# USCCB Maria Middleton Presentation 2026

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki, Chariman, USCCB Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance:

Before I get into presenting the actual consultation, I just want to call your attention to a memo or letter I sent to all of you bishops last March about the protocol that we have. So in November of 2017, we adopted a protocol for consulting other bishops on the advisability of initiating causes of beatification and canonization. And so in response to an increase in the number of requests for consultations at our plenary assemblies, I was pleased to report that His Eminence Marcellus Cardinal Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for Causes of the Saints, agreed and granted permission for the mandated consultation with other bishops to take place at the level of the ecclesiastical province.

Accordingly, the committee's internal protocol has been revised to reflect this new option. The revisions include important details that ought to be observed on the local level if a diocesan bishop chooses to consult the ecclesiastical province on a prospective cause. And we do have another one that that bishop did choose to start at the provincial level. But as I mentioned in my letter to you in March, please know that a diocesan bishop is always free to consult the full body of bishops when we are gathered in plenary assembly.

Moreover, if the individual who is being considered for a cause as national prominence, or the cause is important nationally, for example, for social, political, or religious reasons, the Dicastery still expects the consultation will occur at the national level. The other procedure that our Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance adopted was that there is an increasing number of these causes that are coming forward, which is a very beautiful thing to see all the holy, inspiring lives that we have out there.

And that in itself, I think, is uplifting for us to hear the example of these people. But we also thought just to expedite the process a bit that when we have a cause like this, it would be the chairman of the committee that would make the presentation just a brief biography, but then the bishop of the diocese promoting the cause would be available to answer questions. So with that, I will proceed to the consultation on a cause of beatification and canonization for Maria Middleton.

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not prevent them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Our Lord's command teaches us that young people desire a relationship with God. They seek to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. In other words, they are seeking holiness. The church has been blessed throughout history to have a number

of young people among the canonized saints, Saint Joan of Arc, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, San Francisco, and Santa Jacinta Marto, and Saint Carlo Acutis among them.

The church in the United States has the further opportunity to begin the beatification and canonization process for a young person, Maria Middleton, who lived in our time and in our land. Through the guidance and example of her parents and family, Maria developed a relationship with God from a very early age. Starting at age three, she attended weekly adoration with her mother. She was active in her parish throughout her elementary and secondary school years.

Her spirituality and devotion to the Lord continued to grow and mature throughout her adolescence, as did her spiritual writings discovered in her journals. In high school, she created an annual student fundraiser to raise money for children suffering from cancer and for their families before her own cancer diagnosis. She was a member of the Community Service Corps at her Catholic high school, served as student leader on a mission and ministry team, and supported the St. John Paul II High School and Nakaseke Uganda through prayer, fundraising, and a mission trip.

At age 16, during her sophomore year of high school, Maria was diagnosed with terminal brainstem cancer. She was given between nine months and 12 months to live. In her journal entries after her diagnosis, she wrote that even in the face of suffering, God has a purpose for each person, and that each person can be a witness to God's love, mercy, and compassion, especially when faced with great suffering. She refused to give up performing acts of Christian service despite her declining physical state because she believed that her suffering had a purpose.

She would often counsel her family and friends who worried about her to not give into despair and to hope in God since God is always present and using each person to proclaim his good news. Think hope was the simple yet deeply inspiring phrase Maria used as she faced her prognosis and suffering with steadfast hope in God. A hope rooted in faith and expressed in love. She loved God and trusted in him completely. Maria's counsel, never to give up, extended to her bishop, our brother Archbishop, Archbishop Perez.

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, Maria wrote to him asking him to reopen churches so she could receive the Eucharist and be strengthened for her spiritual and physical journey towards death. As you can see on the screen here behind me, Archbishop Perez brought Maria Holy Communion at her home during her final months. As a 17-year-old facing death, Maria faithfully sought the healing grace of the Eucharist.

Archbishop Perez has spoken countless times over the last six years about Maria's witness to

the gospel and of her enduring hope. Maria offers a modern day witness to all Catholics about the redemptive power of suffering. If her holiness were to be recognized by the church, she would be a visible modern day witness of hope, especially to young people who are searching for meaning and purpose in life.

The statistics concerning depression, anxiety, loneliness, and suicide among our youth speak of the urgent need to lift up modern day examples of young holy men and women who can be witnesses to the power of faith, hope, and love. Archbishop Perez has indicated that Maria's reputation for sanctity is growing. Each year, on the anniversary of her death, hundreds of people celebrate a memorial mass for her. Votive offerings continue to be left at her grave, and numerous reports of graces have been received by the faithful, praying for Maria's intercession.

Reports of intercessory graces have been received from across the United States, as well as from Italy, Poland, and Uganda. Before calling for a vote on the advisability of opening the cause of beatification and canonization of Maria Middleton, I invite you to share any observations or concerns you have about this cause, and Archbishop Perez is here and is ready to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you, Bishop Afrocki. At this time, I invite discussion of the item. Okay, brothers, I think we are ready for the vote. At the request of Archbishop Nelson J. Perez, do the members consider it advisable to advance on the local level of cause of beatification and canonization from Maria Middleton, a laywoman of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia? Please enter your vote now, if you have not already. Archbishop, the action passes.

Thank you.