

Major relic of Saint Francis Xavier to come to Canada, Jan. 3 to Feb. 2

OTTAWA, Ont., November 29, 2017—The forearm of the most famous missionary saint is coming to Canada, January 3 to February 2, as part of a 14-city visit organized by the Archdiocese of Ottawa, the Canadian Jesuits and Catholic Christian Outreach, a national university student movement.

“Saint Francis Xavier is one of the most revered saints of all time,” says Terrence Prendergast, SJ, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa. “He was a man of extraordinary courage and faith who shared the Gospel message of Jesus with thousands across southeast Asia, Goa and India.”

Permanently displayed at the Church of the Gesù in Rome, organizers believe this is the first time the relic has been on Canadian soil. His body, which is buried in Goa, India, as well as the relic of his arm, are incorrupt—they have not experienced natural decay since his death in 1552. Organizers expect close to 100,000 people will visit the various events across the country—the same number of people it is believed Francis baptized with his right arm and hand.

“Spending time with a relic such as this one can lead to immeasurable good,” says Angèle Regnier, co-founder of Catholic Christian Outreach. “It’s often a catalyst for a deeper encounter with God or deeper understanding of one’s vocation or purpose in life. There’s really no limit to what graces can come from this pilgrimage. We’re just thrilled to be able to help bring this relic to all Canadians.”

Born April 7, 1506 in the Kingdom of Navarre in present-day Spain, Xavier is considered one of the co-founders of the Society of Jesus, the religious order better known as the Jesuits. A companion of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, he led extensive missions into Asia, mainly in the Portuguese Empire of the time, India and Japan. He was the first Christian missionary to venture into Japan and is known as the “Apostle of the Indies” and the “Apostle of Japan.” He died on December 3, 1542 off the coast of China, which he had hoped to evangelize.

The relic is scheduled to travel to the following cities: Ottawa, Québec City, St. John’s, Halifax, Antigonish, Kingston, Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Vancouver, Victoria and Montréal.

The veneration of relics is a longstanding practice inside and outside the Catholic Church. Within Christianity, the practice rests on the belief that God came to humanity in the flesh, namely in the physical person of Jesus of Nazareth. Important sacraments of the faith also include water, wine and bread—physical elements that take on spiritual, supernatural value and characteristics. Similarly, the relics of saints provide for a tangible experience of God’s graces. As well, Catholics believe that saints can intercede for humanity, given their proximity to God in what is commonly referred to as the “communion of saints” or the Mystical Body of Christ.

For information on the events, additional details on the life of Saint Francis Xavier, the practice of veneration or a portal into the faith aspect of this project, visit cco.ca/relic.

Follow the project through facebook.com/ccocampus or cco.ca/relic.

Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO) is a university student movement dedicated to evangelization. CCO challenges students to live in the fullness of faith with a strong emphasis on becoming leaders in the renewal of the world. CCO began in 1988 at the University of Saskatchewan. Now in its 30th year, CCO reaches out to thousands of students on 15 campuses across Canada. Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux are patron saints of CCO as well as the Church's patron saints of foreign missions.

Jesuits in Canada

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a Basque nobleman and soldier, and six of his companions, including Saint Francis Xavier, who placed themselves at the service of the Church for wherever the need was greatest. They first came to Canada at Port Royal in Nova Scotia in 1611, founded the first parish and school in Quebec in 1635 and now are present across the country. Today there are almost 17,000 Jesuits serving the Church in 112 nations, making them the largest male religious order in the Catholic Church. In Canada, there are more than 200 Jesuits responsible for the direction of schools, churches, retreat centres, and a variety of ministries from St. John's, NL to Vancouver, BC. In Canada, the Jesuits serve the anglophone and francophone communities all across the country.

Archdiocese of Ottawa

The Archdiocese of Ottawa is one of the larger dioceses of the Catholic Church in Canada. Under the spiritual care of Archbishop Terrence Prendergast since 2007, the Archdiocese is comprised of some 400,000 faithful, in 107 parishes, numerous Catholic schools (public and private), deacons and a large number of female and male religious congregations and orders.

Media information, interviews and additional resources:

Name: Vicki McEachern, CCO Director of Communications

Phone: 613.324.8395

Email: vicki.mceachern@cco.ca