An 'exciting step' toward Archbishop canonization

Theologians said possible miracle should be linked to Archbishop Fulton Sheen

By Thomas Bruch of the Journal Star Peoria IL
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PEORIA — A commission of theologians decided Tuesday that the possible miracle necessary for the beatification of Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen should be attributed to his intercession.

The Most Rev. Daniel Jenky, bishop of the Peoria Catholic Diocese and president of the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Foundation, received the declaration Tuesday from the seven-member theological commission, which advises the Congregation of the Causes of Saints at the Vatican. The group unanimously agreed that the survival of a stillborn baby at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in 2010 was the result of a miracle through prayers seeking the help of Sheen, a Peoria diocesan priest who was born in El Paso and raised in Peoria.

“It is truly another exciting step,” said Monsignor Stanley Deptula, executive director of the Sheen Foundation. “There are still several more steps to go.”

In September 2010, a stillborn baby demonstrated no signs of life for more than an hour as medical professionals at St. Francis attempted every possible life-saving procedure. During those efforts, the child’s parents and loved ones sought the intercession of Sheen. After 61 minutes, the baby was restored to full life and — almost four years later — demonstrated a full recovery without physical or mental impairment.

The commission’s decision comes on the heels of a March vote by a team of Vatican medical experts who affirmed that no natural explanation for the child’s healing could be found.

With both affirmations from the medical experts and the commission, the case will now be forwarded to bishops and cardinals who advise the pope on sainthood causes.

Once it clears that stage, the last step in Sheen’s beatification would be the approval of Pope Francis. Sheen then would be declared “Blessed” in a ceremony held in Peoria, said Deptula, and an additional miracle would be needed for his canonization as a saint. No time line is known for the completion of the final two steps, but Deptula said all signs point to the possible miracle clearing those final affirmations.

“With the unanimous agreement from doctors and theologians, we have every expectation that the cardinals will agree,” Deptula said.

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