News



Katie Prejean-McGrady of the Diocese of Lake Charles, La., is one of three young adult delegates selected by the U.S. bishops to attend a pre-synod gathering in Rome in March. She is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS/Katie Prejean-McGrady)

by Catholic News Service

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A religious brother, a campus ministry director and a youth minister who is a wife and new mother have been named to represent the United States as young adult delegates at a pre-synod gathering in Rome in March.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced Jan. 25 that the delegates are: De La Salle Christian Brother* Javier Hansen, a religion teacher at Cathedral High School in El Paso, Texas; Nick Lopez, director of campus ministry for the University of Dallas; and Katie Prejean-McGrady, a wife, new mother, youth minister, and a popular speaker from the Diocese of Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Last October, Pope Francis invited Christian and non-Christian young people from around the world to a meeting in preparation for this October's Synod of Bishops, which will have as its theme: "Young people, faith and vocational discernment."

"Through this journey, the church wants to listen to the voices, the sensibilities, the faith as well as the doubts and criticisms of young people. We must listen to young people," Pope Francis said in announcing the pre-synod gathering, set for March 19-25.

"We are delighted that Brother Javier, Nick and Katie have accepted the invitation to represent the youth and young adults of the United States at this important gathering in Rome," Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, and Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia said in a joint statement.

Tobin is chairman of the bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, and Chaput is chairman of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

"We hope that all Catholics will join us in praying for them and for all the young delegates from around the world, participating in the pre-synod conference," the prelates said. "Their coming together is a wonderful opportunity for the church, to hear the perspective of young people pertaining to the key themes which will be discussed in the 2018 Synod of Bishops."

For Hansen, this will be the first time he has traveled to Rome.

"I believe I offer the perspective of many young religious in this country and those who are currently discerning religious life," he said in a statement. "I not only will

represent the people of my generation but also the young people I interact with every day in the classroom."

Born in Northern California and raised on a ranch, he is a Brother of the Christian Schools in the Lasallian District of San Francisco New Orleans.**

Lopez, who is a guest columnist for the Catholic News Service column "In Light of Faith," focusing on millennials, sees it as an opportunity to represent the needs of his fellow Hispanic and Latino Americans.

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"In particular, I hope to be able to offer some successes and viewpoints from my life as a minister, including interfaith relations, integrating popular culture effectively in ministry and the Latino/Hispanic American experience," he said.

Prejean-McGrady called it "easily one of the greatest honors of my life." She said she was "remarkably humbled" and "still a little bit stunned" but praying "daily that I will serve well!"

"While there," she said, "I am greatly looking forward to the chance to learn through dialogue and discussion, how other countries uniquely lead young people into an authentic and personal encounter with Jesus Christ, and to bring this information home to share with our bishops, priests, and lay men and women working in ministry."

In addition to the in-person meeting of delegates, the Vatican will be inviting young people from around the world to participate in the pre-synod gathering digitally via social media. This will allow more youth and young adult voices can contribute to the dialogue. Details on how young people can engage the process in this manner will be available in the coming months.

The commitment that Hansen, Lopez and Prejean-McGrady have to Christ and the Catholic Church "is incredible and I am very happy that they will be representing our country," said Paul Jarzembowski, who is assistant director for youth and young adult ministries in the USCCB Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.



Nick Lopez, director of campus ministry for the University of Dallas, is one of three young adult delegates selected by the U.S. bishops to attend a pre-synod gathering in Rome in March. Lopez, pictured in an undated photo, is a guest columnist for the Catholic News Service column "In Light of Faith," focusing on millennials. (CNS/Nick Lopez)

"I am grateful that the three young adults chosen also work with other young people: in the classroom, through parish and diocesan ministries, on the college campus and through their own formation as young adults," Jarzembowski told Catholic News Service.

"Not only will they be able to share their own stories and insights, but they will be able to pass on what they are hearing from other young people they encounter," he added.

He called the upcoming synod itself "a wonderful and graced moment for the church." It comes at an especially important time, he said, "when more youth and young adults are disaffiliating from the practice of the faith, and yet are also seeking direction and meaning for their lives and a community that loves and cares for them through these years of transition and growth."

Jarzembowski said the pre-synod gathering "is a chance for the synod organizers to hear directly from young adults."

"After the national consultation process and the online survey last year, this event will be another opportunity for the church to encounter, listen to and accompany young people," he added.

*This article has been updated to correct the name of Br. Javier Hansen's religious order

**The punctuation of the district name has been corrected

This story appears in the **Synod on the Youth 2018** feature series. View the full series.