



attracted numbers of neighbors and visitors. During the other ten months of those years she was busy in her studio which she named “The Haven.” She experimented with ceramics, batik, and silkscreen and did banners for churches as well as designs for stained-glass windows, chalices, and processional crosses. She offered workshops in a variety of media and devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to woodcuts. Much of her work was the result of requests from her wide circle of friends; often a particular piece marked that relationship. She considered herself a freelance artist for the community.

Sister Mary Charles faithfully kept a daily journal for more than twenty-five years. The entries are those of a woman of strong faith who is intellectually curious and committed to religious life. She reflected often on God’s presence in her life and in the world. Her decision to enroll in an icon studies workshop in 1990 at St. John of Damascus School of Sacred Art in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, was a logical next step in her spiritual journey. While she had carved and painted icon-like figures prior to attending this workshop, in the years that followed her time in Ligonier she focused her creative energy almost exclusively on writing icons.

As Sister Mary Charles’s work as an iconographer became widely known, more commissions were offered, some for larger works that called for creative efforts to overcome the limitations of her Barn studio. A large icon was maneuvered out of the second floor,

hayloft doors into a truck because it was too big for the stairs. In 2001 she moved her studio to the former St. Anthony’s School. A long, large room there offered ample workspace as well as needed classroom space for her iconography classes. She christened the new studio space “Subiaco” after the hermitage in Italy where St. Benedict, the founder of the Benedictine order, once lived.



Sister Mary Charles (right) and her sister, Pat O'Brien, Subiaco Studio, ca. 2002

friends. A significant number were also commissioned by churches, hospitals, and monastic communities across the country. Ever generous, she often sold an icon for what the purchaser could afford because she knew that person or community really wanted it.

Toward the end of her life when asked how many icons she had written, she guessed more than eighty in the period between 1990 and 2006. As was the case with her earlier work, many of those icons were written for

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 “to help save  
 the world a bit  
 through beauty  
 and to glorify  
 God through the  
 work of my hands  
 and heart.”  
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