

Diocese takes first step toward possible cause for former FOCUS missionary

BISMARCK, N.D. (CNS) – Bishop David D. Kagan of Bismarck announced June 16 the diocese will open an investigation into “the holiness of life and love for God” of North Dakota native Michelle Christine Duppong, who died of cancer Dec. 25, 2015. She was 31.

At the time of her death, Duppong was the director of adult faith formation for the Diocese of Bismarck. Before that, she was a missionary for six years with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, or FOCUS.

She mentored hundreds of students on college campuses and her final assignment with FOCUS was on its inaugural team at the University of Mary in Bismarck.

“Michelle’s holiness of life and love for God certainly touched us here in the Diocese of Bismarck, at the University of Mary and throughout FOCUS, but hers is also a witness which should also be shared with the universal Church,” Bishop Kagan said.

He announced the diocesan investigation into her life and faith at the FOCUS new staff training at the University of Mary. The investigation could lead to her beatification and canonization.

“Michelle was a radiant, joyful woman with the heart of a true servant,” said Msgr. James Shea, president of the Benedictine university. “For the students on our campus, she was an inspiration and a treasured mentor, teaching them by her example the transformative power of friendship with God.”

Duppong grew up in Haymarsh, North Dakota, and earned a degree in horticulture at North Dakota State University in 2006. While there, she encountered FOCUS and the Catholic apostolate inspired her to serve as a FOCUS missionary after graduation.

In 2012, Duppong became Bismarck's diocesan director of adult faith formation, "using her missionary zeal to bring others closer to Christ," said a news release. On Dec. 29, 2014, Duppong was diagnosed with cancer "and battled the disease with perseverance and a patient, cheerful spirit" until her death.

The diocesan investigation, which involves the gathering of evidence about Duppong's life and deeds, will include witness testimonies and the compilation of private and public writings. When this is completed, the next stage toward her canonization cause is for the diocese to present the evidence to the Dicastery for Saints' Causes at the Vatican.

If the documentation is accepted for consideration and her cause is officially opened, Duppong would then be considered a "Servant of God."

"From there, the cause could proceed at a steady pace, especially if there are no theological objections and Duppong enjoys what the Church calls 'the fame of sanctity' – that she is venerated as a holy person."

In general, a verified miracle attributed to her intercession would be needed for her beatification and a second such miracle would be required for canonization.

A documentary titled "Thirst for Souls: the Michelle Duppong Story" is in the works. Its worldwide premiere would take place at SEEK23, FOCUS' national conference, to be held Jan. 2-6 in St. Louis.

The mission of FOCUS is "to share the hope and joy of the Gospel" on campuses and in parishes through Bible studies,

outreach events, mission trips and discipleship.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, nearly 800 FOCUS missionaries are serving at 205 locations, which includes 22 parish venues across the U.S. and seven international campuses.

FOCUS alumni, now numbering nearly 40,000, live and serve in parishes and communities across the country.