

MEDIA RELEASE



Polding Centre
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Official process for Eileen O'Connor's sainthood begins

The official process which could lead to Australia's next saint has started after the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP, began the formal process for the beatification of Eileen O'Connor.

Archbishop Fisher today announced that he had taken the significant step of appointing Rome-based priest Father Anthony Robbie as postulator, the person who guides the cause for beatification or canonisation through the Church's rigorous processes for recognising a person as a saint.

"I am very pleased to announce this next step in the cause of Eileen O'Connor," said Archbishop Fisher. "Eileen was a young woman who received the love of God, multiplied it in her heart, and passed it on to others. It is my hope that the heroic and saintly example of Eileen O'Connor will inspire everyone to live faithful lives as disciples of Jesus Christ."

Born in Richmond, Victoria on 19 February 1892, Eileen Rosaline O'Connor was the eldest of the four children of Irish-born Charles and Annie O'Connor. She suffered a crippling break in her spine at age three and lived her short life in constant nerve pain from what was later diagnosed as tuberculous osteomyelitis.

The O'Connor family moved to Sydney and settled in Waterloo when Eileen was aged 10, as Charles found higher-paying work to support the family and fund Eileen's medical care.

Despite her injuries and immense suffering, O'Connor co-founded the religious order of Our Lady's Nurses of the Poor with local priest Father Edward McGrath MSC in April 1913. At a time when no publicly-funded health care was available, and influenced by Eileen's own family's financial struggles following her father's untimely death, the order was dedicated to caring for the sick and dying poor in their homes.

More commonly known as the Brown Nurses because of their distinctive brown cloaks and bonnets, the order's work continues to this day. Unable to undertake the work herself, Eileen supported the sisters with prayers and counsel, and at one point used the only part of her body not paralysed with disease and pain – her left arm – to make phone calls arranging the order's works. At just 115cm tall, the sisters lovingly referred to Eileen as "Little Mother."

Eileen died on 10 January, 1921 – a month short of her 29th birthday.

In 1936, 15 years after her death, Eileen's coffin was moved from Randwick Cemetery to the chapel at Our Lady's Home in Coogee, where the order currently resides. At the time, her body was found to be incorrupt. It has not been verified since.

The 11 religious sisters currently serving as Our Lady's Nurses of the Poor have said they are "delighted" by the news.

Former congregational leader and Eileen O'Connor Centenary Project Leader, Sister Margaret Mary Birgan Oln said that the congregation had been praying for the news ever since Eileen's death in 1921, and remarked that many already considered her to be a 'saint-in-waiting.'

"We welcome this joyful news with great gratitude to God," she said.

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