

# FLORIDACatholic

**PALM BEACH DIOCESE**

## Could a local priest be key to sainthood?

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**PALM BEACH GARDENS** | Formal proceedings are underway in the Diocese of Palm Beach to investigate an alleged miracle that could possibly lead the way to a Carmelite priest's canonization to sainthood.

"I can assure you that the whole Carmelite world is watching this event and praying," said Carmelite Father Mario Esposito, vice postulator of the cause for canonization of Blessed Titus Brandsma. Father Esposito took part in formal openings of the diocesan investigation July 11 at the Pastoral Center in Palm Beach Gardens, with Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito presiding.

Carmelite Father Michael Driscoll, former pastor of St. Jude Parish in Boca Raton, who is a sincere devotee of Father Brandsma, may have the one authentic divine sign needed to bring the priest's cause before Pope Francis for his judgment. Father Driscoll, who continues to serve St. Jude

PLEASE SEE **SAINTHOOD, 3**

# A miracle story for a priest with great faith

**LINDA REEVES**  
of the Florida Catholic staff

**BOCA RATON** | Retired Carmelite Father Michael Driscoll of St. Jude Parish became emotional when he shared his near-death story, but smiled from ear to ear when he talked about his extraordinary healing, which he credits to prayer and the help of a man, who today, needs a miracle of his own.

It was 12 years ago when Father Driscoll, former pastor of St. Jude Parish in Boca Raton and diocesan director of liturgy, visited his doctor for his annual skin exam. Father Driscoll remembers the appointment like it was yesterday. First there was the checkup, and then there were tests. After the scans, x-rays, and MRI came the doctor's grim diagnosis.

"It was fourth-stage and fifth-stage cancer in some parts," said Father Driscoll, then 62, about



Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito signs papers as part of formal ceremonies July 11 opening the diocesan investigation into an alleged miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Titus Brandsma, a Carmelite priest and martyr. Carmelite Father Mario Esposito, standing next to Bishop Barbarito, is the vice postulator of the cause for canonization of Blessed Titus Brandsma. (PHOTOS BY LINDA REEVES | FC)

the aggressive malignant melanoma attacking his neck area behind the ear and spreading to other parts of the body. "I didn't

know how serious it was."

Melanoma is a cancer that usually starts in a certain type of skin cell. With early detection



Carmelite Father Michael Driscoll speaks about his experience with cancer and its cure during an interview with the *Florida Catholic*.

and proper treatment, the cure rate for the cancer is good. How-

PLEASE SEE **DRISCOLL, 2**

## DRISCOLL

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ever, melanoma can quickly spread to almost any organ and can target the lungs, bones, liver and brain. Stage 5 cancer is the most advanced form of cancer and often the most difficult to treat.

Medical data states that when cancer has spread to organs of the body and lymph nodes, there is a higher risk that the cancer might come back after surgery. Rarely do patients survive a long period of time following surgery.

In the July 22, 2004, issue of the *Florida Catholic*, a prayer plea appeared titled "St. Jude pastor needs prayers of healing." The article read, "Father Michael Driscoll, OCarm, pastor of St. Jude Parish and director of liturgy for the diocese, is awaiting surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. St. Jude parishioners and staff members of the Diocese of Palm Beach ask all to keep Father Driscoll in prayers of healing through the intercession of Father Titus Brandsma, a Dutch Carmelite, who was beatified in 1985."

"We were all praying for him," said Barbara Batchelder, a parishioner of St. Jude, where Father Driscoll continues to serve and live with a community of Carmelite priests there. "It was tough and go for him. We all came together in prayer as a community."

The cancer had spread to 10 lymph nodes. The salivary gland was also attacked. Father Driscoll came through surgery with flying colors, but next came 35 aggressive radiation treatments at a cancer clinic in Peabody, Mass.

Members of the Carmelite order, who have a great devotion to Blessed Titus Brandsma, continued to pray for his intercession for Father Driscoll. Parishioners of St. Jude, friends and people from around the diocese continued to pray and ask for Father Brandsma's help.

Margaret Owers, a former diocesan staff member who worked in the diocesan Liturgy Office with Father Driscoll and is now retired, clearly recalled the news of Father's Driscoll's diagnoses and surgery.

"It was very bad," she said. "I had the impression that it was the worst. He gave me a stack of holy cards and he asked me to distribute them. There were about 30 to 40 prayer cards. I gave them out to people. I kept a card, and I continued to pray as I thought of him."

The prayer on the card was short, but many believe very powerful and just the healing medicine needed: "God Our Father, your servant, Blessed Titus Brandsma, labored zealously in your vineyard and gave his life freely because of his faith in you. Through his intercession, I ask for your mercy and help. Father Titus never refused when he was asked for help by your people. In his

## FYI

Diocese creates special focus on life of Blessed Brandsma

Because the promotion of the cause for sainthood of Blessed Titus Brandsma is the first such inquiry for the Diocese of Palm Beach, it is a history-making milestone for the diocese and one that creates added interest in the Carmelite priest.

That's why the diocese has created a special webpage — [www.diocesepb.org/titusocarm](http://www.diocesepb.org/titusocarm) — devoted to Blessed Brandsma and this historic inquiry. The page will help our faith community understand the process of the path to sainthood, provide updates on the process as well as share more on his life. The diocese received permission from the Provincial of the Carmelites to post special biographical information on the life of Blessed Brandsma, including his family life, schooling, professional career and more on his imprisonment. The page also includes pictures of his life and reveals why his works and beliefs brought him to the attention of the Nazis. There is also information on the Titus Brandsma Center in Holland.

name, I come to you for Father Michael Driscoll's cure of his cancer. Lord, help me always to imitate the great faith, generous love and burning zeal of Blessed Titus Brandsma. Glorify your servant as he strove to glorify you. Amen."

Father Driscoll made it through surgery. Then, following the procedure, he successfully came through the harsh treatments that first year. He continued milder treatments the next year and the year that followed. Father Driscoll said most melanomas "come back after two to five years."

"I buried six people in our parish who had it after I was diagnosed," he said. "The doctors said I was clear. After 10 years, they dismissed me."

When asked about any fears of losing the battle with cancer, Father Driscoll firmly stated, "I prayed and I was determined to fight. The people around me were all praying."

Father Driscoll was born in the Bronx, N.Y. He told us that he first learned about the life of Father Titus Brandsma when he studied at St. Albert Junior Seminary in Middletown, N.Y. "A teacher told us about him and the devotion," he said. "I went over for his beatification."

Father Titus Brandsma was a prominent educator, philosopher, poet and writer in mystical theology. He was a true Carmelite, committed to Mary, prayer and the mission of the Church. He served as president and as a faculty member of the Catholic University of Nijmegen. He also served as an adviser for Catholic editors and newspapers in Holland. The Nazi occupation in Holland came in 1940. Father Brandsma, committed to the Church and standing up for freedom of religion and the Catholic

'(Father Driscoll's) recovery to me was a divine intervention. He taught me how to pray to Blessed Titus Brandsma, to whom he had a great devotion.'

J. Albert Johnson

press, was arrested Jan. 19, 1942. He was later sent to Dachau concentration camp in Germany where he joined 2,700 other imprisoned clergy. Six months after arriving at the camp, he was killed by lethal injection July 26, 1942.

Father Brandsma was declared a martyr of the Catholic Church and beatified in Rome by John Paul II in November 1985. Events took place around the world in honor of the beatification of the man who gave great witness of his faith and love of Church and God up until he died — praying, reaching out with the love of Christ even to his torturers and trying to spread the good news.

J. Albert Johnson, a Boca Raton attorney and St. Jude parishioner, is a good friend of Father Driscoll. Johnson was there for him when he was going through surgery and treatments. He also prayed for Father Driscoll.

"His recovery to me was a divine intervention," Johnson said. "He taught me how to pray to Blessed Titus Brandsma, to whom he had a great devotion. Father Driscoll would tell me, 'I am OK because Titus is going to take care of me.' His recovery, I am sure, was through the power of prayer."

Father Driscoll said he prayed and was "determined to fight."

"The people around me were all praying. Prayer is powerful because Jesus said, 'Ask and you shall receive,'" he said. "We are not arm-twisting God through prayer. We are just putting ourselves in God's hands and he decides. We trust in God and trust in God's will for us."

In October, Father Driscoll turns 75, and celebrates 50 years in the priesthood in 2017. He believes that he still has "work to do" for Jesus now that he has a new lease on life. He continues to serve St. Jude Parish and helps out at St. Joan of Arc in Boca Raton. Many are inspired by Father Driscoll's miraculous recovery that beats all odds, and his strong faith in the power of prayer through the intercession of Blessed Titus Brandsma, a man of faith, who now needs a miracle attributed to him to proceed to canonization and sainthood.

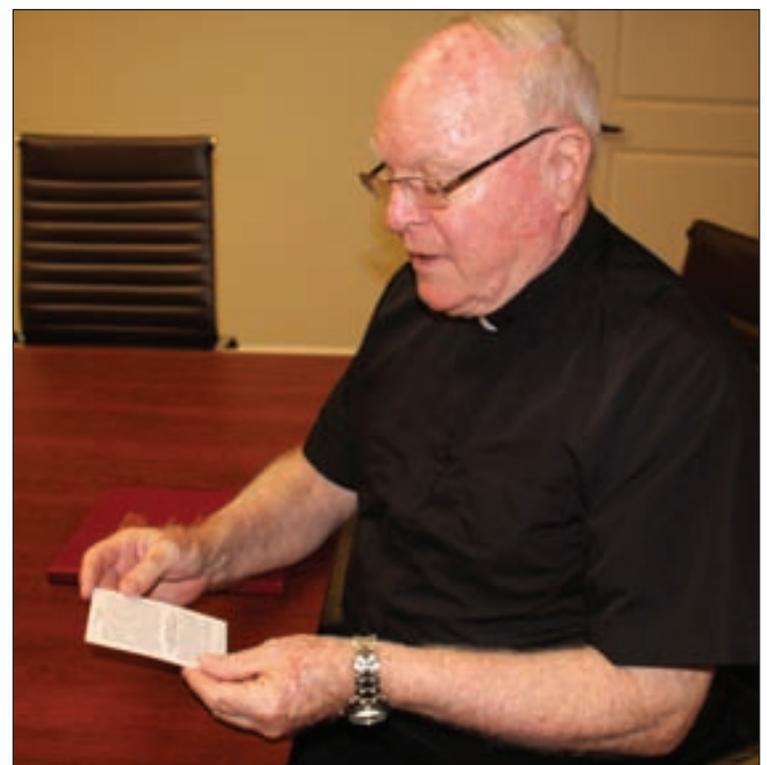
Father Driscoll encourages all those fighting the battle against cancer or carrying other heavy crosses to pray and have faith. "I would say have hope that this illness or misfortune is not going to discourage you. God does love you. Just say no. I am going to fight. I am going to make every day count." ■



A relic of Blessed Titus Brandsma, a Carmelite priest and martyr, is displayed at formal ceremonies July 11 at the diocesan Pastoral Center in Palm Beach Gardens. The relic belongs to Carmelite Father Michael Driscoll, who believes he was cured of cancer by the intercession of Father Brandsma. (PHOTOS BY LINDA REEVES | FC)



Papers are signed and sealed during formal ceremonies July 11 at the diocesan Pastoral Center in Palm Beach Gardens.



Carmelite Father Michael Driscoll talks about his near death experience with cancer during an interview with the *Florida Catholic*. Father Driscoll believes because of prayer he was miraculously healed from the aggressive malignant melanoma he battled.