



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

# 49 - January 2015

## A Best Practice: An Ecumenical Conference and Art Exhibit

As we minister in adult faith formation, we become more and more aware that:

- there is strength in working together
- we model Jesus' call to unity when we collaborate ecumenically
- adults learn in varied ways
- the arts have been, throughout our entire history, a moving vehicle for people to understand and experience the spiritual journey
- we need to hear the voices of many cultures
- it helps to have the support (interest, publicity, financial, etc.) of various organizations within the larger community

We look here in this issue at a best practice which exemplifies these awareness and which certainly was an enormous undertaking. As you read (and discuss with others), ask yourself (yourselves):

- How could we do something similar?
- Who could we partner with to do something similar?
- In what other ways could we incorporate art in adult formation?
- What are the needs of the people in our parish, our region, our (arch)diocese?

and check the GEMS wonderings and suggestions at the end of this issue.

## What was this endeavor?

In April 2014, eight churches in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan hosted a two-day conference and art exhibit:

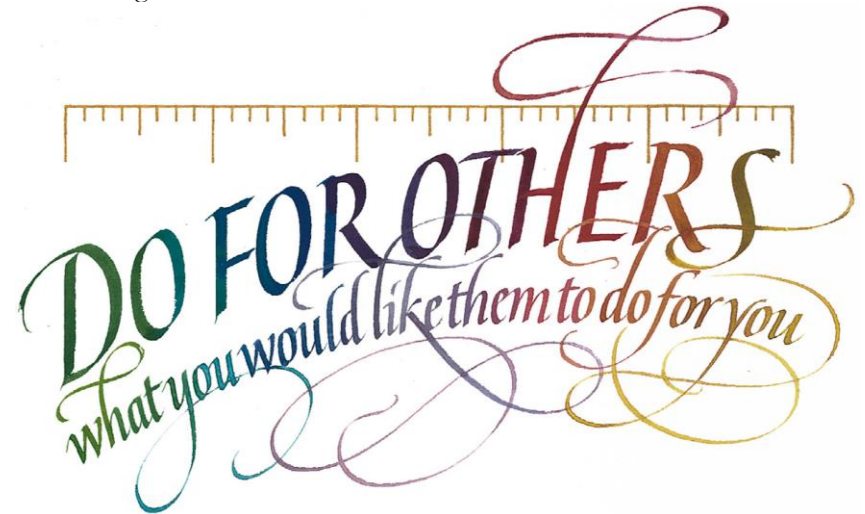
*Who is My Neighbor ~ Art as a Bridge to Each Other:  
Exploring God's Biblical Call "To love your neighbor as yourself"  
through art, theology and the voice of the artist*

The *Who Is My Neighbor? Conference* was designed to be a dialog about art and creativity within church and community. The journey was guided by Catholic Latino theologian Cecilia González-Andrieu, Calvinist philosopher and theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff and the creative voice of 11 artists.

The conference and art exhibit featured two days of seminars and workshops and an eleven artist – three hundred piece exhibit held in the eight hosting churches.

Together participants explored:

- how art can become a bridge "to our neighbor"
- a creative catalyst for social change and spiritual renewal within our neighborhoods, churches, schools and communities



Timothy R. Botts

## How did this begin?

The [Catholic Information Center](#), a ministry of the Paulist Fathers serving the diocese of Grand Rapids presenting programs for Catholics and others seeking to learn more about Catholic belief, practice, and other faith issues, began plans to host a gallery showing of [John August Swanson's](#) art work from the private collection of Richard and Helen DeVos.

As people began to plan, contacting Swanson and people who knew him, they were reminded of other artists – in their midst and throughout the world.

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The idea mushroomed, the committee grew and people throughout the area worked for almost a year: an over-all planning committee of five with various satellite committees at the participating churches.

## Were others – in addition to these committees – involved?

The committee recognized immediately that the involvement of as many religious and community groups as possible would increase the potential for support, finances, marketing and publicity, and participation.

Some of the many groups who became sponsors and/or participating organizations – in addition to the eight hosting churches – were:

- AMDG Architects
- Barnabas Foundation
- Baylor University Press
- Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
- Christians in the Visual Arts
- Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation
- Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids
- Franciscan Life Process Center
- Kendall College of Art and Design
- Eyekons
- Grand Rapids Art Museum
- Several individuals/couples in the community

## In numbers, what were the components of this endeavor?

- 2 days
- 8 churches
- 7 denominations
- 9 presenters
- 11 artists
- 4 plenary addresses
- 25 workshops
- 9 artist hands-on workshops
- 1 live-performance drawing
- 300 original artworks
- 2 week art exhibit

## How were the various events scheduled?

- Each Morning: An Opening Service and two Plenary Addresses
- Each Afternoon: Workshops held throughout the 7 host churches
- Each Evening: Special Events and Presentations
- The Two Weeks following the conference: A three hundred piece art exhibit throughout the eight hosting churches with guided tours available for schools, churches and community groups

Those who perceive in themselves  
this kind of divine spark which is the  
artistic vocation  
– as poet, sculptor, architect, musician, actor  
and so on –  
feel at the same time the obligation not to  
waste this talent but to develop it, in order to  
put it at the service of their neighbor  
and of humanity as a whole.

- Pope John Paul II, Letter to Artists

## Keynote Speakers

The two keynoters for the conference came with a rich background:

- Cecilia González-Andrieu: Catholic Latino Theologian, Professor of Theological Studies and Visual Theology at Loyola Marymount University.

Cecilia is the author of *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty* which provided the inspiration for the conference. The conference explored her idea of how art can be used as a bridge in our churches and communities connecting us to our neighbors and becoming a force for rebirth and renewal.

- Nicholas Wolterstorff: Calvinist Philosopher and Theologian, Noah Porter Emeritus Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University, Senior Fellow: Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Virginia.

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Nicholas is the author of *Art in Action Seminal Study in Christian Aesthetics*. A prolific writer with a wide range of interests, he is currently working on a new book, *Art Re-Thought*, which offers ways we can re-think and re-imagine the role of art in our religious and cultural lives.

## Workshop Presenters

The presenters for the afternoon workshops throughout the two days included:

- David Bosscher (Director of Art Exhibits, Second Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI)
- Themis Fotieo Lawyer (Greek Orthodox Theologian, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Grand Rapids, MI)
- Janaan Manternach (Catholic Educator & Liturgist, Dubuque, IA)
- Betsy Steele Halstead (Visual Arts in Worship Resource Specialist, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship)
- Eric Strand (Director of Music and the Arts, First United Methodist Church, Grand Rapids, MI)
- Rev. Karl VanHarn (Director of Pastoral Services, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, Grand Rapids, MI)
- Vange Van Heusen (Director of the Atrium Gallery, Second Christian Reformed Church, Grand Haven, MI)

## Artists and Presenters

The artists whose works were featured in the conference and art exhibit were:

- Timothy R. Botts (Calligrapher, Glen Ellyn, IL)
- Athanasios Clark Orthodox (Iconographer, Athens, Greece)
- Carolyn Elaine (Mosaic Artist, Chicago, IL)
- Martin Erspamer, OSB (Ceramicist, Painter, Printmaker, St. Meinrad, IN)
- Sergio Gomez (Painter, Curator, Gallery Owner, Chicago, IL)
- The Art of Sister Corita Kent (Printmaker, Teacher)

- Chris Stoffel Overvoorde (Painter, Liturgical Artist, Grand Rapids, MI)
- Steve Prince Artist (Printmaker, Sculptor, Meadville, PA)
- John August Swanson (Serigrapher, Painter, Los Angeles, CA)
- Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk (Fiber Artist, Sculptor, Grand Rapids, MI)
- Linda Witte Henke (Liturgical Textile Artist, Indianapolis, IN)

There is a vast area of our world that we have barely begun to explore and that part is – each other.

Through the works of our religious senses and our artistic making, we come to know one another better, to value the gift of mystery bestowed through radical otherness,

and ultimately come to love one another truly.

How we share the wisdom of our ancestors, how we glimpse the struggles of our young, how we denounce what is wrong and celebrate what is right, how we build communities of compassion and instill compassion for the most marginal in our communities – all of this become possible when we come awake to the power of beauty.

- Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu in *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*

## Who was the audience for *Who Is My Neighbor?*

The planners said: “Our goal is to bring together a wide range of creative thinkers to explore art, faith and community. We invite artists, teachers, students, community leaders, priests, pastors, theologians, worship planners and art enthusiasts to join our dialogue.”

With the two-week art exhibit as an integral part of this endeavor, the audience, of course, was extended to include and reach everyone.

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## An Integrated Approach

One of the principles of adult faith formation concerns attending to the needs of the whole person. That is evident in the goals of the conference and art exhibit:

### ART FOR THE MIND: Aesthetics and Visual Theology

Cecilia González--Andrieu's creative vision, especially in *A Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*, was celebrated. Nicholas Wolterstorff shared ideas from his new book *Art Re-Thought* along with reflections on religious aesthetics from his seminal work, *Art in Action*. The creative legacy of Sister Corita Kent was explored; how her sacred art of iconography and beauty become a pathway to God.

### ART FOR THE SOUL: The Creative Voice of the Artist

The creative voice of the artist was the foundation of the conference. The artists' unique vision was used to help participants "re-think" the role of the visual arts and explore how art can be a force for renewal in our religious and cultural communities.

### ART FOR THE HEART: Art in the Church and Community

Practical ideas and creative help for those working with art in their churches, schools and communities were presented. Artists and presenters illustrated how to use art creatively in worship, explored liturgical themes for banners, offered advice on running a church gallery, shared a visual approach to teaching art and ways to discover how to "build bridges with art" in our schools and communities.

### ART FOR THE BODY: Hands-On Artist Workshops

Nine artists presented hands-on workshops: each one a unique opportunity which creatively engaged the artists. Participants chose from:

- a printmaking workshop
- a spiritual journey into art
- learning creative calligraphy
- discovering how to make liturgical art affordable and meaningful
- exploring religious symbols with fiber and fabric
- discovering the art of mosaic
- engaging worship with the five senses



## Plenary Addresses

The keynote addresses throughout the conference explored:

- *Art in Life ~ Art in Action* by Nicholas Wolterstorff
- *The Second Line: Art as a Catalyst for Change* by Steve Prince
- *Who Is My Neighbor? Art as a Bridge to Each Other* by John August Swanson and Cecilia González-Andrieu
- *Sharing Our Stories: The Art of John August Swanson* by Steve Prince



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## The Various Workshops

This list of workshops that were offered at the conference is quite long. It's included here to:

- illustrate the diversity of the explorations
- spark our thoughts for things we might do

### ART FOR THE MIND: Aesthetics & Visual Theology

- *The Art and Legacy of Corita Kent* with Cecilia González-Andrieu, John Swanson, Tim Botts, and Janaan Manternach
- *Art Re-Thought* with Nicholas Wolterstorff
- *Beauty as a Pathway to God* with Martin Erspamer, OSB
- *Iconography: A Creative Vision of the Spiritual World* with Athanasios Clark
- *Asombrados : Art as a Gospel of Beauty* with Cecilia González-Andrieu
- *The Art of John August Swanson* - Presentation by Janaan Manternach with John Swanson
- *Worship, Beauty, Justice and Shalom* with Nicholas Wolterstorff

### ART FOR THE SOUL: The Creative Voice of the Artist

- *Katrina Suite: Take Me to the Water* with Steve Prince
- *Puertas Abiertas: Open Doors* with Sergio Gomez
- *Passing the Colors: Engaging Visual Culture* with Chris Stoffel Overvoorde
- *Glimpses & Destellos: A Vision for Art and Justice* with Sergio Gomez
- *Portraits of the Word: Biblical Calligraphy* with Timothy R. Botts
- *Art of the Icon: Reflections by a Working Iconographer* with Athanasios Clark
- *Covenant of Love: Old Testament Made New* with Steve Prince
- *Bound for Glory: Calligraphy Celebrating Gospel Songs* with Timothy R. Botts

### ART FOR THE HEART: Art in the Church & Community

- *Exploring Our Liturgical Tradition in Fiber & Fabric* with Linda Witte Henke

- *Creative Art for Contemporary Worship* with Betsy Steele Halstead
- *Running a Church Gallery* - Panel Discussion with Vange Van Heusen, David Bosscher, Eric Strand
- *Engaging Students in the Creative Process* with Carolyn Elaine
- *Art in Education: A Visual Approach* with Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk
- *Art, Our Neighbor and the Benedictine Way* with Martin Erspam
- *Creating Liturgically Purposed Art for the Church* with Linda Witte Henke
- *Liturgical Art for Your Neighborhood Church* with Chris Stoffel Overvoorde
- *Creative Use of Art in Spiritual Care* with Rev. Karl VanHarn and Pine Rest Pastoral Staff
- *Building Bridges with Art* with Carolyn Elaine
- *Re-Visioning Community thru Art: A Multi-Cultural View* with Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk

The vocation of the artist  
is to pull from old roots to make a new thing that  
will catch some of the light  
of our archetypal beacons ....

I try to make accessible and  
re-affirm certain values –  
loving your neighbor, acting as peacemakers,  
something as simple as listening to someone  
who needs to be heard.

- John August Swanson

### ART FOR THE BODY: Hands-On Artist Workshops

- *Monoprints: A Christian Vision for a Contemporary World* with Steve Prince
- *Paintings of Hope: A Spiritual Vision in Pigment* with Sergio Gomez

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- *The Work of Our Hands: The Art of Paper Cutting* with Martin Erspamer, OSB
- *Expressive Calligraphy: Uniting Word and Image* with Timothy R. Botts
- *Transforming Worship Space: Affordably and Creatively* with Chris Stoffel Overvoorde
- *A New Vision for Textile Art in the Church* with Linda Witte Henke
- *A Broken Beauty: The Communal Art of Mosaic* with Carolyn Elaine
- *Engaging Worship through Our Five Senses* with Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk
- *Art and Theology of Orthodox Iconography* with Athanasios Clark, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Themis Fotieo

Creativity belongs to the artist  
in each of us. To create means to relate.  
The root meaning of the word art is  
“to fit together” and we all do this every day.

Not all of us are painters but we are all artists.  
Each time we fit things together we are creating  
– whether it is to make a loaf of bread,  
a child, a day.

- Sister Corita Kent

## Evening Opportunities

The two evenings of the conference offered additional and varied opportunities:

- *A Catholic-Calvinist Conversation: Until Justice and Peace Embrace* with Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu and Nicholas Wolterstorff

- Conference Finale: *Sharing the Vision* - Panel Discussion  
The artists and presenters reflected together on their experience of the conference, *Who is My Neighbor?*
- Live Performance Drawing with Sergio Gomez & Steve Prince. Sergio and Steve created a 6' x 16' drawing inspired by the *Who is My Neighbor?* Conference. They begin drawing at separate ends and continued until they meet in the middle.
- The Artists Ball  
Everyone joined with the artists and presenters for a time of fun and fellowship featuring live music and creative conversations

## Wondering GEMS

- This endeavor enlisted the support from various religious and civic groups. For some (or all) of your adult faith formation efforts might you partner with and/or invite support from other religious groups, from organizations and services in the local community?
- This opportunity featured various artists, from different nationalities, areas of the world, and in different mediums. They all were involved in religious art. Could you do something similar featuring many themes of artistic expression? Does all art (not only religious art) have the capacity to invite people to reflection, to engagement with life?

## Some GEMS Suggestions

- Seeing the Word: Have you taken time – in adult faith formation opportunities – to explore, study and reflect on the images from [The Saint John's Bible](#)?

One resource for this type of Scripture study is provided by [Seeing The Word - Visio Divina with The Saint John's Bible](#).

- Might you plan a Pilgrimage of Art ... art hosted at various parishes, local art museums, etc.
- This endeavor utilized the expertise of professional artists. What about your parish community (or diocese)? There may be many

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parishioners who have artistically portrayed their spirituality, their faith in God, through paintings, drawings, sculpture, photography, poetry, etc.

Have a parish (diocesan) art exhibit on faith and God. Invite parishioners to share their creativity, their artistic expressions of their faith life. The evening/day could be structured in various ways:

- time for people to meditatively browse
  - time for the “artists” to talk about their experience
  - an opportunity for all to try their hand at a creative experience
  - time for prayer, etc.
- A popular current trend around the country is painting parties for groups (mostly women, but a few adventurous men also participate).



For information, check:

- <http://www.wineandcanvas.com/>
- <http://www.palettesandpairings.com/>

- <http://www.paintingwithatwist.com/ferndale/>
- <http://www.myspirtedart.com/>

Why not adapt the idea for a parish event? Invite an artist to lead participants through their own creation, flowing from a Scripture reading, a liturgical season, etc.

- At times, some events are not individual paintings, but a group works collaboratively on a larger painting. Might families do this? A Parish Pastoral Council or commission? The Adult Faith Formation Committee?
- Could families be engaged in an activity such as this, especially within an intergenerational faith formation program?



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found at:

- <http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> Scroll down for *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
- [www.pastoralplanning.com](http://www.pastoralplanning.com) Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation.*