

ENGAGING THE SPIRIT

Synod, diocesan shrine pair well at St. Francis Xavier parish

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The timing was perfect. Just as parishioners at St. Francis Xavier in Lake Station were talking about creating a diocesan shrine to Saint José Luis Sánchez del Río, a diocesan-wide synod was taking root.

“With the synod coming up, we thought this was perfect,” pastoral associate Lucia Bim-Merle said. “We can pair this.”

Young Catholics is one of the ecclesial areas of focus for the parish synod plan, a theme that fits well with the developing shrine to the young saint.

Also known as St. Joselito, he was killed at age 14 after refusing to deny Christ. The saint was part of the armed resistance against an anti-Catholic government in Mexico and was captured by authorities. They cut the skin off the bottom of his feet, marched him through town as they flogged him, brought him to an empty grave in a



cemetery and forced him to deny Christ. He shouted in Spanish, “Long live Christ the King!” so they shot him and kicked him into the grave, explained Father David Kime, pastor of St. Francis Xavier. His age, Hispanic background and civil disobedience

to defend religious rights speaks to the young people in the parish about dedicating their life to Christ, Father Kime said. When the saint was canonized in 2016, a Mass was celebrated at St. Francis Xavier, and it drew people from all over.

“The church was packed,” Father Kime said. “After the canonization, we realized he is a saint that really speaks to the people of our day.” The parish moved forward on creating a diocesan shrine to Saint Joselito, displaying a bone

fragment that belonged to the saint, as well as a statue in his likeness and information about his life story. Kime said some church members are related to the saint, who was executed in 1928. The shrine also ties into the parish synod focus on evangelization. The parish hopes to reach out to the greater community, offer days of reflection and host small pilgrimages.

“The goal is to actually have a museum and a shrine that would be set apart for his life story,” Bim-Merle said. Father Kime said the parish plans to push forward on its evangelization efforts in earnest after Easter.

The ecclesial area of marriage and family is another focus for St. Francis Xavier. When the parish hosted its synod session, young families expressed interest in seeing more support for marriage. They also want resources to help young people stay close

to their Catholic faith despite worldly influences, according to Bim-Merle.

The parish is developing its youth group program and especially wants to connect with young people who are close to making their confirmation or are post-confirmation.

Bim-Merle, who was a member of the synod commission at the diocesan level, said that perspective has helped with the implementation process and understanding the value of the synod as it helps meet the specific needs of each parish.

“It gives me a greater awareness of the overall synod from conception to implementation,” she said. “It’s neat because, overall, it will bring a momentum to the diocese that perhaps hasn’t been there before.”

To tell us how your parish is following the Holy Spirit’s lead in this synod process, contact Vanessa Negrete at vnegrete@dcgary.org or 769-9292, ext. 246.





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