



Knights of Columbus®

Frequently Asked Questions

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- I. **The Path to Sainthood**

1. **What is a cause for canonization?**

A cause for canonization is the means by which a person who was known for extraordinary holiness and virtue is proposed for sainthood in the Catholic Church. Ordinarily, a cause cannot be initiated until five years after the person's death and is usually overseen by the bishop of the diocese in which the person passed away. In Father McGivney's case, given his prominence as the founder of the Knights of Columbus, the Order serves as the "actor," or promoter, of the cause. Typically, years of painstaking work go into a cause due to the great amount of research involved in accessing public and archival sources, the taking of testimony as to the candidate's life and works, and the composition of an extensive biography that highlights the spiritual qualities of the candidate. All of these steps are compiled into an official *Positio*, an extensive document presenting the case for the candidate's sanctity, that is presented to the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. The Rome phase of a cause involves further study, documentation and review by panels of experts in medicine and theology before a cause can move through the steps toward beatification and canonization, as detailed in the following sections.

2. **What is beatification and "Blessed"?**

Beatification is the penultimate stage in the process of a cause for canonization. After a candidate has been declared a Venerable Servant of God, a miracle attributed to the intercession of the candidate for sainthood must be documented, studied by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, determined to be medically inexplicable by a board of impartial medical experts, and approved by the pope. The title Blessed is bestowed on the holy person, who is then accorded limited liturgical rites, usually with a date being added on the calendar of a diocese or region, such as an entire nation. A Blessed, however, is not given a feast day for veneration by the universal Church until canonization.

3. **What is canonization and a "Saint"?**

Canonization is the final step of the cause, when a candidate for sainthood is declared a saint by the pope. A second miracle, which occurred after the decree recognizing the first miracle, must be attributed to the candidate, documented and approved. A saint is accorded full liturgical rites, with a feast day on the Church's universal calendar.

4. What is a miracle according to the Catholic Church?

A miracle is an extraordinary event, perceptible to the senses and not explainable in natural terms, that is performed by God to manifest his power and glory. In the process of canonization, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints usually considers well-documented physical healings that cannot be explained medically or scientifically but can be attributed to the intercession of a candidate for sainthood.

II. Father McGivney's path to sainthood

1. What are the steps in Father McGivney's canonization process?

Father McGivney was recognized as a Servant of God when the Vatican accepted his cause for canonization in September 1997. The cause was officially opened on Dec. 18 of that year by Archbishop Daniel A. Cronin of Hartford, upon the request of then-Supreme Knight Virgil C. Dechant, and the Knights of Columbus became the "actor," or promoter, in the cause. The Archdiocese of Hartford compiled all historical records pertaining to Father McGivney's life and reputation for holiness and virtue. Father Gabriel B. O'Donnell, O.P., was appointed as the postulator to oversee the cause and prepare a *Positio* — a 1,000-page document that makes the case for Father McGivney's canonization.

After exhaustive study of the *Positio* by the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Pope Benedict XVI authorized a decree recognizing Father McGivney's heroic virtue on March 15, 2008. This decree advanced Father McGivney to the next stage of the canonization process as a Venerable Servant of God, stating, in part:

"Concerning the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love both toward God and neighbor as well as the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, and those others joined to them, they existed to a heroic degree in the Servant of God Michael McGivney, Diocesan Priest and Founder of the Fraternal Order the Knights of Columbus."

On May 26, 2020, Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Father McGivney, opening the way for him to be beatified, after which time he will be known as Blessed Michael McGivney. The beatification ceremony will take place Oct. 31 in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Hartford.

Another approved miracle is required for Father McGivney to be canonized, at which time he would be enrolled as a saint of the Catholic Church. The second miracle must occur after the decree recognizing the first miracle. Those who are devoted to Father McGivney are asked to pray to him in times of need and to report any favors received through his intercession to the Father McGivney Guild.

2. Why is Father McGivney being beatified?

In the Catholic Church, a Blessed is a person who, during life, exhibited extraordinary gifts of holiness and practiced the virtues to a heroic degree. From the story of his life, his founding of the Knights of Columbus, and his reputation for sanctity and virtue, Father McGivney possesses all the qualities for beatification.

He was a holy parish priest who labored tirelessly to improve the condition of his 19th-century immigrant community and had a profound effect on the growth and charitable outreach of the Church in America. He founded the Knights of Columbus to provide financial support for widows and orphans and to keep Catholic men and their families close to their faith at a time of widespread anti-Catholic bigotry.

By founding an Order for the sanctification, betterment and advancement of laypeople, he anticipated by nearly a century the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the central role of the laity in the “universal call to holiness.”

Heroic Virtues: Father McGivney’s advance to beatification can be told in the Church’s traditional categories of the theological virtues and the cardinal virtue of justice. He lived out these virtues at a time when heroic character was necessary to keep and defend the faith. In 19th-century America, the Catholic faith was often attacked, and Father McGivney himself served in a New Haven parish that was called by the *New York Times* a “blight” on an “aristocratic avenue.”

Faith: Father McGivney led by example with an unshakable faith that drew to him people of all walks of life, especially those who needed spiritual uplift and comfort. Amid the bigotry of the time, he empowered his immigrant flock to hold fast to their faith and bring it with them into society.

Hope: He practiced supernatural hope in the face of so much hardship and early death among his people, as well as in his continued concern for their welfare — even during his own prolonged final illness. Despite obstacles in founding the Knights of Columbus, he persevered in hope and hard work.

Love: His virtue of love was shown most fully in the founding of the Knights of Columbus, which was built on the principles of unity and charity. In providing for widows and orphans and raising the status of Catholics in society, he expressed all of the love in his heart for the welfare of others in the spirit of the Good Samaritan.

Justice: At a time when Catholics were treated as second-class citizens and the Irish were considered unfit for American society, Father McGivney sought to assure the full measure of civil rights for his immigrant community. He knew firsthand the hard labors of factory work and the trials brought on by the early death of a father. As a priest, he saw his people suffer from bigotry and exclusion, and he presided over the funerals of many young men who succumbed to the hard life of an immigrant laborer, leaving their families destitute. Into this difficult situation, Father McGivney brought an unwavering sense of justice. Stepping outside his parish’s precincts, he appeared in court to advocate for families subject to separation, visited the sick and imprisoned, and brought the faith into the public sphere in a humble yet confident manner. In founding the Knights of Columbus, he raised the status and esteem of Catholics, gave them a voice in society, built a fraternity for social support and provided a means of financial assistance to keep families together after the loss of a breadwinner.

3. What is the miracle that Pope Francis approved for Father McGivney’s beatification?

In May, Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to Father McGivney, putting him one step closer to sainthood. The Knights of Columbus’ founder is recognized as having miraculously interceded on behalf of Mikey Schachle, the son of Michelle and Daniel Schachle, a Knights of Columbus insurance agent in Tennessee. Before Mikey was born, he was diagnosed with Down syndrome as well as a rare condition that doctors said would “take his life shortly after birth.” After his parents and others began praying through Father McGivney’s intercession, Mikey was cured, and his parents named him Michael McGivney Schachle. He is now 5 years old.

4. What are relics? Are any relics of Father McGivney available?

The practice of venerating relics, the bodily remains and personal effects of holy persons, goes back to the earliest period of Christianity. Relics serve as a sign of God’s work through a holy person’s life and ministry.

Relics come in three classes:

- **First class:** A part of the bodily remains of a holy person. Father McGivney's remains are interred in a polished sarcophagus near the entrance to St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Connecticut, where he founded the Knights of Columbus. Small parts of these remains will be prepared for pious veneration in preparation for the beatification ceremony, and a substantial relic will be presented during the ceremony itself. Afterward, other first-class relics will be made available on a limited basis.
- **Second class:** An item or piece of an item worn or used by a holy person during his or her lifetime. The Father McGivney Gallery at the Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven displays the cassock in which Father McGivney was buried. Second-class relics, consisting of threads of this cassock, are available to the faithful on a limited basis.
- **Third class:** An item reverently touched to a first-class relic; these relics of Father McGivney are available to the faithful.

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES

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