

# **UPDATED: Seattle bishops to review blessing of assisted suicide advocate**

Social media posts made by Robert Fuller, the man whose assisted suicide was profiled Aug. 26 by the Associated Press, suggest that he scheduled his funeral with his parish days before his suicide, and that a priest had “given his blessings” to the suicide plan.

In a March 16 Facebook post, Fuller claimed that he had completed the legal steps required to receive a prescription of life-ending drugs, and that he had the approval of a priest to end his own life.

“I have absolutely no reservations about what I am doing,” he wrote. “And my pastor/sponsor has given me his blessings. And he’s a Jesuit!!!”

Fuller did not name the priest referenced in the post, and the pastor of St. Therese parish, Rev. Maurice Mamba, is not a Jesuit. Several Jesuits assist with Sunday Masses at the parish. Examination of past parish bulletins shows that only one Jesuit, Rev. Quentin Dupont regularly celebrated the Sunday Mass that Fuller normally attended; the priest celebrated that Mass eight times between December 2018 and May 5.

Dupont was the celebrant at the Mass on May 5, at which he, along with first communicants and other parishioners, extended their hands in blessing over Fuller.

In a statement released Aug. 27, and an Aug. 28 statement released after the initial publication of this story, the Archdiocese of Seattle said that Dupont was not aware of Fuller’s circumstances when he conferred the blessing.

“We looked into this and can confirm that the priest who did the blessing [on May 5] did not know about Mr. Fuller’s intentions. The priest was a visiting priest who happened to be at St. Therese that particular Sunday when the pastor was celebrating Mass at his second parish. The blessing was done after Mass by the priest whose interest was to bring comfort to someone he learned was dying. The priest was not aware of any news photographer, although he was aware people were taking pictures,” the Archdiocese said Aug. 28.

Other posts on Fuller’s Facebook page recount that he met with parish staff as he planned the final days of his life, including a party held in the hours before his suicide on May 10, and his own funeral.

On May 3, Fuller wrote that he had one week left to live. He thanked his “faith family” at St. Therese, and invited people to join him at Mass the next day and at his “end of life celebration party” on May 10 – the day he died.

In addition to the posts regarding his funeral and his pastor's "blessing," other social media posts by Fuller suggest that some parish leaders knew about his plans to end his own life, and affirmed his decision.

On March 3, Fuller posted that he had arranged for one of the musicians at the parish to perform during his end of life "party" to mark his suicide. Three weeks later, he posted that a parish choir would perform as well.

"Today I asked our choir director if he and other musicians and singers can come perform during the first 1 1/2 hours and he emphatically replied YES. OF COURSE!" wrote Fuller on March 24. An article on the Seattle Housing Authority's website confirms that the Shades of Praise choir from St. Therese performed at the party.

Parish choir director Kent Stevenson also told the AP that Fuller's suicide "was completely in keeping with who Bob was" and that Fuller made the choice to die with "tenacity and clarity."

The Facebook posts appear to be at odds with a statement released by the Archdiocese of Seattle on Tuesday. That statement said parish leaders had been unaware of Fuller's intentions at the time he received a blessing during Mass on May 5.

The Aug. 28 statement, released subsequent to the initial publication of this story, acknowledged that some at the parish did know Fuller's plans.

"While it is clear that some of Mr. Fuller's friends at the parish knew of his intentions, the pastor at St. Therese initially did not," the archdiocese said.

According to the archdiocese, when Fuller eventually approached the pastor to ask to plan his own funeral, "the pastor discussed the gift of life and tried to convince him to change his mind. He made it clear that neither he nor the parish could support his plan to take his own life."

After it was clear Fuller would continue with his plans, Mamba contacted Archbishop Sartain, who agreed that "it is the church's responsibility to pastorally care for those who mourn. With this in mind, the archbishop gave permission for the funeral with certain conditions to ensure there was no endorsement or other perceived support for the way in which Mr. Fuller ended his life," the Archdiocese said.

Fuller announced the arrangements for his own funeral one week before he died, and days before the parish blessing. He scheduled the funeral for May 17. The archdiocese did not indicate when Sartain granted permission for the funeral.

"The purpose of the funeral was to pray for his soul and bring comfort and consolation to those who mourned," the archdiocese said.

The Aug. 28 archdiocesan statement did not address Fuller's March 16 statement

that he had met with a Jesuit priest to discuss his intentions, or questions related to the parish choir's performance at his "end of life" party.

Neither Dupont nor the West Province of the Society of Jesus responded to requests for comment.