

News Release
Catholic Diocese of Peoria
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For Immediate Release

***Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen: Preparations Begin to Move Sheen to Peoria
and Response to Statement of the Archdiocese of New York***

Peoria, IL - On June 8, 2018, the Supreme Court of the State of New York for the second time ruled in favor of the petition of Joan Sheen Cunningham to allow her to transfer the mortal remains of her beloved uncle, Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen, from the Cathedral of St. Patrick in New York, New York, to the Cathedral of St. Mary in Peoria, Illinois.

Based upon this second favorable ruling, Joan Sheen Cunningham has begun rapidly working with the Diocese of Peoria to make arrangements for this transfer. The Diocese of Peoria is prepared to immediately receive the mortal remains of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen and inter him in a worthy shrine within the Cathedral of St. Mary in Peoria. Unlike his current tomb in New York, the Peoria shrine will be very accessible and in a prominent place allowing the public to pray before the remains of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen. Upon the reception of the mortal remains in Peoria, Bishop Jenky, Promoter of the Cause of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen, will work with Rome to advance the process for Beatification.

The Diocese of Peoria has been in contact today with those in Rome who have been assisting in advancing the Cause of Beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen. They have assured the Diocese of Peoria that, based upon this recent ruling of the Supreme Court of New York allowing the remains to be transferred, that the decree calling for the Beatification of Archbishop Sheen could be issued by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in the very near future. Rome has insisted that the wishes of the family be respected and that any civil litigation be resolved before they would take any further action in the Cause. The court's recent decision supports the wishes of the family and resolves litigation.

The recent press release by the Archdiocese of New York contains some inaccuracies that require a response.

The Archdiocese of New York's press release commended the Diocese of Peoria for its great service in advancing the cause. Despite the appearance of kind sentiment, it falls short of acknowledging that the Archdiocese of New York has done almost nothing in the last fifteen years to assist in the Cause's lengthy, complicated and laborious process. Instead, the Archdiocese of New York has only provided expensive legal resistance during the last two years by refusing to respect the legally supported petition of Joan Sheen Cunningham.

The Archdiocese of New York's press release continued to argue that it must respect Archbishop Sheen's desire to be buried in New York. The court has rejected this argument two times. Instead, the court has determined that Joan Sheen Cunningham has good and substantial reasons to transfer the remains of her uncle in order to accommodate her belief that the transfer will advance the Cause of the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen. In the recent Court decision, Judge Bluth stated: "There is no basis whatsoever to conclude that Archbishop Sheen would have prioritized keeping his earthly remains in New York over the chance to become a saint and continue the joy of his life's work even after his death. That possibility – to become a saint – is sufficient grounds to move Archbishop Sheen's remains." The court stated that the Archdiocese of New York presented no reason to reject Joan Sheen Cunningham's good and substantial reason for transferring the remains. In fact, even the Archdiocese of New York's primary witness "never testified that Archbishop Sheen would have opposed moving his remains in order to advance the Cause."

The Archdiocese of New York's press release also stated that the Cause can progress without the transfer of the remains. This is simply not true. In 2017, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome established new rules, which unequivocally provide direction for this Cause. First, the new rules clearly stated that the wishes of the family, regarding the earthly remains of a potential saint, must be respected. Joan Sheen Cunningham has clearly expressed her desire that her uncle's remains be moved to Peoria. The court has upheld this petition two times. Her wishes must be respected before the Cause may be advanced. Second, the new rules indicated that a Cause can advance only when all civil litigation is resolved. In this case, New York's pursuit of civil litigation blocks the advancement of the Cause. The court has ruled two times in favor of Joan Sheen Cunningham's petition. This ought to resolve civil litigation and allow the Cause to advance. The new rules make clear that this Cause cannot advance until the wishes of the family are respected and litigation is resolved.

Furthermore in recent times, it is unprecedented that the remains are not located in the place where the work for a Cause was advanced. Except in cases such as martyrdom where the body does not exist, it is virtually unheard of that the remains are not present at the Beatification and remain at the place of Beatification allowing for future veneration. Transferring the remains of Venerable Archbishop Sheen to Peoria follows current practices.

Lastly, the Archdiocese of New York's press release indicated that they are reviewing the recent decision with their attorney in order to determine the next steps to be taken. If they determine to continue with legal actions, it will be the third time that this has been brought to court, despite the court ruling twice in Joan Sheen Cunningham's favor. Regretfully, if the Archdiocese of New York continues litigation, the Cause cannot advance based upon the information provided to the Diocese of Peoria by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.

Many preparations for the transfer of the mortal remains of Venerable Archbishop Sheen are in process. It is everyone's hope and prayer that the Archdiocese of New York will respect the wishes Joan Sheen Cunningham and allow the Diocese of Peoria to advance the Cause. It is unimaginable that Cardinal Dolan, as well as the New York Archdiocese, will continue their legal resistance. If the Archdiocese of New York follows this second ruling and assists Joan Sheen Cunningham's desire to transfer her uncle's mortal remains to Peoria, Rome has indicated that there is a strong possibility that the celebration of the Beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen could happen in the next few months after obtaining the approval of the Holy Father. This would be truly good news for all of the faithful.

New York's cooperation at this time would end the unnecessary two-year legal dispute, as well as end the unnecessary delay of Beatification. It would bring great joy to so many of the faithful, in New York, Peoria, throughout the United States and around the world, who desire Venerable Archbishop Sheen to be beatified. Bishop Jenky encourages everyone to pray for a spirit of cooperation in the efforts to beatify Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

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