

Correspondence of the Presiding Bishop and President of the NCCB on the Canonization of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

As the Roman Catholic Church approached the day on which Elizabeth Ann Seton would be canonized, Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote to Bishop John M. Allin, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, inviting its representatives to the canonization in Rome. In part he wrote:

“With gratitude to God, our Church plans soon to celebrate its joyful recognition of the holiness of life of Elizabeth Seton. Her canonization as a saint will be proclaimed by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI at St. Peter’s Basilica on Sunday, September the fourteenth.

“We are deeply aware that Elizabeth Seton began her Christian life as a child of The Episcopal Church and continued her membership in your Church until after the death of her husband and her decision to embrace the religious life of a nun. So our joy at her canonization would not be complete unless I shared with you our deep appreciation of The Episcopal Church and all it did to enrich and strengthen the life of one who in time became the source of so many blessings to us. Her canonization is a particular source of joy to American Catholics. She is the first native born American to be proclaimed a saint by our Church. But more than that, the Catholic Church in America, as a result of her inspiration and greatness of soul, came to be endowed with many institutions carrying on programs of education, care for the sick and social service. She is rightly regarded as the mother of much that has been entrusted to us and, we hope, a source of much needed help to the people of our country.

“The Holy Father has indicated that he would be pleased if the National Conference of Catholic Bishops would extend an invitation to The Episcopal Church to send a delegation

to the celebration in Rome. It is my great pleasure in turn, by this letter, to do so."

The Presiding Bishop replied as follows:

"It is with thanksgiving to God for the community and love growing between our two Churches that I respond to your invitation from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, made on behalf of Pope Paul VI, to send a delegation to the canonization of Elizabeth Seton at St. Peter's Basilica on September the fourteenth.

"The participation of our delegation will signify, as you have said, the contribution the Episcopal Church made throughout the earlier part of her life. It will also signify the certain bond of baptism and faith in the Lord which makes us one in the Body of Christ despite our divisions. Perhaps God will help us to see this truth more clearly through her.

"We rejoice with you in the heritage of Elizabeth Seton bequeathed to the Roman Catholic Church in America through her religious life as a nun, her service and charity and educational work.

"We are pleased that these persons have agreed to be our delegation at the celebration in Rome:

The Rt. Rev. David K. Leighton, Bishop of Maryland.

The Rt. Rev. J. Stuart Wetmore, Suffragan Bishop of New York

The Rev. Geoffrey R. Skrinar, Rector, St. Andrew's Church, Staten Island, New York

". . . We look forward to learning more through our delegation about the life and work of Elizabeth Seton and her contribution to the Church and the nation.

With my best personal regards, I am

Faithfully yours,
Bishop John M. Allin"
August 22, 1975

Archbishop Bernardin confirmed these arrangements:

"It was with great joy that I received your letter of August

22 in response to my invitation to send a delegation to the canonization of Elizabeth Seton in Rome on September 14. I am delighted to learn that Bishop Leighton, Bishop Wetmore and Reverend Skrinar will be able to attend.

". . . With cordial good wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin"
August 26, 1975