

# Manitoba missionary Bishop Charlebois one step closer to sainthood

Pope Francis advanced the sainthood cause of Bishop Ovide Charlebois – a Canadian Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate who ministered to First Nations peoples and migrant workers scattered throughout Manitoba.

The pope recognized the Quebec native, who lived from 1862 to 1933, as having lived the Christian virtues in a heroic way.

The pope also recognized the martyrdom of Father Jan Franciszek Macha, a Polish priest who began his parish ministry when the Nazis invaded Poland and was imprisoned and murdered by its elite force, the SS, despite his mother's efforts to secure a pardon from Adolf Hitler.

The pope also formally recognized the martyrdom of 16 victims of the Spanish Civil War and advanced the causes of eight other men and women.

During a meeting Nov. 28 with Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, the pope signed the decree approving the heroic virtues of Bishop Charlebois, making him "venerable." Before he can be beatified, the Vatican must recognize that a miracle has occurred through his intercession.

The seventh of 14 children and born in Oka, Quebec, Bishop Charlebois was ordained in 1887 and immediately began serving in Saskatchewan, establishing a school, teaching and traveling thousands of miles by snowshoe and dogsled to minister to the Metis and other indigenous peoples.

He helped start a French-language Catholic newspaper and served as the principal and taught catechism in Cree to students at a residential school, which, like many residential schools at the time, were hotbeds of disease and unsanitary conditions, resulting in startling death rates among the students.

At the age of 48, he was named the first apostolic vicar of Keewatin, Manitoba, when it was erected in 1910.

Being a skilled carpenter, he built the cathedral of Le Pas and the bishop's residence – a 1.3-square-metre log cabin – as well as other chapels, schools and residences.

He was fluent in Cree and Chipewyan, and he traveled throughout the vicariate, visiting 14 missions and posts, covering thousands of miles on foot, by canoe, wagon and train.

While his work began as establishing new missions and ministering to the First

Nations people, the discovery and extraction of natural resources in the region triggered a massive influx of Caucasian workers, creating, in turn, serious social problems in the area.

The number of missions, clergy and religious grew under his leadership, and he continued to travel in difficult conditions until his death at the age of 71.