



**NEWS RELEASE**

**DIOCESE OF ERIE**

[www.ErieRCD.org](http://www.ErieRCD.org)

11.13.24

**U.S. Bishops Advance the Cause of Canonization  
of the Servant of God Dr. Gertrude Barber**

The journey toward possible canonization for Erie's Dr. Gertrude Barber took an important step forward on Tuesday, Nov. 12, when members of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) voted to advance her cause for sainthood. Her candidacy was considered by the group of more than 200 active and retired members of church hierarchy at their annual Fall Plenary Assembly held this week in Baltimore, MD.

Bishop Edward Lohse, currently Bishop of Kalamazoo, MI and former Vicar General of the Diocese of Erie, delivered a presentation on Dr. Barber's life and work that brought hope to children and adults with disabilities and their family. In his former position, Bishop Lohse was involved in preparing the canonization cause that was opened by The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico in a decree issued on Dec. 12, 2019, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

In his address, Lohse described how Dr. Barber, then a psychologist in the Erie School District, had to tell parents that their children with disabilities would have to remain at home or be sent to a distant institution because the schools did not have any programs to meet their needs. "Her spirituality was simple; she saw these individuals as children of God who deserved the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential," said Lohse.

Guided by her Catholic faith, Dr. Barber devoted her life to developing educational,

- more -

**KRISTINE RILLING**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Office 814.824.1167  
Cell 814.397.8366  
[krilling@ErieRCD.org](mailto:krilling@ErieRCD.org)

**OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Office 814.824.1161  
**AFTER-HOURS ANSWERING SERVICE**  
814.451.1531

residential, job training and mental health services for children, adults and families. “She inspires us all to seek holiness through service, said Bishop Lohse.

Three levels of notification are required in the canonization process: an announcement to the faithful, which was made when the edict opening the Cause was displayed in St. Peter Cathedral in December, 2019; approval from the Vatican, which issued a “Nihil Obstat” to indicate that no obstacles “stand in the way” of the cause proceeding; and the presentation and vote by the USCCB.

Following the presentation, USCCB members voted in support of advancing the canonization effort, fulfilling an important requirement of the church process.

“This presentation to a gathering of church leaders is an important step in the long and complex process toward possible canonization,” said Monsignor Tom McSweeney, Postulator for the Cause. “They had the opportunity to learn about Gertrude’s good works and life of faith and express their support for the continued effort toward sainthood.”

The presentation took place during a public session that was livestreamed at [www.usccb.org/meetings](http://www.usccb.org/meetings)

Dr. Gertrude Agnes Barber was an educator and advocate for children and adults with autism and intellectual disabilities and their families. At a time when children were denied an education because of their disabilities, she began the first classes for children in a borrowed classroom in 1952. In 1958, she opened what has become the Barber National Institute, which now provides services for more than 6,200 children and adults across Pennsylvania.

With the opening of her Cause for Canonization, she was officially given the title “Servant of God,” designating the first stage in the process.

“It is an honor to open the cause for sainthood for Dr. Gertrude Barber,” Bishop Persico said at the time her cause was announced. “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 to those throughout our region and beyond.”

The next important step is a review of the candidate's writings by a group of church historians and theologians, and the recording of official testimony from witnesses who knew the candidate. After these reports are reviewed by the Vatican and the candidate is determined to have lived a virtuous life, the Pope will confer the title of "Venerable."

Before advancing further toward canonization, two miracles must be verified to have occurred because of the candidate's intercession. Miracles usually involve medical healings and are subjected to intensive independent review to determine that they are permanent healings that have occurred without any other explanation.

With the confirmation of the first miracle a candidate is given the title of Blessed; sainthood is conferred with the verification of a second miracle.

"Even though we are early in the process, it is important for people to begin praying to Gertrude," said Monsignor McSweeney. "We believe that she is already in heaven, and that we can look to her to intercede on our behalf. Because of her work to bring hope to children and adults with disabilities, many people already consider her a saint. Now, we all need to work together to make it official."

For more information about Dr. Barber, to schedule a group presentation about her life, and for help in reporting a possible miracle, visit <https://www.drbarber.org/>.

### **Prayer for Canonization**

Merciful Father,

You guided your servant, Getrude Barber, in bringing hope to children and families who faced the often overwhelming challenges of living with autism and disabilities, while inspiring all of us to recognize all individuals as people of God.

We know you hear our prayers as we gather in your name.

Through her intercession, please grant the intention I ask in Jesus' name (state your intention) if it be in accordance with Your Divine Will.

If it is in your design that Getrude be glorified by the Church, so as to further her extraordinary mission, show us Your will. Grant us the grace to hear Your answer and commit ourselves to take up her cause by the merits of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.

**For media inquiries, please contact:**

Mary Cuneo, Barber National Institute      814.392.1952

Kristine Rilling, Diocese of Erie      814.397.8366



**DIOCESE of ERIE**  
*Sharing the Catholic faith in northwest Pennsylvania*

#####