News



Allen Sánchez, president of the nonprofit CommonSpirit St. Joseph's Children, speaks about the sainthood cause of Sr. Blandina Segale of the Sisters of Charity, June 1 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in front of a convent named for Segale. Pictured, far left, is Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico. (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)



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A Sister of Charity who helped tamed the Wild West in the 1800s — fending off a lynch mob and befriending Billy the Kid, as she set up hospitals, schools and orphanages — is another step closer to sainthood.

Sr. Blandina Segale was born in Italy in 1850, immigrated with her family to Ohio at the age of 4, and joined the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati in 1866. She has been a Servant of God since her sainthood cause was opened in 2014.

On May 28, Vatican theologians voted unanimously to advance her cause for further review by the bishops and cardinals before it is presented to Pope Leo XIV. If it is decided she lived a "life of heroic virtue," she would be declared venerable; then the search for miracles begins so she can be beatified. This latest step was announced June 1 by Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in front of a convent named for her.



Sr. Blandina Segale, in an undated photo (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)

"The Sisters of Charity are profoundly grateful for the life of Sister Blandina and her witness of faith, courage, and care for those most in need," Sr. Monica Gundler, president of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, said in a statement. "As her story continues to be shared with the world, we pray that her compassionate heart will inspire others to emulate her example of charity, justice, and service."

In 1872, Segale was sent to Trinidad, Colorado, then Santa Fe and later Albuquerque. According to the biography on the official site for her sainthood cause,

along the way she saved a man about to be hanged by a lynch mob. OSV News, reporting on Segale's life, noted "many larger-than-life feats," such as Segale nursing back to health an injured member of Billy the Kid's gang, and earning the famed outlaw's respect. She advocated for immigrants, established schools and hospitals, served the marginalized, and worked for peace and justice in frontier communities.

In 1891 she returned to Cincinnati and helped form social service ministries to support newly arrived immigrants and those in poverty. She wrote letters about her adventures in the West to her sister Justina Segale, also a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati, which in 1932 were published as a book, *At the End of the Santa Fe Trail*, which is still in print. She was featured in a 1966 television show that nicknamed her "the fastest nun in the West."

Segale died in 1941.



The graves of Sr. Blandina Segale and her sister, Sr. Justina Segale, are seen in the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati cemetery. (Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati)

In a press release announcing the latest step in Segale's cause, the Sisters of Charity wrote that "guided by a deep concern for those on the margins, Sister Blandina devoted her life to recognizing the needs of the most vulnerable and responding with courage, compassion, and action. Her legacy continues today through ministries that serve children, families, immigrants, and others in need."

Allen Sánchez, petitioner for Segale's cause and president of CommonSpirit St. Joseph's Children, a nonprofit that is part of the legacy of hospitals Segale helped found, said there was no debate among the theologians over whether to advance her cause.

"We are overjoyed by this wonderful news," Sánchez said in a statement. "Sister Blandina truly won the hearts of these esteemed theologians from Catholic pontifical universities in Rome and around the world. Their vote is a testament to the heroic virtue she demonstrated throughout her life."

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At the announcement in Santa Fe, Sánchez said finding miracles to prove Segale is a saint won't be a problem.

"For beatification, we need one miracle," Sánchez said, according to the Santa Fe New Mexican. "We have 58 of them."

Charity Sr. Andrea Koverman, board chair for CommonSpirit St. Joseph's Children, said one of the biggest lessons she has learned from Segale's life is the way she defined community.

"Community encompassed everyone ... not just the successful or the popular, but absolutely everyone," Koverman said, the New Mexican reported. "The most marginalized people, the most pushed aside, the most in need are part of the community. And we, as Christians, are called to recognize that as well."