

Toronto nun, who touched many, considered for sainthood

Sister Carmelina ministered from a hospital bed for years after being given six months to live

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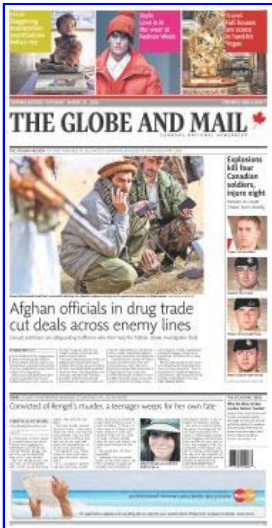
TORONTO -- The road to sainthood is a little shorter today for Sister Carmelina Tarantino, an Italian woman who came to Toronto for cancer treatment, was given six months to live - and became a nun who ministered from a hospital bed for the next 23 years.

Archbishop Thomas Collins will give a diocesan council his blessing to move ahead with an inquiry into her life.

During mass at St. Paschal Baylon Parish today, Archbishop Collins will officially give the council the green light to review her writings, deeds and testimonials.

Today's ceremony kicks off the second stage on the road to her beatification - the process all Catholics must pass through before achieving sainthood, said Deacon Joe DiGrado.

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It also means that the council, which consists of seven theologians, is permitted to review the material gathered by Deacon DiGrado to determine whether Sister Carmelina lived a virtuous life.

"This is the diocesan stage, which is the inquiry into her sanctity ... once we've finished with the inquiry of all those documents, then it goes back to Rome," said Deacon DiGrado, who also noted that he's started gathering documents and testimony about Sister Carmelina, which is his responsibility as vice-postulator.

He said he's received about 150 testimonials that show how she touched the lives of others

"They're various," the deacon said. "Some of them are about people who have seen her and [how] she has steered them onto the right path. People who had family problems, or even abuse problems ... marital problems, health problems.

"Sister Carmelina helped them."

But the road to sainthood can be long and winding.

Neil MacCarthy, spokesman for the Toronto archdiocese, said gathering and evaluating information can take decades.

Once the inquiry is concluded, the dossier will be sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome and be voted on by nine theologians. If passed, the information will be sent on to the congregation's Cardinals and Bishops. If they endorse it, it will then be passed on to the Pope. With his approval, the candidate is granted "venerable" status.

The next state is beatification, which requires that a miracle be attributed to the candidate's work. Once a miracle is authenticated, the candidate receives the title of "blessed."

The final stage is canonization, which requires evidence of a miracle attributed to the candidate after beatification. Then, the "blessed" becomes a Saint.

Sister Carmelina was a member of the Passionate Sisters, a group of nuns that began the campaign for her entry into sainthood.

She was born in 1937 in Liveri, Italy, a small town north of Naples. She came to Toronto in search of a cure for an illness that baffled doctors in her homeland. In 1969, she was admitted to Riverdale Hospital and told she had six months to live. Canadian doctors suspected she had a rare form of cancer.

In 1977, she became a nun despite being confined to her hospital bed and facing a series of painful treatments.

But during the 24 years she spent as a bedridden patient, it is estimated that she was visited by thousands of people, mostly of Italian heritage, seeking guidance and advice.

The lineup of people seeking Sister Carmelina's help often extended outside her door. Many others sought her sagacity over the phone, until 1992, when she died at 55. She had lived 23 years longer than expected.

"She must have seen over three thousand people during that time, I met most of them and saw how their lives changed because of her," Deacon DiGrado said.

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