

Bernard Smith: Promoter of Justice

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



Q&A: What is one way the Church can reach young adults better?

To educate all people on ways to involve themselves in the Church. Specifically, I think a lot about vocation and this idea that there are two main paths of vocation, either you go down the religious path and become a priest or religious or you go down the path of marriage, you have a spouse and family ... I think a lot about the single life and it's very much a vocation I have kind of adopted for myself. I think because it feels very much temporary to marriage or priesthood ... it doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

Bernard Smith, 27, became a leader in music ministry and a youth minister at Immaculate Conception Church in Blytheville and St. Matthew Church in Osceola in the way many do.

"An old lady in the front was like, 'You should join the choir' and dragged me over. 'Hey, you're

young,' and that's how I got involved in youth ministry," he said.

While he's stepping back from youth ministry to pursue his master's degree, music is close to his heart. As an applied mathematics major at Hendrix College, he wrote his senior thesis on the mathematical principles of music.

"I linked it back to the beauty of nature and kind of this idea of God's design," he said. "... Whenever I'm in adoration, and I noticed this whenever I went to the St. Joseph chapel (in Conway), very often I'd throw on my earphones and listen to music. Somehow the perfect song would come on and I'd say, 'OK God, I see you, I know what you're doing.'"

Growing up primarily in Jacksonville, he attended St. Jude Church with his siblings, including brother Alex Smith, a diocesan seminarian. Diocesan retreats like Search and Catholic Charities Summer Institute helped him become a faith leader.

Smith teaches math and computer science at Blytheville High School, part of Arkansas Teacher Corps, which places exceptional and social-justice minded teachers in schools that need it most.

"My biggest focus has been the very first social teaching of the Church is the dignity of the human person and this idea that essentially each person embodies Christ and God. We as humanity, in general, need to recognize that," he said, pointing to the Black Lives Matter movement.

"I think what I very much appreciate with this intersection between my faith and my own strong feelings about social justice in particular overlaps with my career, I'm able to share a deep part of myself to my own students in a way that's not overpowering," he said.