

Artist's portrait of Jesus wins international honor

By **JEFF STRICKLER**, Star Tribune

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Minnesota artist Brandon Kidder's recent award from the National Christian Art Competition is the result of 20 years of hard work -- which sounds like the standard winner's cliché until you factor in that he's only 26.

"I started early," he admitted with a chuckle.

Kidder, a graduate of Anoka High School and Bethel University who lives in Andover, submitted three pieces to the competition (which, despite its name, is now an international contest). His pastel portrait of Jesus Christ titled "Persistent Prayer" won fourth place.

The recognition is nice, of course, but he was more excited about the award's validation of his effort to create a more authentic image of Jesus.

"It's more of an ethnic Jesus than we see in the traditional paintings, which tend to show him with blue eyes and lighter hair," he said. "I'm trying for a more realistic look, a more Jewish look, based on my study of the Bible and other books."

Kidder's artwork is carried by 20 Christian bookstores in the Twin Cities. And he just illustrated his first book, "Come Unto Me" by Tania Frankie. He's been supplementing his income by doing portraits, but now he has launched a company, In His Name Design, and is hoping to be able to focus most of his energy on religious art.

He's not getting rich. "One of my 11-by-14 [inch] pieces sells for \$50," he said. But with a website he's in the process of launching (inhisnamedesign.com), and with his mother, Judy Kidder, acting as his agent, he's looking to expand his marketing nationwide.

Besides, there are other payoffs besides money. "I'm meeting some wonderful people, and that's very exciting," he said. "[U.S. Rep.] Michele Bachmann came up to me and said, 'I've seen your work, and I'm a fan.'"

One last letter from Flynn

Archbishop Harry Flynn's final pastoral letter was released this week. It's about having a strong moral conscience, and if you're wondering why he's getting it out so late, his conscience is clear: He finished it before he stepped down from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis two weeks ago, but it took until now for it to work its way through channels.

Flynn uses the letter to call for "a deeper appreciation of what a gift conscience is and why we must, for our own eternal happiness, attend to its proper formation."

The letter goes on to say that "the judgment of conscience about the goodness or evil of a contemplated act is not only a judgment on the value of the act itself, but is also a judgment on the doer of the act."

The complete text is posted on the archdiocese's website, www.archspm.org.

Latte-flavored charity

A Salvation Army donation drive ends today. Collection bins have been set up at coffeehouses, bakeries, cafes and bookstores all over the metro area to accept new and gently used shoes, books and cell phones. A complete list of participating sites arranged by location is available at www.thesalarmy.org.

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