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# In New York, Catholic convert takes a step toward sainthood

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Father Paul Wattson. Credit: Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

New York City, N.Y., Mar 21, 2017 / 12:39 am (-) - The Catholic convert who founded the Society of the Atonement, Father Paul Wattson, S.A., could be one step closer to recognition as a saint.

"Father Paul started a small week of prayer on the top of a mountain in Garrison, and now it's a worldwide movement," Father Brian Terry, S.A., the minister general for the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, told the Catholic New York newspaper.

Fr. Wattson helped launch the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is now an international event held in January.

The Archdiocese of New York concluded an 18-month investigation into his cause for canonization on March 9. Fr. Wattson's writings, along with writings about him, were collected together, boxed and wrapped and sealed with Cardinal Timothy Dolan's seal.

With the archdiocese's investigation finished, the materials will now be reviewed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. This could determine whether he can proceed to beatification and even canonization.

Fr. Terry briefly spoke with Pope Francis about Fr. Wattson in November. He said he gave the pontiff a prayer card, and the Pope "really seemed sincerely interested."

"He said a saint of unity, a saint of healing, a saint of charity, that is something that is important," the priest recounted.

Fr. Terry said that Fr. Wattson's message has been absorbed locally in New York. He hopes that message can go worldwide.

Fr. Wattson was born in 1863 and was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1886. He co-founded the Franciscan Society of the Atonement with Episcopal Sister Lurana White in Garrison, N.Y. The society consisted of both friars and sisters who wanted to promote Christian unity. Though it was originally Episcopal, the society became Catholic when Fr. Wattson converted in 1909. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1910.

He passed away in 1940 at the age of 77.

Cardinal Dolan said the progress in Fr. Wattson's cause was "an affirmation from above." He voiced gratitude to God and to those who worked on the priest's cause.

The U.S. bishops approved his cause for canonization in November 2014 and the cause formally opened in September 2015 at the New York Catholic Center.

Msgr. Douglas Mathers, pastor of St. John the Evangelist-Our Lady of Peace parish in Manhattan, served as the archdiocese's episcopal delegate for the cause. He said there is no time limit on the process.

"Realistically, it's the work of God; what God wants is going to happen," he said.

**Tags:** Saints, Cause for Canonization, Catholic News, New York, Paul Wattson

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