

ICONOGRAPHY AND SISTER MARY CHARLES

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For Sister Mary Charles, iconography was not just another form of art; iconography was an immensely personal ministry that both fed a spiritual hunger within the Church, and allowed her to give glory to God.



Though Sister Mary Charles had depicted religious imagery in her art since the early 1950s, it wasn't until 1990 that she undertook formal training in iconography and learned about this artistic tradition of Eastern Christianity. For her, icons were an inspiration to prayer, calling her to be a child of God without guile or fear. She once wrote, "I had always been distressed over the shallow, sentimental images found in most of our Catholic Churches. The lack of interiority and transcendence had unnerved me" (McGough, "The World," 184). This brought her to the St. John of Damascus School of Sacred Art in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, where she studied with Phillip

Zimmerman, learning how iconography has the power to teach, to heal, to comfort, to challenge, and to help people pray.

For Sister Mary Charles, as well as any iconographer, the creation of an icon is a prayer in and of itself. Before beginning any work on an icon, artists pray that the Holy Spirit direct their hands to perfectly portray the person represented in the icon. The iconographer also prays that through this process he or she, as well as everyone who gazes upon the icon, will be inspired to a prayer that manifests the God who breaks through all signs and symbols with truth. Iconographers then proceed with their work,