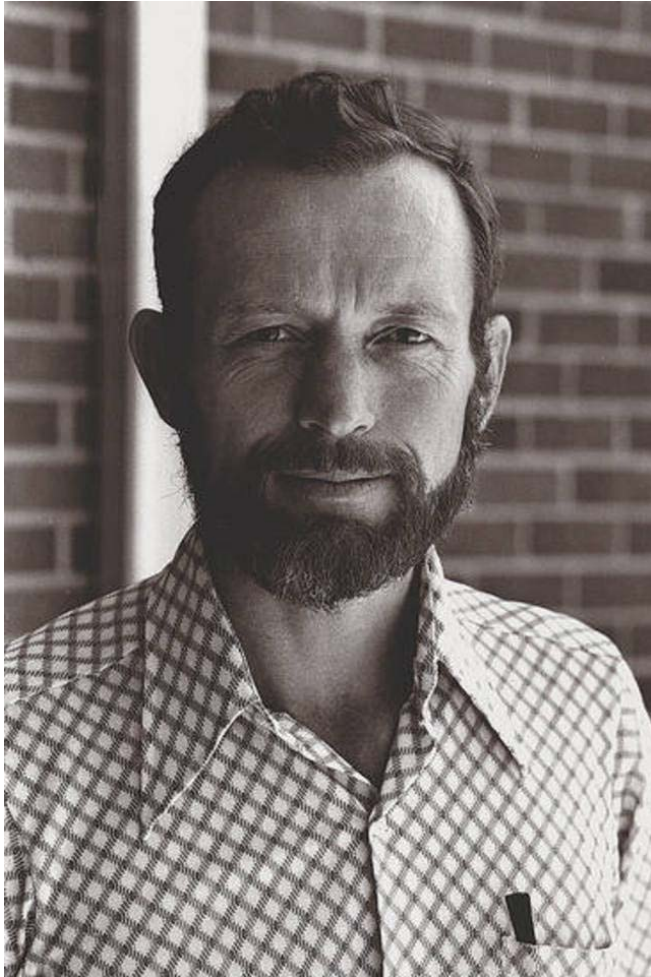


# Date, location set for martyred priest's beatification ceremony

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The Rev. Stanley Rother [Photo provided]

The date and location of the beatification ceremony for the late Rev. Stanley Rother has been set, a Roman Catholic leader said Monday.

The much-anticipated ceremony will be at 10 a.m. Sept. 23 at Cox Convention Center, said the Most. Rev. Paul S. Coakley, archbishop of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.

Coakley said an organization committee already has begun doing some of the preliminary work necessary in the planning of the event. He also said the pope will be represented by Cardinal Angelo Amato, who, as the pope's delegate, will officiate the ceremony.

Dec. 2, 2016, Pope Francis signed a decree declaring Rother a martyr, making the Okarche native the first U.S. born martyr.

The papal declaration essentially cleared the way for Rother's beatification. Beatification is the last step before sainthood, the final stage before canonization.

Rother's beatification will place him on the path to become the first U.S.-born priest and American-born male to receive this official recognition from the Vatican. Rother also will be the first Oklahoman to receive such recognition.

"We're very, very excited. This is something we've been working toward for many years now," Coakley said during a telephone interview Monday.

"We anticipated this news since Dec. 2 when Pope Francis declared Father Rother to be a martyr of the Catholic Church, which in effect gave approval for him to be beatified. We needed a date for the beatification ceremony so we could actually begin planning toward that."

Rother was serving as an Oklahoma City archdiocesan priest and missionary when he was killed July 28, 1981, in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, by unknown assailants. Rother, 46, had chosen to continue serving the people of the Guatemalan parish as their pastor and supporter despite receiving death threats. He was shot to death in his rectory.

At the December 2016 news conference to announce the papal decree of Rother's martyrdom, Coakley said the late priest's recognition is a "a local story but with universal implications."

Monday, he reiterated that theme when discussing the planned ceremony and the benefits of hosting the event in Rother's home state and archdiocese.

"It's wonderful. We hope that there will be people there who knew him well as well as people who have been touched by his life and his example who maybe never met him," Coakley said.

"It's certainly a very important local event, but it's an event for all of Oklahoma, and indeed, for all of the United States and far beyond."

The archbishop said a delegation of people from Guatemala is expected to attend the ceremony.

Rother was ordained to the priesthood in 1963 and served in several parishes in Durant, Tulsa and Oklahoma City before he volunteered for mission service in Guatemala in 1968.