Igniting biblical imagination

By Chaplain Sharon J. Reives

I was privileged to be around during the early stages for what is now known as The St. John's Bible (SJB). In 1998, Saint John's Abbey and University commissioned renowned calligrapher Donald Jackson to produce a hand-written, hand-illuminated Bible. This work of art unites an ancient Benedictine tradition with the technology and vision of today, illuminating the word of God for a new millennium.

Artistic Director Donald Jackson, says, "The continuous process of remaining open and accepting of what may reveal itself through hand and heart on a crafted page is the closest I have ever come to God." The SJB is a work of art and a work of theology. A team of artists coordinated by Donald Jackson in Wales and a team of scholars in Central Minnesota have brought together the ancient techniques of calligraphy and illumination with an ecumenical Christian approach to the bible rooted in Benedictine spirituality. The result is a living document and a monumental achievement. Back in the 1990s, Donald Jackson observed the monks of Saint John's Abbey processing with their book of the gospels for Sunday Mass, and he recognized the importance of "their book." To create a bible that would capture the beauty and tradition of centuries of liturgy and carry it into the future, that is the vision that united a calligrapher in Wales with a group of Benedictine monks in Minnesota. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI stated, "This is a work of art, a great work of art… a work for eternity."

The leaders of this project have wisely implemented the SJB Heritage Program which is an international initiative for individuals and institutions to explore the artistic and spiritual beauty of the SJB. Through its primary offering, the Heritage Edition, communities around the world can use this gift of sacred art to ignite their spiritual imaginations. Thanks to the creative leadership of Calligrapher Donald Jackson, the Heritage Edition is a work of art in its own right. Leading manuscript experts around the world who have seen the Heritage Edition recognize it as the highest quality reproduction ever made. One might want to explore the opportunity to bring the SJB to a cherished educational, religious or cultural institution, or add it to an art or fine book collection. It will be a legacy enjoyed by generations to come.

Jackson said, "When I was a nine-year-old, desire led me to copying ancient scripts and decorated letters. I loved the feel of the pen as it touched the page and the breathtaking effect of the flow of colored ink as its wetness caught light." One of the main goals of the SJB is to inspire and cultivate creativity. To that end, its viewers are encouraged to use the SJB as a starting point for church, classroom, small group or home activities. Its Heritage Program Leaders have developed a series of programming options that can be brought to your site, and groups are always encouraged to visit the campus of Saint John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Additionally, Saint John's has commissioned curriculum developers and collected examples of activities undertaken by school and church groups across the country.

Furthermore, the SJB is making news around the world:

June 22, 2011 - During the Royal Wedding between Prince William and the former Catherine Middleton April 29 at Westminster Abbey in London, the bride's brother, James Middleton, read scripture from Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 using the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the same translation used in the SJB.

June 15, 2011 - The SJB is part of a year-long diocesan centennial celebration covering nearly a 12,500 square-mile-area in southwestern Iowa.

May 30, 2011 - An anonymous donor gifted the SJB Edition to be shared by Holy Family Catholic High School and St. Hubert Catholic Community.

March 1, 2011 - Marquette University's Mission Week 2011 (Feb. 6-11, 2011) was a community celebration of the "remarkably bold, daringly different" and featured the arrival of The SJB Heritage Edition at the Catholic, Jesuit University.

January 12, 2011 - The Loyola-Notre Dame Library introduced the Heritage Edition to the two communities with the installation of the exhibit "The SJB: Inspiration and Illumination."

November 20, 2010 - Chaminade University, Hawaii's only Catholic university, has received a fine art edition of The SJB.

I encourage you to visit The SJB at its home, the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library on the campus of Saint John's University. Smithsonian Magazine called The St. John Bible, "One of the extraordinary undertakings of our time."

Benedict's Rule instructs the reader to "listen ... with the ear of your heart." As you learn more about The SJB, it is their hope and mine that the Scriptures will open up to you and that your journey within its pages will become a journey toward God. Dr. Evan M. Maurer, former director and CEO of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts said, "What a privilege it is for us to be associated with this project that will bring a contemporary celebration of the beauty and power of these sacred texts to our community." The St. John's Bible is magnificent and breathtaking. I would love to see it being made available to prisons, to the military and to various communities world-wide. Dr. Patrick Henry, former Executive Director of the Institute for Ecumenical & Cultural Research, accurately asserts that "The SJB might seem like doing what ancestors did, not as they did, but as the White Queen says to Alice in Through the Looking Glass," "'It's a poor sort of memory that only works backward.'" "The SJB", says Henry, "is a remembering forward for the 21st century. Words whose flavor has been diluted in oceans of printer's ink suddenly taste again. The really good news is something the Benedictines know: Things worth doing take time, must be done together and will have to overcome resistance and discouragement; what seems traditional to us was not the product of traditionalism, but the result of boldness and innovation and investment. Both the Abbey Church and The SJB are models of what 'the good news' could mean for the rest of us — should we so choose."

Nearly complete, with 160 illuminations the superbly-illustrated SJB has been an interfaith effort. With the same dynamic relationship that existed between medieval Benedictine houses and the scribes whose talents they engaged, Saint John's Abbey and University and Jackson, in collaboration with a wider community, will produce a bible which will ignite the biblical imagination of believers throughout the world.

Chief of Naval Personnel seeks nominations for CSADD sea, shore chapters of the year

From Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

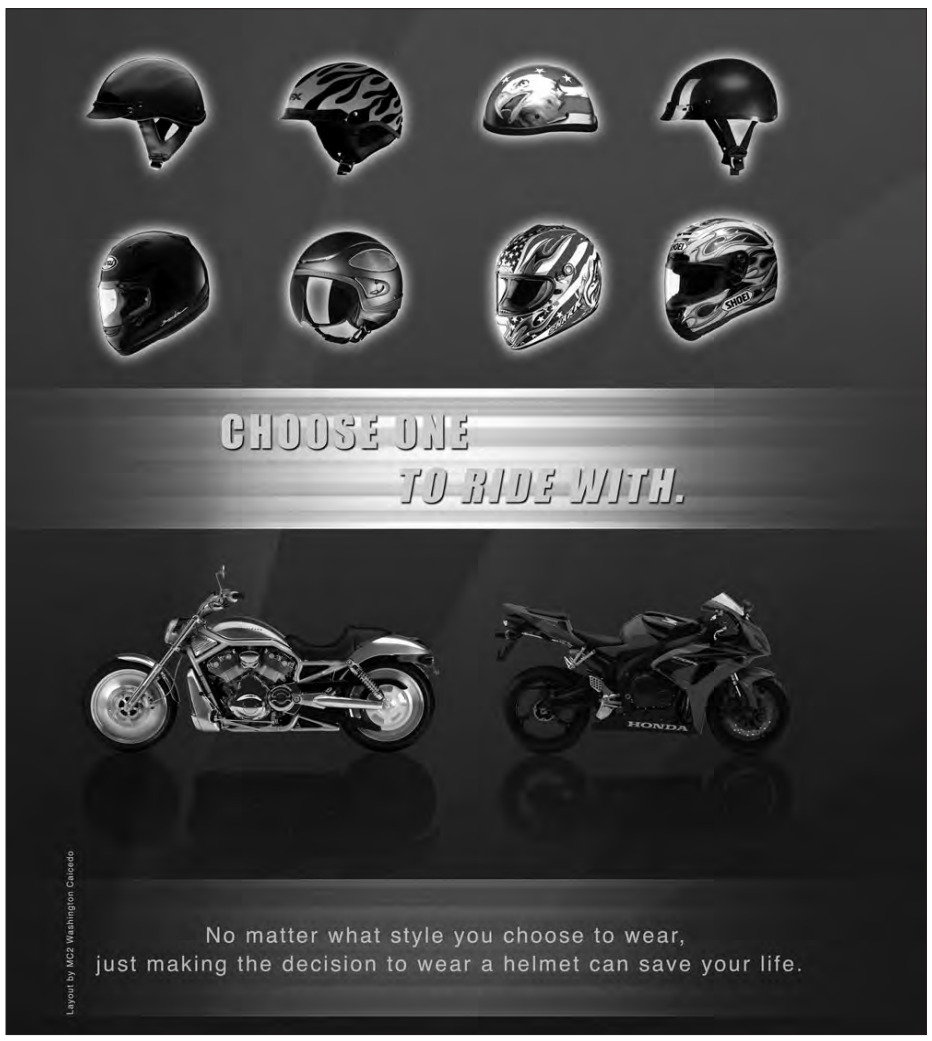
WASHINGTON – The Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) announced Aug. 4 that the Navy is seeking nominations for the Coalition of Sailors Against Destructive Decisions' (CSADD) sea and shore chapters of the year.

CSADD was established in June 2010 by OPNAVINST 1500.80 as a peer-to-peer mentoring group to positively influence young Sailors' behavior through resources and tools that promote good decision making.

The group now has more than 180 chapters, which share their activities via Facebook and other communication channels.

"Our Sailors are making us all extremely proud of how they are engaging and working to have a positive impact across the Navy," said Fleet Master Chief Scott A. Benning, fleet master chief for CNP and CSADD's sponsor. "Based on the work that these chapters are doing, as viewed on the CSADD Facebook page, as well as in the entries on best practices that we have seen, the competition is steep.

"Whether or not a particular chapter is selected as the chapter of the year, the engagement and desire to have a positive impact with their shipmates makes them all winners and this affords them the opportunity to reflect on their contributions to success."

Last year's winners were USS San Jacinto (CG 56) and Naval Submarine Base New London. This year's nominations may include only activities that occurred during fiscal 2011 and are due to regional coordinators by Oct. 1 and to CNP by Nov. 1. All commands are encouraged to nominate their local chapters, including active, reserve and ROTC chapters.

For information on the nomination process, visit the CSADD Facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Coalition-of-Sailors-Against-Destructive-Decisions-CSADD/299642495316.