News
Spirituality

Representatives from the five dioceses in Indiana prepare to receive a first-class relic of St. Theodore Guerin during an Oct. 11, 2026, gathering at St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind. (OSV News/Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods)

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Catholics in Indiana recently marked the 20th anniversary of the canonization of St. Theodore Guérin, a saint who served their state, with additional relics being given to representatives from each of Indiana's five dioceses, offering the faithful a special connection to her and her story.

St. Theodora, as she is known, was born in France's Brittany region in 1798, joined the Sisters of Providence in 1823 at nearly 25 years old, working to educate and care for the poor. She accepted an assignment to the Indiana frontier and travelled there in 1840 with five other sisters. When she arrived in Terre Haute, Indiana, she went to a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament and said, "We found waiting for us in a poor log cabin, our God, our ALL."

The sisters opened their school within a year, one that exists today as St. Mary-of-the-Woods College. Filled with missionary zeal, Theodora would establish nearly a dozen schools and two orphanages throughout Indiana.

She was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican on Oct. 15, 2006.

In St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, the Sisters of Providence celebrated the 20th anniversary of her canonization Oct. 11, with a pilgrimage, special Eucharistic liturgy and picnic.

During the liturgy, first-class relics were given to representatives of each diocese in Indiana, including to Msgr. Fred Easton of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Mary Gen Blittschau of the Diocese of Evansville, Fr. Francis Chukwuma of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Sr. Evelyn Ovalles of the Diocese of Gary and Marcia Murphy of the Diocese of Lafayette.

"The 20th anniversary allowed us to remember St. Mother Theodore as a woman whose faith, courage and trust in Providence continues to inspire," Sisters of Providence General Superior Sr. Jeanne Hagelskamp said. "Her relics and personal belongings provide a tangible connection to her life and invite visitors to encounter her story in a deeply personal way."

The relic given to Chukwuma will be "brought back to the cathedral in Fort Wayne, where it will be available for public veneration at a future date," according to the diocese.

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will also be commissioning a statue of Theodora, the diocese said, "from the same Italian company that created the cathedral's statue of Blessed Solanus Casey. Once complete, the statue and relic will be placed together near the back of the cathedral, facing the existing statue of Blessed Solanus. A completion date has not yet been set."

Sr. Anne Therese Falkenstein of the Sisters of Providence told OSV News that while they don't yet know the plans of all of the dioceses in making the relics available for public veneration, the sisters are "hoping that by placing relics in various places that people will come to know Mother Theodore and want to do the type of good things that she did in the world and to rely on God in the process of caring for the vulnerable."

She said the sisters are developing a protocol so that relics of Theodora will be available by request to parishes, shrines and other ecclesiastical institutions with the purpose of honoring and promoting her story for the faithful.

Anne Therese pointed out the lack of resources that Theodora had when she first came to Indiana. She said that "the hallmark of her life is just really reliance on God's providence for everything she tried to accomplish, for everyone she tried to heal, for everyone whose needs she tried to meet. Whether or not she had the means did not stop her from accomplishing what she believed God had called her to do."

"We feel like now more than ever, Mother Theodore's life speaks volumes of how we can help to heal the world and to be people of love, mercy, and justice," she emphasized.

She also highlighted Theodora's recognition of Indiana's natural beauty.

“We have gone out several times this summer to gather simples and linden blossoms," Theodora wrote. "In each excursion, we discover something marvelous, beautiful, and useful in the magnificent forests of Indiana. At each step we can admire the grandeur, the power, the goodness of God. How bountifully He provides

for all our wants – I would even say for our pleasures! I love our woods and solitude very much."

St. Theodora is the eighth canonized American saint and the first in the state of Indiana.

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