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### **Cause for canonization of Dr. Gertrude Barber opened**

Erie, PA — The formal process to begin investigations concerning the possible canonization of the late Dr. Gertrude A. Barber as a saint in the Catholic Church is underway. Gertrude Barber, founder of the Barber National Institute, was a renowned Erie educator and woman of faith who dedicated her life to serving children and adults with intellectual disabilities/autism and their families.

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, issued a decree on Dec. 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, opening the cause for canonization of Dr. Barber. It is one of the first steps in a process that likely will take decades or longer.

Bishop Persico announced the opening of the cause during a gathering of supporters and members of the Barber family with staff, students and adults at the Barber National Institute Dec. 17. The decree announcing the cause will be shared in Catholic churches across the Diocese of Erie the weekend of Dec. 28/29. It also can be found at [www.DrBarber.org](http://www.DrBarber.org).

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“It is an honor to open the cause for sainthood for Dr. Gertrude Barber,” Bishop Persico said. “Her family members, and the thousands of families who have been touched by the work she initiated in her lifetime, are surely thrilled to be part of this historic moment. But I am particularly pleased that the good work of Dr. Barber, motivated by her Catholic faith and undertaken on behalf of those in need, will now be known more fully by those throughout our region and beyond.”

Although Dr. Barber passed away years before Bishop Persico was assigned to serve in the Diocese of Erie, he noted he had heard about the good works and faith commitment of Dr. Barber from his earliest days in the diocese.

“It has been my privilege to visit the Barber National Institute on several occasions, and to offer Mass here,” he said. “I know the family and staff is deeply committed to carrying out the mission she established.”

Bishop Persico first recognized the Association for the Cause of Gertrude A. Barber, a public association of the faithful, in August 2019. The association includes within its members the parent of a child with a disability, supporters, Barber National Institute staff and Barber family members. The association formally submitted a petition for the cause to the bishop in October.

John Barber, nephew of Dr. Barber and president of the Barber National Institute, said those privileged to know Dr. Barber saw her devotion to God and her dedication to serving those who were often forgotten by society.

“Dr. Barber served as a model for all of us to become more giving and to see God in one another,” he said. “She established the philosophy which we at the Barber National Institute live by, which is ‘all children are welcome here.’ I know that she would look at this honor today not as a recognition of her, but as an honor for the children and adults she served.”

With the historic announcement, a formal inquiry will begin a review of her life, work and holiness. Bishop Persico has approved the appointment of Msgr. Thomas McSweeney, a retired priest and former director of the Office of Evangelization for Communications of the Diocese of

Erie, to serve as diocesan postulator for the cause. In this role, Msgr. McSweeney will be the main point of contact for the gathering of documentation and formal interviews with anyone wishing to discuss the interactions they had with Dr. Barber during her lifetime. The testimony will become part of the official documentation considered during the canonization process, all of which will eventually be sent to the Vatican.

Although any Christian can properly be called “Servant of God,” in practice, the term is often applied to those whose cause for canonization has been opened. Dr. Barber will be referred to hereafter as “Servant of God.”

Dr. Barber left a legacy of deep compassion and groundbreaking advancements in educating and empowering those with intellectual disabilities in her nearly 70 years of service. With the opening of her cause, she becomes the first layperson on the list of other Pennsylvanians whose causes for canonization are currently underway. They include Sister Teresa of Jesus Lindenberg, a Carmelite sister from Allentown; Father Walter Ciszek, a Jesuit priest from Allentown; Father Demetrius Gallitzin, a diocesan priest from Altoona-Johnstown; and Father William Atkinson, an Augustian priest from Philadelphia. The only Pennsylvania native to date to earn the rare designation of saint within the Catholic Church is Saint Katharine Drexel, a sister who founded schools for Native American and African American children, who was canonized in 2000. A Philadelphia native, St. Katharine Drexel died in 1955. Additionally, Saint John Neumann, born in what is now the Czech Republic, served as bishop of Philadelphia and was canonized in 1977. Other Pennsylvania natives whose causes are opened in other states include Sister Cornelia Connelly, founder of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and a native of Philadelphia, and Fr. John Anthony Hardon, a Jesuit priest born in Midland in Beaver County.

At various steps in the canonization process, further consultation is required in order to proceed. Bishop Persico eventually will need to consult the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding his decision to open the cause, at which point the bishops will vote on whether the cause should proceed.

Today's announcement will be livestreamed at the following locations:

Website: <https://www.barberinstitute.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BarberNationalInstitute>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/eriercd/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BarberNational>

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