



The U.S. bishops have selected the young adult delegates who will represent the country at the pre-synod gathering in Rome this March, which will take place before the 2018 Youth Synod of Bishops in October.

The three delegates, all 20-somethings, represent a variety of vocations and will be able to bring their personal perspectives, as well as what they have learned from working with young people at local and national levels, to the gathering in Rome, said a representative of the U.S. bishops' conference.

"What was not really intended, but certainly was wonderful to see, was that they really reflect the vocational diversity (of the Church)," said Paul Jarzembowski, assistant director for youth and young adult ministries at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"This is a pre-synod meeting on the reality of young people but also the vocational pathways, so it was wonderful to see that the three representatives...represent the three particular phases and experiences of the vocational journey, it just made for a wonderful diversity of the vocational and ministerial experiences," he told CNA.

The chosen delegates are: Brother Javier Hansen, FSC, a LaSallian Brother who teaches religion at Cathedral High School-El Paso, Texas; Nick López, a single young adult who is the director of campus ministry for the University of Dallas and a guest columnist for the Catholic News Service; and Katie Prejean McGrady, a wife, new mother, youth minister, and speaker from the Diocese of Lake Charles in Louisiana.

The pre-synod gathering is significant because it is yet another way that the Church is listening to and gathering information about youth and young people, ages 16-30, the demographic on which the synod will focus, Jarzembowski said.

Typically, the bishops gather pre-synod data from questionnaires sent out to episcopal conferences, but this year the bishops are also including this pre-synod gathering as well as the pre-synod youth survey, which was available online last year.

“So when the bishops meet in Rome in October, they will have a lot of information at their fingertips in terms of what is the experience of young people today,” Jarzembowski said.

The Youth Synod’s theme is “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.” While an official agenda has yet to be set, the preparatory document outlines some of the things that the bishops will be discussing, while the rest will be determined by the pre-synod survey as well as the gathering.

Brother Hansen said that he looks forward to representing young adult religious vocations, as well as his students, at the gathering.

“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.”

For Lopez, the gathering is an opportunity to share what he has learned working in youth ministry, as well as his perspective on the American and Latino youth experience.

In comments to CNA, Prejean McGrady said she is looking forward to learning from other youth ministers throughout the world, as well as sharing what she’s learned in her work with young people in America.

“...I’ve noticed that American youth are hungry for authentic encounter: with each other, with their families, with the Church, and ultimately with Jesus,” she said.

“They are seeking the chance to communicate and share their hearts, and be guided on their journey, but they’re confronted with the noise of the culture and struggle to find opportunities to authentically share, be heard, and listen. I hope to convey that our American youth want to know Jesus, and there are many successful ways we are helping young people meet Him in our country.”

Fostering vocations; the impact of technology and social media on individuals and communities; and best practices for youth and young adult ministry are likely to be some of the key topics going forward in the gathering and the synod, Jarzembowski said.

He added that he was excited about the chosen delegates because not only are they young people themselves, but they are accompanying other young people in the faith.

“They’re young people working with young people, which in and of itself is a wonderful model for the way we should accompany one another,” he said.

“We don’t do this Church thing alone, we walk with each other. And these are three examples of young adults who are walking with other young people, and we can’t go wrong with that model.”

Jarzembowski encouraged young people to continue offering their perspectives and follow along with the pre-synod gathering as well as the synod by following @Synod2018 on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

Youth and young adults can also follow along on the official Vatican website for the synod and the pre-synod gathering, as well as on the USCCB web page for the synod.