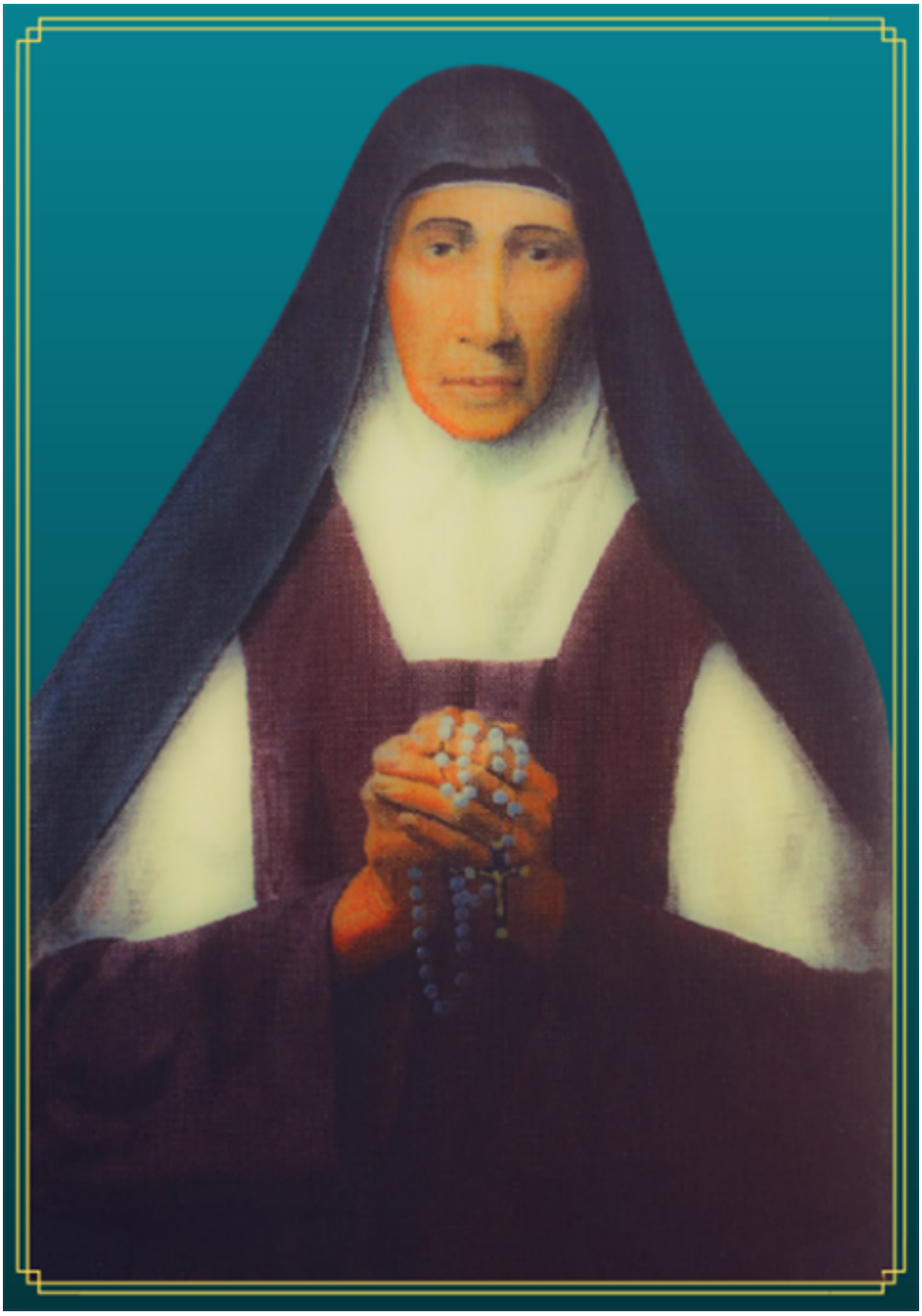
News
Religious Life

by UCA News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

April 21, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



Mother Eliswa Vakayil (Friendswithsaints/Wikimedia Commons)

Indian Catholic nun Eliswa Vakayil, known as a champion of women's rights, has moved closer to sainthood after Pope Francis published a decree authorizing her and five others to be declared blessed.

Francis approved the decree to beatify the 19th century nun during an audience with Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints,

on April 14, according to Vatican News.

As part of the procedure, Francis approved a miracle attributed to Vakayil.

Eliswa Vakayil (183-1913), from Kerala state of southern India, is popularly known as Mother Eliswa of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

She founded the first Indigenous Carmelite religious order for women known as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites in 1866. It was later renamed as the Teresian Carmelite Sisters.

Vakayil was married at the age of 16 and gave birth to a daughter named Anna before entering religious life. The sudden illness and death of her husband changed the course of her life. Her daughter was just 18 months old then, according to a report by the Vatican’s Fides news agency.

She took refuge in silent prayer and service to the needy in the community. She started frequenting the Blessed Sacrament and other forms of spiritual nourishment.

In 1862, about 12 years after her husband's death, she expressed her desire to join religious life to her parish priest.

Four years later, she joined the Carmelite congregation, a feat soon followed by her daughter Anna and her younger sister Thresia. She became the first native religious nun from Kerala.

Advertisement

During that period, Indian society was highly caste-based and male-dominant. That triggered many forms of social and economic hardships for women, such as early marriage, early pregnancy, illiteracy, unemployment, subjugation, domestic abuse and exploitation.

Vakayil made the social and economic emancipation of women her congregation's priorities.

The congregation set up schools and training centers to offer education and livelihood skills to thousands of women. It also runs facilities to support orphaned and abandoned girls.

Today, the congregation has 209 convents and about 1,500 nuns working in different parts of the world, including India, America, Africa, Germany, Italy and England, according to Fides.

Mother Eliswa spent the last 23 years of her life at the St. Joseph convent in Varapuzha, a northern suburb in Kochi city of Kerala state.

She died on July 18, 1913. Many people started visiting her tomb to pray and pay respect.

On May 30, 2008, Archbishop Daniel Acharuparambil of Verapoly declared her a Servant of God, the first official step toward sainthood in the Catholic Church.

The Vatican declared her venerable on Nov. 8, 2023.

She will be declared a saint by the pope after the Vatican approves a second verified miracle attributed to her intercession.