

## ENGAGING THE SPIRIT

# Fun and games lead to deeper faith connections at St. Matthias

BY VANESSA NEGRETE  
Northwest Indiana Catholic

On movie night at St. Matthias in Crown Point, organizers pull in comfortable couches, pop some popcorn and show an entertaining or informational religious-themed video.

"We fill that room every time," said Jackie Gentry, pastoral associate.

Along with traditional programs like Bible study, the parish uses social functions, such as movie nights, trivia nights and game nights, to draw in people. People are in different places in their faith life; maybe they're not ready to come to church, but they will attend a trivia night, Gentry said.

"Instead of judging the people for where they're not, we meet them where they are and challenge them to develop a greater faith life and to live that out in very joyful ways," she said.

The parish has people who joined because a friend invited them to a social event. They were met with such a welcome that they wanted to see why people are drawn to the church, Gentry said.

"Then they come to the pew and they're met with a welcome, and Father Jim (Wozniak) provides a great liturgy," she said. "People

want to be a part of good things. They want joy."

The synod has helped parish leaders reflect on their successes and tighten their focus.

"The blessing of the synod is we could really focus our initiatives and streamline our efforts to move forward to plan goals, not just for the upcoming year, but for the next five or 10 years," Gentry said. "The synod allowed us to redirect and reexamine where we are and where we want to be."

The parish synod goals are tied to small faith-sharing groups, adult education and youth and young adult ministries. Focus group feedback from parish staff and the parish council, along with surveys to parishioners, helped determine the synod plan.

One of the takeaways from that process is to emphasize leadership development. Parish leaders want people participating in programs to take the next step and take on leadership roles, Gentry said.



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~ JACKIE GENTRY, pastoral associate

St. Matthias recently hosted a catechetical event for the second year. It is a program inspired by Bishop Donald J. Hying's encouragement for parishes to collaborate, Gentry said.

The parish also sends a quarterly newsletter to everyone in its database and every parish in the diocese so they can share ideas, she said.

One key to success is simple: offer free babysitting during events.

"That's been a game changer," Gentry said.

"Who can afford to pay a

babysitter (so they can) go to a three-hour event?"

The parish trains its babysitters and offers the free babysitting on-site so parents know their children are safe and in the same building. Taking away the babysitting obstacle has led to an influx of young families participating in parish events, Gentry said.

*To tell us how your parish is following the Holy Spirit's lead in this synod process, contact Vanessa Negrete at [vnegrete@dgary.org](mailto:vnegrete@dgary.org) or 769-9292, ext. 246.*

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# THE ANDREW DINNER

## FRIDAY, NOV. 30, 2018

**Mass begins at 5:00pm**  
**Dinner & Program to Follow**

**at St. Thomas More**  
**in Munster, IN**

**Guest Speaker Bishop Hying**

**Contact/RSVP to Fr. Kime**  
**at 219.962.8626 or**  
**[peggy.guernsey@gmail.com](mailto:peggy.guernsey@gmail.com)**

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