

Why Our Parish is Named after Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

At the weekend Masses on December 18 and 19, 2021, members of the Catholic Community at Carolina Forest (CCCF) voted by a margin of 4 to 1 to have their parish and future church named after Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati.

How did the selection of a 20th-century Italian young man whom the Church has not yet canonized come about?

Although part of the answer must be attributed to the workings of the Holy Spirit and Divine Providence, the human element resided in the prayerful planning of CCCF's founding members.

On March 12, 2020, Bishop Robert E. Guglielmone gave Father David Nerbun a verbal directive to push forward in establishing a new Catholic community in the Carolina Forest region of Myrtle Beach, SC with the hope of it eventually becoming a parish. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown, Father Nerbun assembled a team of mission-minded disciples to brainstorm the logistics of starting a weekly Sunday Mass in the hallway at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School. CCCF celebrated its first Mass on Sunday, July 26, 2020, at 11 a.m.

During this same timeframe, Father Nerbun found himself drawn anew toward the life and spirituality of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. Father Nerbun's initial encounters with the young Italian layman, more than a decade earlier, were both brief and distraction-filled. The first was while attending World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia (2008) and then again while visiting the Shroud of Turin in Italy (2010). As Father Nerbun began to personally rediscover Blessed Frassati, he wondered: *Could Blessed Pier Giorgio be a good choice as a patron for this new community?* In Spring 2020, Father Nerbun purchased Frassati books for some of the founding members of CCCF to read and determine if the life of this young "blessed" also resonated with them.

Those founding members of CCCF saw many connections between the life of Blessed Pier Giorgio and their newly established community:

1) Pier Giorgio Frassati was born on April 6, 1901 and died on July 4, 1925. He was, therefore, a modern-day blessed whose youthfulness matched the youthfulness of the Carolina Forest area. (At the time CCCF was founded, Carolina Forest had existed for approximately 25 years – since the late 1990s).

2) At the age of 24, Pier Giorgio died of the polio virus, which doctors surmised he contracted from the poor in Turin, Italy, whom he served daily. CCCF began its grassroots efforts during a period when the COVID-19 virus was the cause of people dying in great numbers around the world.

3) Pier Giorgio is attractive to many in the church today, because of his extraordinary ordinariness of his person and charity. He was neither a priest, a religious, a missionary, a pope, a theologian, nor a worker of great miracles. He was a layman studying mining engineering. He

loved the arts and literature, cultivating friendships, political activity, gardening, practical jokes, and sports — especially mountain climbing. He mastered finding and being with Jesus in the ordinary details of his life by embracing the basic tools of our faith: Daily Communion, frequent Confession, reading Sacred Scripture and other spiritual classics, praying the Rosary, participating in Catholic associations, and visiting the Blessed Sacrament during nocturnal Eucharistic Adoration. Taking this layman as a patron memorializes the Second Vatican Council's universal call to holiness — that every baptized person is called and can become a saint and the best version of themselves. Moreover, it's a fresh departure from the naming of churches after various titles of Jesus, Mary, the apostles, and other "greats." This newness and distinctiveness are amplified by the fact that this church would be the first parish in North America (and only the seventh in the world) to be named in his honor.

4) Pier Giorgio models for all Catholics what the Church calls an "*ad intra – ad extra*" approach to spirituality. By going inward (*ad intra*) to meet Christ through prayer and the sacraments, we are called to go outward (*ad extra*) and sanctify the world with joy, simplicity, and contagious laughter. Nourished by his life of personal prayer and Christian friendships, he went out as a "missionary disciple" to serve the poor, the sick, and the needy in the slums of Turin. Inspired by Pier Giorgio's devotion to the poor, CCCF established a social outreach association called Friends of Frassati. Its goal is to emulate Pier Giorgio's "*ad intra – ad extra*" spirituality so that we can heed Pope Francis's call to "encounter" and "go out to the peripheries" *with* Christ and *because* of Christ.

5) Pier Giorgio was sensitive to the strained relationship between his parents. After prayer, he consciously made considerable sacrifices to do everything possible to keep them together. The discovery of his sanctity after his death led his parents to reconcile and not separate. CCCF recognizes that no family in today's culture is without its divisions and wounds. The community hopes that the healing of many familial relationships will continue to come about through the intercession of Pier Giorgio.

Recognizing these connections, the founding members of CCCF were convinced that Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati should be *the* patron of the new Catholic community in the Carolina Forest region. To foster devotion to Pier Giorgio, the community began praying the "Prayer for the Courage to be Great," before every Sunday Mass. This prayer asks for Pier Giorgio's intercession to rise above mediocrity and aspire toward holiness.

After the members of CCCF voted overwhelmingly in December 2021 to name the parish in honor of Blessed Frassati, one obstacle remained. The Diocese of Charleston needed to receive an "indult" (special permission by canon law) from the Vatican to name the parish and future church for someone who was not yet a canonized saint.

On December 13, 2022, Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune, the 14th bishop of Charleston, SC, sent a letter to the Dicastery for Divine Worship making this request. The letter shared many of the above connections with the Vatican.

On February 3, 2023, His Excellency, Jacques Fabre-Jeune, received the indult from the Vatican to name the new parish in honor of Pier Giorgio. Three days later, on February 6, 2023, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati parish was formally erected.