends, I embarked on a journey painting Father Gus.

“My apartment in Quincy was a few blocks away from his grave,” she said. “I went to his grave every day to ask for his intercession in my endeavor. I was amazed at the signal graces from the people he led me to, including Father (Roy) Bauer (who died in April 2017), God rest his soul, who wrote a book about Father Gus.”

Additionally, Lewis was in touch with Father Daren Zehnle, a priest of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, who is extremely devoted to Father Tolton. Father Zehnle had exchanged emails with her about her work and then the two coincidentally met at Father Tolton's gravesite. Father Zehnle and Lewis talked there in the cemetery for about 30 minutes about her devotion to Father Tolton and about the process of painting the 4 feet by 6 feet image. Father Zehnle has her first draft of the

painting framed in his rectory.

Lewis painted Father Tolton at a paramount moment in his life. “My painting is a commemoration of Father Tolton celebrating his first holy Mass,” she said. “Because Father Tolton had studied at QU before leaving to the seminary in Rome, I was thrilled when QU accepted my painting to be hung in their beautiful chapel.” Lewis was pleased that the painting was blessed on the 130th anniversary of Father Tolton's ordination.

About a year after the Tolton painting was blessed, Lewis married. Her husband was offered a job in San Diego, and they have been living in California since 2019. She still has an affection for Quincy, she says, adding she has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Marymount University, and has always loved producing art. She added, “I love to make art, however, I love to make artists even more! I now teach art to children in various homes and parishes here in San Diego.

“My commissioned work has consisted mostly in portraiture,” she said. “In recent years I have focused on developing art lessons to teach the devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.”

Like so many faith filled artists, Lewis gives credit where she says credit is due. “I know that painting portraiture is a gift if not a mission that I was born with,” she concludes, “all for the greater glory of God.”



Nancy Jatcko

St Boniface Parish —
Edwardsville

When it comes to a parishioner having gorgeous and numerous pieces of art featured in a diocesan parish church, Nancy Jatcko of St. Boniface Parish in Edwardsville could well be at the top of the list.

Beginning back in 2018, Jatcko was commissioned by her pastor, Father Jeff Goeckner, to paint a series of four paintings of St. Boniface as well as individual paintings of St. Clare, St. Cecilia, St. Pope John Paul II, Venerable Father Augustine Tolton, and Blessed Father Michael McGivney. Father Goeckner picked individuals that had special meaning to the parish, Jatcko says.

The first four paintings, the series on St. Boniface, were in place on June 5, 2019, just in time for the saint's feast day. The paintings depict St. Boniface in a boat, chopping Thor's tree, baptizing the people, and finally his martyrdom. The martyrdom painting has significant features "hiding" in the painting: the St. Boniface church building, wooden shoes, a griffin, and a blue jay — all creative additions to give homage to important local aspects of the church and schools in Edwardsville.

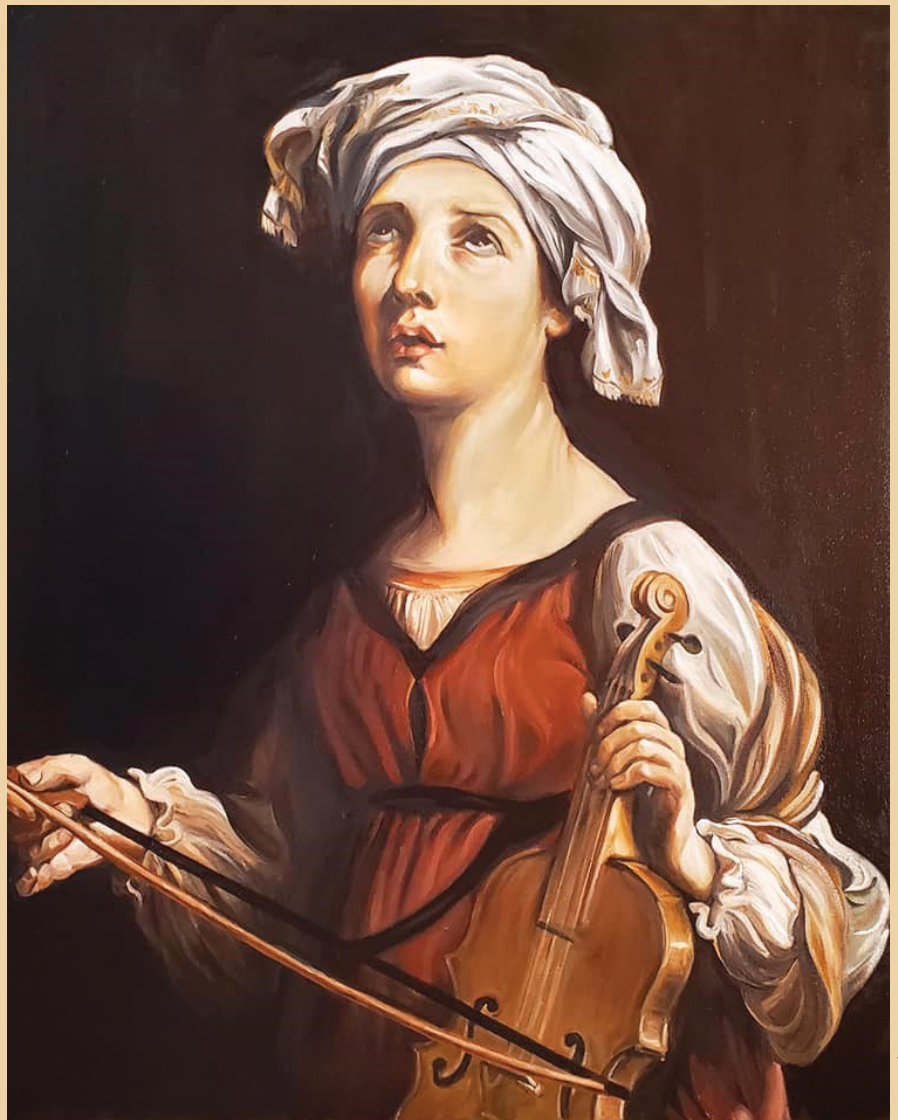
Jatcko says that when the first series of paintings was hung, she felt great gratitude, knowing that her art will remain for future generations to remember that St. Boniface was a "real human being whose heroic story calls us to greatness." With the hanging of each painting, her gratitude grew. The paintings of St. Clare, St. Cecilia, St.

Pope John Paul II, and Father Tolton were placed in their sacred home for the Sept. 15, 2019, 150th anniversary of St. Boniface Parish. Father McGivney was completed and hung after that.

Jatcko and her husband have five children who range in age from 17 to 32, so over the decades, her art has long been something

she works on when she isn't busy with her family or her job. The couple has also volunteered with a variety of parish, diocesan, and Knights of Columbus activities.

Jatcko says for as long as she can remember, she has been an artist. "The skills I developed were really self-taught," she said. After high school



St. Cecilia

“

When people ask me how I do what I do, I tell them I really don't know. I don't think I do anything. It's a God-given talent. I guess I borrow God's talent and he lent it to me very early on.”

”





St. Pope John Paul II

graduation, Jatcko honed those skills by studying at the Chicago Art Institute on a scholarship. She has always been a prolific artist, but until Father Goeckner commissioned the church paintings, she had never really concentrated on religious art.

Once she began painting the saints, however, she began to see what a blessing it was to be able to tell stories about those Godly people. Those stories came to life after countless hours of work. “My studio is in my home, and I work there at all hours. My art comes in here and there,” she said, adding that normally she worked on the paintings for about six hours at a time, many times in the evenings and on the weekends. She estimates that each painting took about 80 hours of work.

Jatcko is accepting, yet surprisingly humble about her gifts. “When people ask me how I do what I do, I tell them I really don’t know,” she said. “I don’t think I do anything. It’s a God-given talent. I guess I borrow God’s talent and he lent it to me very early on.”



Mike Sachsenmaier

St. Joseph the Worker Parish — Chatham

Another artist who has shared his talent with his parish is Mike Sachsenmaier, who is a member of St. Joseph the Worker in Chatham.

Sachsenmaier’s stained-glass depiction of the Nativity may have a Christmas theme, but it hangs year-round in the north chapel of St. Joseph. Sachsenmaier says he was inspired by a fellow parishioner. “In 2012, Helen Thomas, a parishioner at St. Joseph’s made a wall hanging of the Nativity for a fundraiser for the youth for Catholic HEART Work Camp,” he said. “I loved how she put all the pieces of cloth together to make such a beautiful picture. I took a picture of it and made a pattern. It is three panels totaling 53 inches by 21 inches.”

The Nativity rendering wasn’t his first project. “In 1998 I decided I wanted to make something out of stained glass, so I bought a couple of kits and made hanging lamps, one for me and one for a neighbor who was remodeling their dining room. I enjoyed working with the glass. It was relaxing.”

Later, his new hobby helped him with a difficult life transition. “I was laid off from my job in 2006, and I went to Welch Studio in Springfield and took classes. After that, there was no stopping me. One of the first pieces I made was a cross draped with a purple cloth for Father Robert Franzen (the late long-time pastor at St. Joseph the Worker) for his retirement.

“I have also made the *Eye of God*, which is like the one (in the nave of) the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception,” he said. Other pieces include doves, angels “and many more pieces including anniversary celebration glass.”

Additionally, Sachsenmaier, who works out of his home, has a booth at the annual fall craft show sponsored by St. Joseph the Worker. However, he hasn’t limited his parish efforts to making stained glass. “I have served the parish in several ways, as a eucharistic minister, altar server for funerals, event photographer, decorating the church for Easter and Christmas, and I headed up the parish picnic for 12 years.”

All these efforts led the parish social media coordinator, Kathy Szamocki, to sing his praises, calling the artist Sachsenmaier “one of our dearly beloved parishioners.”



“

All these efforts led the parish social media coordinator, Kathy Szamocki, to sing his praises, calling the artist Sachsenmaier ‘one of our dearly beloved parishioners.’”

”

Leo Crawford & Tess Riedle

St Jude Parish — Rochester

When Leo Crawford passed away at the age of 97 this past February, he left a lasting legacy to his beloved parish, St. Jude in Rochester. Thanks to Crawford and the several pieces of artwork he produced, St. Jude Church is more beautiful — and that meant a lot to him, says one of his eight children, Francy Cobern of Springfield.

Cobern remembers her father working away in his basement studio. “He was a carpenter before he began working on stained glass. We all have furniture that he made. It wasn’t until after he retired that he became interested in making the stained glass. I think it was in the early 1990s. He had a big workshop set up in his basement.

“He always started out with a plan. He would get a picture and copy it to the size that he wanted,” she said. “He would lay them out on a table, cut the glass to fit and lay it out. Then he would solder the pieces together. It was a lot of work for him, but he liked doing it.” Crawford signed his work simply, with the initials LFC for his full name, Leo Francis Crawford.

Late in Crawford’s life, Cobern came to her father’s assistance. “He worked on stained glass for about 20 years. I even made a couple of pieces with him before he quit doing it,” she said. “His eyes were going then.”

Crawford made stained-glass pieces featuring St. Jude, St. Teresa, the Little Flower, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Francis of Assisi, and *The Last Supper*.



The largest piece of stained glass is *The Last Supper*. “It’s pretty phenomenal,” Cobern said. “That piece is the one that contains the most detail.” Crawford was just pleased that all the pieces he made for St. Jude were there in the church and would remain after he was gone. “He liked to talk to people about them and he was so happy they were there. It was something he loved to do.”

Longtime but now retired St. Jude parish secretary, Sue Bozarth, remembers how Crawford was so dedicated in his work. “Leo was a super, super nice guy and everybody really liked what he did (with the stained glass). It was really a loss for us when we lost him,” she said.

In addition to Crawford’s depiction of St. Jude, a statue of St. Jude is a more recent addition to the parish. Another parishioner, Tess Riedle, refurbished the statue, which was originally from the collection of the late Father Vincent Worland. When Father Joseph Havrilka was tasked with finding homes for individual statues, he immediately thought about the Rochester parish. “I knew there was only one St. Jude Parish in the diocese, so I offered it to them,” he said.

From there, Father Chuck Edwards, pastor of St. Jude, asked Riedle to take on the project. Riedle says the statue, which is over 4 feet tall, definitely “needed some work.” “It was rough, but it wasn’t like it was terrible,” she said. “I had to clean it, sand it down to get rid of that chippy paint, spackle over that, sand it down again, paint it with acrylic paint, and seal it with clear varnish. You really have to baby them along,” she said. “But he came out pretty good.” ✠



“Leo was a super, super nice guy and everybody really liked what he did (with the stained glass). It was really a loss for us when we lost him.”

