

RESOLUTION (#1) on Fr. Paul Wattson

Resolution on Commemoration of Fr. Paul Wattson
Presented to the Synod of Province III on May 3, 2021
If adopted, to be forwarded to the Secretary of General Convention

Resolved, That the Synod of Province III, meeting electronically on May 3, 2021, endorses the following resolution and hereby instructs the Secretary of Province III to forward it by no later than June 25, 2021, to the Secretary of General Convention.



Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 80th General Convention urges the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to add Fr. Paul Wattson to the calendar of commemorations of the Episcopal Church.

Based on the following resolution adopted by the Diocese of Easton on February 24, 2018:

Commemoration of Fr. Paul Wattson

Resolved, That this 150th Convention of the Diocese of Easton memorialize the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to recommend to the General Convention that Fr. Paul Wattson, who was ordained Deacon in the Diocese of Easton in 1885 and Priest in the Diocese of New York in 1886, be added to the calendar of commemorations of the Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of this Convention forward to the Secretary of General Convention and each member of the Diocese of Easton Standing Committee a copy of this resolution within sixty days of the adjournment of this Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese of Easton is hereby encouraged to set February 8 as the day on which Parishes and members of this Diocese may commemorate and celebrate the historic ministry of this native son of the Eastern Shore and of the Diocese of Easton.

Submitted by:

Mr. Mark Hansen, Lay Pastor – St. Clement’s, Massey
The Rev. Nathaniel W. Pierce, Ecumenical Officer, Diocese of Easton

Explanation

Lewis Thomas Wattson was born on January 18, 1863, in Millington, MD, the son of the Rev. Joseph Newton Wattson, Rector of St. Clement’s Episcopal Church, Massey, and Mary Electa Gregory Wattson. After graduating from college he attended the General Theological Seminary in New York. He was ordained as a Deacon by the Rt. Rev. Alfred Lee, Bishop of Delaware, on behalf of the Rt. Rev. Henry C. Lay, Bishop of Easton, at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in

Centreville, MD, on June 5, 1885. He was subsequently ordained a Priest by the Bishop of New York. His first parish was at Port Deposit followed by a ministry at St. John's Church in Kingston, NY. From 1895 to 1899 he was head of the Associated Missions in Omaha, Nebraska.

“In 1899, while still a Priest of the Episcopal Church, he and some friends established the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement at Graymoor, NY [at which time he assumed the name Paul]. The Sisters of the Atonement, also Protestant, had been established the year before by Mother Lurana Francis. In 1909 Fr. Paul Wattson and his associates startled Protestants and Catholics alike when they made their corporate submission to Rome. On October 9, 1909, both congregations were corporately received into the Roman Catholic Church. On June 16, 1910, Fr. Paul was ordained a Priest of the Roman Catholic Church at the Dunwoodie (NY) Seminary.” (obituary in *The New York Times* published February 9, 1940)

In addition to his prodigious ecumenical work, “Fr. Paul also founded the Home for Homeless, known as St. Christopher's Inn, where more than 52,000 homeless men, regardless of their religious affiliations, were sheltered in 1938, and more than 170,000 meals given to applicants who would have otherwise gone hungry. ... Under the rules established by Fr. Paul, no questions are ever asked of those who seek aid, except the name of a near relative to be told in case of sickness or death. Visitors are welcome to stay as long as they like. Those who stay longer than over night (*sic*), get work to do, and 10 cents worth of tobacco or candy daily. Thousands of hoboes throughout the world know the place.” (obituary in *The New York Times* published February 9, 1940)

Founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, Servant of God Father Paul of Graymoor was a true apostle of Christian Unity and charity, an ardent Franciscan, missionary of At-One-Ment and leader. His life purpose and legacy was work for the realization of Christ's prayer at the Last Supper: “That all may be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” (John 17:21) This legacy of At-One-Ment and the example of his life and work have drawn others into the world to be bridge builders, peace makers and reconcilers.

Fr. Paul Wattson died on February 8, 1940, the day after Ash Wednesday. Today he is remembered as the founder of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which began in 1908 as the Octave of Christian Unity and focused on prayer for church unity. The dates of the week were proposed by Fr. Wattson, cofounder of the Graymoor Franciscan Friars. He conceived of the week beginning on the Feast of the Confession of Peter, the Protestant variant of the ancient Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, on 18 January, and concluding with the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on 25 January.

Pope Pius X officially blessed the concept and Pope Benedict XV “encouraged its observance throughout the entire Roman Catholic Church.” For a while, the observance was renamed the “Chair of Unity Octave” by Wattson in order to emphasize the relationship between Christian unity and the Petrine See (i.e., the papacy). Protestant leaders in the mid-1920s also proposed an annual octave of prayer for unity amongst Christians leading up to Pentecost Sunday (the traditional commemoration of the establishment of the Church).

Abbé Paul Couturier of Lyons, France, who has been called “the father of spiritual ecumenism,”

had a slightly different approach from that of Father Wattson, a convert to Roman Catholicism from Anglicanism. He advocated prayer “for the unity of the Church as Christ wills it, and in accordance with the means he wills,” thereby enabling other Christians with differing views of the Petrine ministry to join in the prayer. In 1935, he proposed naming the observance “Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” a proposal accepted by the Roman Catholic Church in 1966. Father Couturier's message influenced a Sardinian nun, Blessed Sister Maria Gabriella of Unity, whose deep, prayerful, sacrificial devotion to the cause of unity is held up by Rome as an example to be followed.

In 1941, the Faith and Order Conference changed the date for observing the week of unity prayer to that observed by Roman Catholics. In 1948, with the founding of the World Council of Churches, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity became increasingly recognized by different churches throughout the world.

In 1958, the French Catholic group Unité Chrétienne and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (a body which includes, among others, most of the world's Orthodox churches as well as many Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, United and Independent churches) begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer. The year 1968 saw the first official use of materials prepared jointly by the Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, representing the entire Roman Catholic Church. Collaboration and cooperation between these two organizations has increased steadily since, resulting recently in joint publications in the same format.

Timothy Cardinal Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York formally opened the Cause for Canonization of Father Paul on Tuesday, September 22, 2015, in New York City. On March 9, 2017, at the New York Catholic Center, documents and artifacts illustrating the holiness of the life of this Servant of God were sealed for shipment to Rome.

Father Paul was an indefatigable servant of God whose work was to spread the Kingdom of God on earth. He had the heart of a Franciscan and the missionary zeal of St. Paul, as evidenced by his many publications, sermons and letters he left behind, and the Ave Maria Hour Radio Show which brought the words of the gospel and the lives of the saints into people's homes.

If the Roman Catholic Church decides to canonize Fr. Paul, and if the General Convention adds him to the calendar of commemorations of the Episcopal Church, he will become the second native-born Episcopalian to be so honored by both churches. The first was Elizabeth Ann Seton, canonized on September 14, 1975, by Pope Paul VI, and added to the Episcopal calendar of commemorations by the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

Sources

The New York Times, February 9, 1940 (obituary)

Website for the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement: <https://www.atonementfriars.org>

Wikipedia