

Boston Archdiocese opens canonization cause of Opus Dei priest

BRAINTREE, Mass. – The Archdiocese of Boston has opened the canonization cause of an Opus Dei priest, Father Joseph Muzquiz, who established the organization in the United States and worked for many years in the greater Boston area.

About 150 people, many of whom are local members of Opus Dei, attended the ceremony held June 2 at the archdiocesan pastoral center in Braintree.

“All Christians are called to be saints and we are deeply grateful that the Archdiocese of Boston is undertaking this effort to see whether Father Joseph Muzquiz indeed truly lived a holy life,” said Opus Dei spokesman Brian Finnerty.

Father Muzquiz was born in Spain in 1912. He joined the nationalist army during the Spanish Civil War after his city was taken over by nationalist forces. In 1941, he was admitted to Opus Dei.

He was ordained to the priesthood June 25, 1944, but before his ordination he worked as a railroad engineer, building bridges and railroad stations.

Upon coming to the United States in 1949, he helped establish Opus Dei centers in Chicago and Washington. He also laid the foundations for Opus Dei’s work in Canada, Japan and Venezuela. The organization, a personal prelature of the pope, today has about 87,000 members around the world, including about 1,900 priests.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Father Muzquiz worked in Europe and pressed for the canonization of the organization’s founder, Monsignor Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, who died in 1975. Pope John Paul II canonized him in 2002.

Father Muzquiz returned to the U.S. in 1981, settling at Arnold Hall Conference Center, an Opus Dei apostolate in Pembroke. On June 20, 1983, he suffered a heart attack while teaching a class there, and died the following day at Jordan Hospital in Plymouth. His funeral was at the former St. Aidan’s Church in Brookline and he is buried at St. Joseph’s Cemetery in West Roxbury.

The June 2 event marked the beginning of the process that could lead to his canonization.

There will be an inquiry into his life and ministry, and if there is a declaration of the priest's heroic virtues, the church will give him the title "venerable."

The second step is beatification, after which he is called "blessed." The third step is sainthood. At various steps in the canonization process, evidence of alleged miracles is presented to church authorities. In general, two miracles need to be accepted by the church as having occurred through the intercession of the prospective saint.

Father Bryan Parrish, the Boston archdiocese's assistant vicar for administration, opened the gathering with a prayer. Father Parrish represented Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston, who was traveling and unable to attend.

Following the opening prayer, Father David Cavanagh, an Opus Dei priest who is the postulator for Father Muzquiz's cause, praised the late priest, saying he "may be one of those persons who has persevered to the end living a life of heroic virtue on the path to sanctity."

"Is the Servant of God Joseph Muzquiz one of those persons who has lived the virtues to a heroic degree?" Father Cavanagh also said. "Today marks the first official step in this long process which will, without doubt, give the response to this question."

With the opening of the archdiocesan inquiry, Father Muzquiz receives the title "servant of God."

Father Mark O'Connell, the archdiocese's judicial vicar and vice chancellor, then read the decree written by Cardinal O'Malley announcing the opening session of the inquiry and naming the officials who will conduct it.

Those taking an oath and promising to perform their roles and maintain appropriate confidentiality included: Boston Auxiliary Bishop Emilio Allue, episcopal delegate; Fathers Cavanagh, O'Connell and Parrish; Father Rodney Copp, the promoter of justice; and Fathers Dan Hennessey and Michael Medas, who are serving as notaries for the inquiry process.

The documents relating to the cause's opening were signed and notarized. The meeting concluded with a singing of "Salve Regina."

Several local members of Opus Dei who were in attendance had known Father Muzquiz, and reacted positively to the opening of his cause.

"He was a very cheerful person, an extraordinarily dedicated person who clearly grasped God was calling him to do something. That was the focal point of his life," said John Coverdale, a member of Opus Dei for more than 50 years and author of "Putting Down Roots: Father Joseph Muzquiz and the Growth of Opus Dei," a 2009 biography.

Father Muzquiz was "intelligent and hardworking," Coverdale told The Pilot, Boston's archdiocesan newspaper.

Alan MacKay had been to confession with Father Muzquiz, and the two men were acquaintances.

"Everybody who knew him well thought he was a saint," MacKay said. "I'm very happy the church is taking cognizance of his sanctity."