

Archdiocese announces beatification date for Oklahoma priest

By Rhina Guidos

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City announced that one its native sons, Father Stanley Rother, a North American priest who worked in Guatemala and was brutally murdered there in 1981, will be beatified Sept. 23 in Oklahoma.

“It’s official! Praised be Jesus Christ! Archbishop Coakley received official word this morning from Rome that Servant of God Father Stanley Rother will be beatified in Oklahoma City in September!” the archdiocese announced March 13 on its website. Pope Francis recognized Father Rother’s martyrdom last December, making him the first martyr born in the United States.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, also tweeted the news about the priest born near Okarche, Oklahoma on a family farm: “Just received notification of the date for the beatification of Fr. Stanley Rother, Oklahoma priest, missionary and martyr. September 23!”

In an interview published March 13 by The Oklahoman daily newspaper, Archbishop Coakley said Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for Saints’ Causes, will be representing the pope at the beatification ceremony in Oklahoma City. It will take the priest one step closer to sainthood. In general, following beatification, a miracle attributed to the intercession of the person being considered for sainthood is required for that person to be declared a saint.

The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City sent Father Rother to its mission in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, in 1968 and while stationed there, he helped build a small hospital, a school and its first Catholic radio station.

In 1981, as Guatemala was in the middle of a decades-long conflict, Father Rother, who lived in an indigenous rural area that had been accused by the government of sympathizing with rebels, suffered the same fate as many of his parishioners and native Guatemalans and was gunned down in the rectory. Like many deaths at that time, his assassins were never identified, nor prosecuted. His body was returned to the United States.

“It continues to challenge me to know that my brother, an ordinary person like you or me, could give himself in the prime of his life to such a complete dedication to

serve 'the poorest of the poor' of another culture and language, and to give of himself in such an extraordinary way," wrote his sister Marita Rother, who is a religious sister of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, in the introduction to "The Shepherd Who Didn't Run: Fr. Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma," a 2015 biography by Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda.

Archbishop Coakley, who wrote the foreword of the book, said "the recognition of this generous parish priest's simple manner of life and the sacrificial manner of his death serves as a tremendous affirmation to priests and faithful alike in the United States and around the world." He went on to write that "saints are local, they come from ordinary families, parishes and communities like Okarche, Oklahoma. But their impact is universal."

Father Rother was one of about 200,000 killed during the civil war in Guatemala, a conflict that began in 1960 and ended with peace accords in 1996. He was 46 at the time of his assassination and died in a rural community he loved and one that loved him back. Because his name was tricky to pronounce for the community, he went by "Padre Francisco," adopting his middle name of Francis.

Archbishop Coakley told The Oklahoman newspaper that a delegation from Guatemala is expected to be present at the September beatification ceremony. Before it was official, he was considered a martyr by the church in Guatemala and included on a list submitted to the Vatican of 78 martyrs for the faith killed during the country's conflict.

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