

# ON THE MOVE

## Youth group spotlights Mexican martyr

**A** religious service, a Mexican fiesta and a dinner-theater performance were all rolled into one on Nov. 9, thanks to the efforts of youth-group members at Greece's St. Lawrence Church.

Most importantly, participants gained a deeper appreciation for a young priest — Blessed Miguel Pro — who was martyred by Mexican police in 1927 at age 36. His feast day is Nov. 23.

The evening began with a liturgy honoring Father Pro in St. Lawrence Church. Mass goes then moved to the parish center, where they enjoyed heaps of Mexican food prepared by parish families. The festive atmosphere was enhanced by Mexican music played over a loudspeaker and bunches of balloons hovering over the dining tables. Near the evening's end, Mexican sundaes were served, and grammar-school children got to break open candy-filled piñatas.

As dinner wound down, approximately 20 members of St. Lawrence's junior- and senior-high youth groups launched a reenactment of Father Pro's life. Performing in mime and accompanied by narrators, they conveyed the story of a man who:

- As a youngster, was cheerfully mischievous and often got into trouble for his pranks.
- As a young adult, was beloved by children and regarded as somewhat of a Pied Piper.
- Was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1925 and remained active despite a severe stomach disorder that required three operations.

**"He wasn't so holy as a kid; he had problems at home. You can compare yourself to him."**



A young Miguel Pro (Cory Magglo, 14) plays the guitar for his sister, (Joanna Bianchi, 12) and his mother, (Krista Marcucci, 13, at left) in a performance at St. Lawrence Church Nov. 9.

- Refused to curtail his ministry during an era when Catholicism was outlawed in Mexico. He often disguised himself as a businessman, policeman or beggar in order to administer sacraments and minister to the Mexican poor.

- Was falsely implicated in an assassination attempt on a former Mexican president, and sentenced to death.

- Refused to be blindfolded for his execution in 1927, instead stretching out his arms toward the firing squad and shouting "Viva Cristo Rey!" or "Long Live Christ the King!"

- Was so beloved that throngs of Mexican citizens — ignoring orders not to stage a public funeral — carried his coffin through the streets, chanting the same words: "Viva Cristo Rey!"

The street scene ranked as the most profound for St. Lawrence's Jordan Spencer, who portrayed the adult Father Pro in the play.

"The people could have died, could have been shot by the soldiers (for) any sign of showing their faith in public," said Jordan, 14, a freshman at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

Krista Marcucci, who played Father Pro's prayerful mother, said her role enabled her to connect with the real-life events.

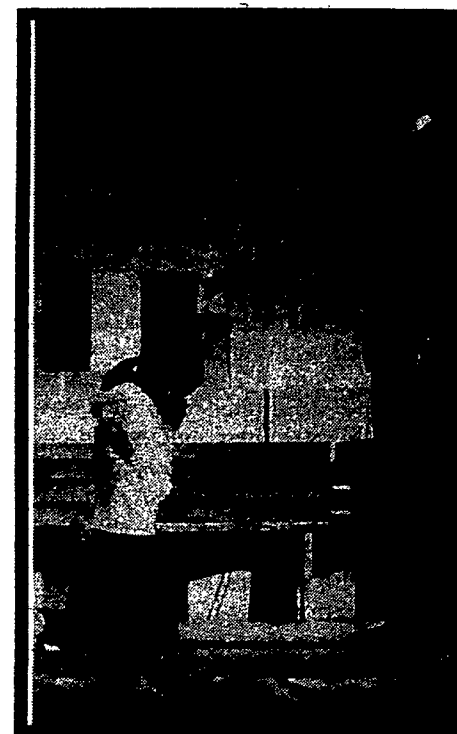
"I felt, like, very very deeply in prayer. You kind of got really into it," said Krista, 13, a seventh-grader at St. Lawrence School.

Donna Gray, St. Lawrence's youth minister, said audience members sensed the intensity of these scenes, remarking, "Just the dead silence of everyone watching was a compliment."

Father Pro was beatified, or made Blessed, by Pope John Paul II in 1988. This leaves him just one step shy of sainthood. To become beatified, a person must have had considerable heroic virtues as well as a certified miracle that is attributed to his or her intercession. To become a saint, another miracle must be proven and the person must be deemed worthy of veneration by the entire Catholic Church. This process can take many decades, even centuries.

If the turnout at St. Lawrence is any sign, Jordan remarked, then interest in Father Pro is high enough to make him a candidate for sainthood. "They were expecting more like 50 people, but they got 150," he noted.

The 19-page play was written by Father Michael Volino, St. Lawrence's parochial vicar, who also provided many of the costumes and celebrated the Mass that evening. During his homily, Father Volino said that a biography of Father Pro, which he had read earlier this year, inspired him to share the



An older Miguel Pro (Jordan Spencer, 14) blesses a young girl (Alyssa Faticone, 11).

priest's life with the youth group. Father Volino also noted that Father Pro is a fitting role-model because he was a young priest who was well-liked by young people.

Gray — who, along with volunteer youth minister Cathie Bianchi, served as co-coordinator — said the project gained surprising momentum during planning and rehearsal. Krista joked that so many people showed up for the play "because there was Mexican food there." But the real reason, she said, is that Father Pro and his courageous acts were so captivating. "I think everyone got more inspired about the story," she said.

And yet, Krista said she was surprised that Father Pro had temptations that today's teenagers can relate to — such as the one that led to a confrontation with his father, who caught him with cigarettes.

"He wasn't so holy as a kid; he had problems at home. You can compare yourself to him," she said.

Because of the way in which Father Pro has inspired St. Lawrence's youth group, Gray said the Mexican priest is being considered as its patron.

"This (project) really made Blessed Miguel a part of their lives; it's really going to stick to them the rest of their lives," Gray said. "For the kids to see he was just like them, that really drew them in."

**"Love others as God loves you; Remember, works of love are works of peace."**

- Mother Teresa of Calcutta



### Catholic Charities Works of Love

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester would like to thank the many Catholic schools and faith communities who joined us in celebrating our common call to love one another as Jesus did during **Works of Love Week, Oct. 20-27**. Over 7,000 young people and adults participated in service projects and joined in prayer and reflection to encourage the work that is done quietly all year round by those who try to be Christ's presence in the world.

Operating as the human service arm of our 12-county diocese, Catholic Charities' mission is to provide service to those most in need, and work with parishes to promote social justice.

Catholic Charities and the Diocese of Rochester wish you and your loved ones a joyous Thanksgiving!

*Special thanks to Fidelis Care and Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers for their support of our program.*

**"I tell you whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me."**

Matthew 25:40