

# Diocese of Wichita, Kansas, set to welcome home remains of Father Kapaun

WICHITA, Kan. (CNS) – The flag-draped casket was empty during a memorial Mass in Wichita for Father Emil J. Kapaun on July 29, 1953.

The casket at Father Kapaun's funeral Mass on Sept. 29, won't be vacant. He is coming home.

The memorial Mass in 1953 in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated a little over two weeks after word of Father Kapaun's death reached Bishop Mark K. Carroll on July 12, 1953. He was notified the U.S. Army chaplain had died in a North Korean prisoner of war camp on May 23, 1951.

Seventy years after his death, a U.S. government forensics team in Hawaii announced March 4 that it had identified his remains.



Father Emil Kapaun,  
a U.S. Army  
chaplain, is  
pictured in an

undated portrait. A candidate for sainthood, he died May 23, 1951, while ministering to prisoners of war during the Korean War. (CNS photo/St. Louis Review)

Father Kapaun was ordained a priest for the Wichita Diocese on June 9, 1940. He was a U.S. Army chaplain in World War II and the Korean War and held the rank of captain. A candidate for sainthood, he has the title "Servant of God."

Scott Carter, coordinator of the Father Kapaun Guild, will be flying Sept. 20 to Honolulu with Wichita Bishop Carl A. Kemme and Father David Lies, vicar general of the diocese, as well as with Ray Kapaun, Father Kapaun's nephew, and his wife, and the late priest's niece to formally accept his remains and bring them back to the Diocese of Wichita.

Other representatives of the diocese and the U.S. military also will take part in the ceremonies in Hawaii.

Carter said many events have been scheduled in Hawaii and in Wichita to bring Father Kapaun home.

Bishop Larry Silva of Honolulu will celebrate a Mass on Sept. 23 in the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Peace as a ceremonial send-off of Father Kapaun's remains. The Mass is scheduled to be live-streamed from the Honolulu cathedral's website at 11 p.m. central time.

"It's a moment for the (Hawaiian) people to recognize someone who has been buried in their midst ... and a send-off [for], hopefully, a future saint," Carter said.

The Wichita diocesan group also will tour the U.S. military

facilities where Father Kapaun's remains were identified as well as the Punchbowl, the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific located at Punchbowl Crater in Honolulu.

U.S. Army Forces Command Chaplain Col. Rajmund Kopec and U.S. Air Force Maj. Christina Roberts, Father Kapaun's niece, will officially escort Father Kapaun's remains on a commercial airline flight leaving Honolulu Sept. 24. Family and diocesan representatives also will be on the journey that will conclude Sept. 25, when a flight from Dallas lands at Eisenhower National Airport in Wichita.

"The military escort stays with the remains along the way," Carter said, "which is a great way to honor those who have fallen and ensure their security. They are never left alone, they are loved and not forgotten."

Other family members and diocesan representatives will welcome Father Kapaun's remains at the airport, he told The Catholic Advance, Wichita's diocesan newspaper.

"From there, his remains will be going to Pilsen for the weekend where he will truly be returning home," Carter said.

The visit to St. John Nepomucene Church in Pilsen, Kansas, is primarily for the Holy Family Parish community to pray for and spend time with their native son.

Father Kapaun's remains will be delivered to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita on Sept. 27 for a vespers service for the priests of the diocese.

"I think it will be a powerful, touching moment for them to be with their brother priest," Carter said.

A luncheon will be held Sept. 28 at the cathedral for special guests such as the families of the prisoners of war, military officials and possibly some former Korean War POWs.

Kopec and Ray Kapaun are scheduled to share some thoughts at

the luncheon. Kelly McKeague, director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, may also attend and speak.

“We’re looking forward to that moment to honor and share Father Kapaun’s story,” Carter said.

The funeral vigil for Father Kapaun will be held Sept. 28 at Hartman Arena in Wichita.

“It will be a beautiful and powerful ceremony with prayer – and music by the Air Force and West Point Catholic Cadet choirs,” Carter said.

A Rosary will be prayed at the vigil and comments from Ray Kapaun and possibly Mike Dow, a fellow POW with Father Kapaun, will be delivered. Father Kapaun’s remains casket will be on the stage during the event.

His funeral Mass will be celebrated at Hartman Arena on Sept. 29. EWTN is scheduled to broadcast the Mass.

“Bishop Carroll celebrated a Mass in 1953 when they found out that Father Kapaun had died in a prisoner of war camp. They had heard that he had been captured and they had been praying that he would make it back,” Carter said.

“The family was there, the military was there, and that was a great way to honor him and pray for the repose of his soul,” he said. “But a flag was draped over an empty casket.”

A lot of people now believe that Father Kapaun’s soul is now in heaven, he said, adding that the diocese is waiting for validation from the Vatican regarding his cause for sainthood.

In general, one miracle attributed to the sainthood candidate’s intercession and verified by Church authorities is needed for beatification; a second such miracle would be needed for canonization.

After the funeral, Father Kapaun’s remains will be driven to a

site near the Veterans' Memorial Park where his casket will be placed on a horse-drawn military caisson.

The procession will slowly move east from the park about a half-mile to the cathedral.

Father Kapaun will receive military honors, a 21-gun salute, and "Taps," before his remains are carried into the cathedral by members of the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division from Fort Hood, Texas.

Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division from Fort Riley, Kansas, also will take part in the various events planned for welcoming the priest home.

"There will be opportunities to visit him and pray at the cathedral after these events are over," Carter said, adding that it is unknown how long Father Kapaun will be interred at the cathedral.

"If he is named 'blessed,' we will probably begin working on a shrine," Carter said.

More information about Father Kapaun's life, ministry and sainthood cause can be [found here](#). Details are being finalized for his funeral and other events and also will be available on the website.

*Riggs is editor of The Catholic Advance, newspaper of the Diocese of Wichita.*