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The Saint John's Bible: Docent program reaches thousands

Kansas State University Libraries

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 THE SAINT JOHN'S BIBLE

Illuminating History

K-State Libraries' first docent program reaches thousands

BY: TIFFANY RONEY



Docent volunteers are bringing a creative tradition from the middle ages to audiences across Kansas with K-State Libraries' Heritage Edition of The Saint John's Bible.

Commissioned by Saint John's Abbey and University (SJU) in Minnesota, The Saint John's Bible is the first handwritten, hand-illuminated Bible produced in over 500 years. The monumental project began in 1998 when SJU chose Donald Jackson, official scribe to the Queen of England, to lead an international team of artists and calligraphers in what Smithsonian Magazine called "one of the extraordinary undertakings of our time."

In consultation with SJU's biblical scholars, Jackson's team employed historic calligraphic techniques to create 1,150 pages of handwritten text and 160 illustrations on calfskin vellum. The team completed the work in 2011.

To engage an even broader audience, SJU commissioned a limited-edition, museum quality reproduction of the original vellum pages published as a seven-volume set called the Heritage Edition. In 2012, K-State Libraries received a gift of this edition from K-State alumni Warren and Mary Lynn Staley of Edina, Minnesota.

"The Staleys wanted to see the volumes shared with K-State and beyond," said David Allen, a curator

at K-State Libraries. "With that in mind, we started a docent program."

David Carter, a docent and pollution prevention specialist for K-State Research & Extension, said the program provides value engagement and outreach beyond the university.

"The program is rewarding because it shows people the scale and artistic grandeur of The Saint John's Bible," Carter said. "Presentation attendees are blown away by what they see."

Though its creative tradition is from many centuries ago, The Saint John's Bible imagery frequently draws on modern themes with illustrations of the DNA molecule and the Twin Towers, as well as renderings of satellite photographs, including the first view of earth as seen from space.

"I am grateful to the Staleys for their donation to K-State," Carter said. "Without their gift and their vision, I might not have even known about The Saint John's Bible."

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— DAVID CARTER, DOCENT, (PICTURED BELOW)



To date nearly 5,000 people have attended docent presentations or viewed Heritage Edition volumes at Hale Library. To see the Bible, visit the Morse Department of Special Collections, open 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To schedule a docent presentation in your community, contact David Allen at 785-532-7428.

Left: *Creation*, Donald Jackson with contribution by Chris Tomlin, Copyright 2003, The Saint John's Bible, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. www.saintjohnsbible.org

Places Traveled

