

A MASTERLY STROKE

Artist renews faith and finds career in religious works

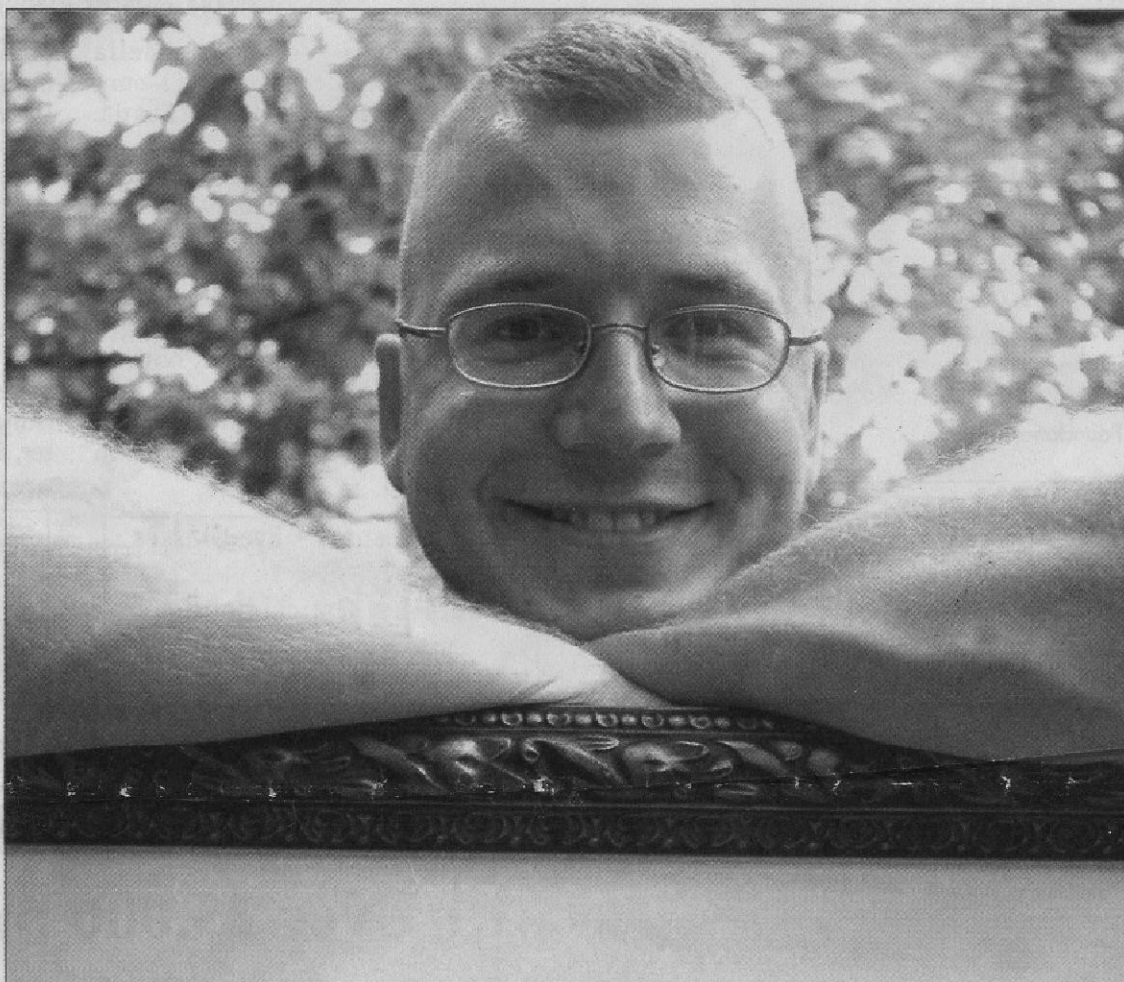
By **JOE BOLLIG**
Leaven staff

If Jason Jenicke's "Raising of the Cross" reminds you of the Rubens masterpiece of a similar name — it's supposed to.

But if you don't quite recall the famous artist's 1611 "Elevation of the Cross" being set against a backdrop looking remarkably like the Flint Hills, there's a reason for that as well.

That's because when the Lawrence artist and St. John the Evangelist parishioner recreates familiar religious scenes in his artwork, he often sets them against a backdrop that is strikingly familiar to archdiocesan Catholics as well.

While the Kansas flavor of Jenicke's landscapes might be unintentional, the primary subject matter of his artwork is not. Although the 2001 graduate of the University of Kansas originally intended to become an illustrator, he has since become primarily a religious painter who focuses on traditional



On display

Art buffs can view three of Jenicke's works at the St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center, 1631 Crescent Rd., Lawrence: the original oil painting "The Visitation," and charcoal sketches of Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II.

In the pipeline

Jenicke is currently working on five new pieces with religious themes:

- Wedding at Cana
- Sermon on the Mount
- Agony in the Garden
- Mary at the Foot

Catholic subjects like the Madonna and Child, the Last Supper, and the Sermon on the Mount.

"I knew I wanted to do art, but I never thought I'd do religious art," said Jenicke, who grew up in western Wyandotte County. "That was one of those things that came out of nowhere."

As a college student at KU, Jenicke's approach to his faith was admittedly casual. He was more interested in partying and having a good time than church.

It grew old fast, however, and he felt that something was missing in his life.

Jenicke found what was missing, in a renewal of his faith.

The young artist began taking classes, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, and attending daily Mass at the St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center. He also began receiving individual spiritual direction from Mike Scherschligt, now the center's interim director.

"It was just one of those things," said Jenicke. "As I grew in my faith, the artwork followed along. I remember the day [Scherschligt] challenged me, 'Wouldn't it be great if you did artwork for the church?'"

"And I was just like, 'Yeah, sure, that would be great,' but there was no way I was going to



Leaven photo by Joe Bollig

Jason Jenicke's favorite among his own work is "The Last Supper," an oil painting done in a modern-realistic style. It attempts to be both historically accurate and to give viewers a feeling of what it would have been like to have been present.

do that. But lo and behold, it just kind of happened."

Msgr. Vince Krische, the center's former director, gave Jenicke his first commission — "The Visitation," which depicts the story of the Virgin Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, who was at the time pregnant with John the Baptist. This painting, unlike the "Raising of

the Cross," features a more contemporary-realistic style.

"I had done some abstract painting and was taking a lot of drawing classes — mainly life drawings, nudes and stuff like that," Jenicke said. "That's what got me interested in more of the classical style of artwork. I think in my third drawing class my teacher said my artwork looked

more like [that of] the Old Masters."

Soon after, and despite the fact that the young artist had never painted anything in his life, one of his teachers steered him toward painting. After creating a few abstract works, he copied his first Rubens work, "Sampson and Delilah."

Although some students and

- Wedding at Cana
- Sermon on the Mount
- Agony in the Garden
- Mary at the Foot of the Cross
- The Risen Christ

FYI

Several Jenicke prints are on sale at A Wing & A Prayer, 6032 N.E. Antioch Rd., Kansas City, Mo., (816) 453-7705.

For information on purchasing others, or on how to purchase or commission an original piece of art, contact the artist in Lawrence at (785) 843-5929, or through his parents in Kansas City, Kan., at (913) 721-2662.

The artist can also be reached by e-mail at: jjenicke@hotmail.com.

teachers were supportive of his religious-themed, Baroque-style art, others weren't.

"Some people up at KU liked [Raising of the Cross]; other people didn't," said Jenicke. "Some people just don't think that religion should be in art. And some of the teachers

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Artist finds his calling

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weren't excited about me doing religious art. They felt that it's been overdone or it can become a cliché."

But even some of the backhanded compliments served to encourage him.

"After I completed the Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul drawings," Jenicke said, "a teacher came up to the display and said, 'Normally, I just can't stand this kind of artwork, but you did such a beautiful job with these portraits that I really like them.'"

One way Jenicke sought to both differentiate his work from that of the Old Masters and avoid it becoming clichéd, was by trying to infuse an emotional element in his portraiture.

"You don't see a lot of that in Renaissance artwork," he said. "You look at a lot of Madonna and Childs and you see Mary just holding this baby with no expression on her face. I try to create a feeling of emotion, showing Christ's human side, and reminding people that Christ is human and he had struggles and problems, too."

Of his own works, Jenicke's favorite is "The Last Supper." This painting, done in a modern-realistic style, attempts to give the viewer a participant's level view of the event.

"It's something that I had rolling in my head for two or three years before I painted it," he said. "It took a lot of prayer, sitting in church. During the offertory of the Mass, I'd sit there and offer up a meditation time on that painting, trying to imagine what it would be like if

you were sitting there.

"Even when I prayed my rosary, I'd drift off into space and imagine what it would have been like to be sitting there at the Last Supper," said Jenicke. "I try to do that with all my artwork, to try to get a good mental image. I find the more time I spend meditating on what the painting should look like, the better it turns out."

The paintings also turn out better, he believes, when he has the time to study up on his subject. Jenicke made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in mid-April to get a feel for the places where Jesus exercised his ministry.

"They actually let us into the Garden of Gethsemane, so I took some pictures there," he said.

Like most artists just starting out, Jenicke works a day job to make ends meet. But in addition to working full time at Hobby Lobby in Lawrence, Jenicke has begun his own business, called Divine Images, to market his artwork. Currently, he has four pieces in development — a "Sermon on the Mount," "Mary at the Foot of the Cross," the "Agony in the Garden," and the "Wedding at Cana."

One of Jenicke's most impressive and ambitious works is a close copy of Peter Paul Ruben's 1611 masterpiece "The Elevation of the Cross," which is the central panel of a triptych altarpiece in the Antwerp Cathedral in Belgium. Jenicke departed from the Old Master in making the landscape look like Kansas.

