

Young adult's vibrant faith makes an impact at Cockeysville parish

COCKEYSVILLE — Anita Martinez's face lights up every time she talks about her Catholic faith.



Faces of Faith

The 23-year-old has been a member of St. Joseph Parish in Cockeysville since she and her big sister Lidia came to the United States from Central America in 2004. A Dulaney High School graduate, she hails from San Miguel, El Salvador, which is about 85 miles east of San Salvador, the country's capital.

The third one of seven children, young Anita was only 13-days-old when her father, Lucio, left El Salvador and moved to Baltimore County looking for a better opportunity to provide for his family. Mom Lidia stayed in El Salvador to raise Anita and two older sisters at the time.

"I didn't see my father in person until I was 10, when my sister and I came to the United States," Martinez said.

“My faith started with my mom and my (paternal) grandmother,” she recounted. She learned all her prayers from them, and they made sure Martinez and her two sisters went to Mass every Sunday. However, she said it wasn’t until this year that her faith matured, and she truly developed a sincere relationship with God.

The arrival of associate pastor Father Carlos Osorio in 2015 served as a catalyst that helped her Catholic faith become real and authentic, she said.

“He has been a good friend to me, and he’s always pushing me to get out of my comfort zone and to stretch my faith,” Martinez said.

GET TO KNOW

Anita Martinez

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What is your home parish?

St. Joseph, Cockeysville

Who had the most influence on the development of your faith?

My grandmother, Ana Amaya de Martinez, although she was blind, she taught us to see God with the eyes of faith. Every day at 6 p.m., my cousins and my two older sisters would pray the rosary with her — she walked with a cane, and if someone would laugh or mess up during the rosary, the cane would reach you! We have many fond memories of praying the rosary with Mamita (as we called her). Now that she's in heaven, she can check on us all to make sure we're praying the rosary as she taught us.

Who is your favorite saint and why?

St. Francis of Assisi. When I made the retreat this summer, my group was named after him. I didn't know much about him, but after I read about his life, I saw a lot of similarities between his life and my life. He was one of the saints that also inspired me to truly love God.

What makes you proud to be Catholic?

The Eucharist. We have him right there in front us during the Mass; that we are able to have that special moment with him, that makes me proud to be Catholic.

Father Osorio described the young woman as someone who has always had a strong faith foundation.

“Anita comes from a family of committed leaders in this parish,” he said in an email. “However, what impacted me the most when I came to St. Joseph was that Anita had all kinds of fresh ideas to better our Hispanic ministry here.”

Although Martinez has always shown great enthusiasm in all ministries she has been involved, Father Osorio said she initially had a tendency to give up easily on her parish involvement. He told her that to persevere and advance in her spiritual journey, she needed to know herself, and ask who she was. In that way, Father Osorio said, she would realize “that everything we do, we do it for the love of God.”

A providential three-day silent retreat this summer facilitated by “Los Voceros de Cristo,” a young adult charismatic group out of Frederick, completely transformed her faith and her relationship with God.

“That retreat really impacted my life,” Martinez said with a smile. “I fell in love with God there, and I discovered that I really liked working for the church. And that it was time for me to show that love for God.”

Although Martinez said she has been actively involved at St. Joseph in several ministries since an early age, the Charismatic retreat really helped her to recommit herself to serving God and the church.

She is currently an extraordinary minister of holy Communion, as well as a catechist to fourth-graders at St. Joseph. According to Father Osorio, Martinez also created, along with other Hispanic young adults at the parish, a group called “pescando juvenes” (fishing for young adults), a parish outreach to Hispanic young adults.

“I’ve heard that some young people here call her ‘Mama.’ This gives me great joy to

have someone in our parish with such great impact on young adults,” Father Osorio said.

Another person who noticed the young leader’s rekindled enthusiasm was Lia Salinas, archdiocesan director of Hispanic ministry. Salinas said Martinez is one of the 10 delegates that will represent the Archdiocese of Baltimore at the “V Encuentro Nacional” a national church gathering for Hispanic ministry , which will be held in Dallas in September 2018.

The V Encuentro is a United States Conference of Catholic Bishop’s (USCCB) initiative, and its main objective is to address the pastoral needs of the growing number of Latino Catholics in the U.S. church.

“She was selected from a pool of candidates, along with nine other delegates, as a rising parish leader,” Salinas said.

Martinez’s advice to people who struggle with prayer:

“Make God your friend, and talk to him as one of your friends,” she said. “Make him your best friend.”

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