A Saint for Pennsylvania:
Loretto Couple Promotes Sainthood for Prince-Priest Gallitzin,
Apostle of the Alleghenies
by Blanche McGuire

In April 2014, Pope Francis said:
Priestly joy is deeply bound up with God's holy and faithful people, for it is an eminently missionary joy. Our anointing is meant for anointing God’s holy and faithful people: for baptizing and confirming them, healing and sanctifying them, blessing, comforting and evangelizing them. And ... this joy is one which only springs up when the shepherd is in the midst of his flock.
(Homily given by Pope Francis at his Holy Chrism Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on Holy Thursday, April 17, 2014)

No words better describe Prince Demetrius Augustin Gallitzin (1770-1840), the Russian prince who gave up a life of privilege to labor for forty years among pioneer settlers in Cambria County, Pennsylvania. The son of a Russian Prince and German Countess, Gallitzin discovered his vocation when he traveled to Baltimore on an educational tour in 1792. Ordained by Bishop Carroll in 1795, Prince Gallitzin became the first priest to receive all of his Orders for priesthood in the United States. That same year he first came to a remote Cambria County* settlement on a sick call. Warmly welcomed by the settlers, Gallitzin was told that the settlement’s founder, Captain Michael McGuire, a Revolutionary War veteran, had set aside land for a Catholic Church.

The settlers asked Gallitzin to take possession of this land and become their priest. Four years later, when Bishop John Carroll gave Gallitzin permission to return to McGuire’s Settlement, the parish Gallitzin founded became the first English-speaking Catholic church between Lancaster, Pennsylvania and St. Louis, Missouri.**

From 1799 until his death in 1840, Prince Gallitzin lived and worked in Cambria County among his beloved and sometimes troublesome mountaineers. He founded the town of Loretto (now home to St. Francis University, the Franciscans Friars of the Third Order Regular, a Carmelite Monastery and the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel), and spent all that he had to help new settlers acquire land in his Catholic community. He established missions in outlying settlements such as Johnstown, Ebensburg, Bedford and Somerset, started a school, cared for orphans, and wrote pamphlets defending the Faith against attacks by non-Catholics. Most importantly, he administered the sacraments to three generations of pioneer families, laying a foundation of Faith that still endures among many of their descendants.

Two such descendants of Prince Gallitzin’s early parishioners, Betty Seymour and her husband, Frank, have led the Cause for Gallitzin’s canonization. Long time residents of Loretto, Betty is a retired schoolteacher while Frank is a retired welfare administrator for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Seymours have been interested in Prince Gallitzin for decades. In 1988, Frank founded the Prince Gallitzin Historical Association of Loretto. Betty’s work on Prince Gallitzin began in the bitterly cold winter of that same year when she had a teaching sabbatical. Snug by her fireplace with hot tea at hand, she requested and read all books on Gallitzin available from interlibrary loan as well as their own collections and those housed at the Gallitzin Chapel House.

She also consulted two well-known authorities on Gallitzin: Grace Murphy of Loretto and Monsignor Paul Lenz, a Cambria County native who served for years in the Altoona-Johnstown diocese. Betty credits Monsignor Lenz with breathing life into the Gallitzin Cause when he was curator of the Prince Gallitzin Chapel House in Loretto.

Interest in Prince Gallitzin’s canonization had long been present in Cambria County with initial efforts starting in the 1870s and 1960s. However, this interest became more pronounced when St. Michael the Archangel Church in Loretto was declared a minor basilica in 1996.

In 2004, the Seymours were part of a local grass roots task force established by Bishop Joseph Adamec of the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese to determine if a Cause for the canonization of Prince Gallitzin should be initiated. Because no living witnesses could testify about Gallitzin’s fame of sanctity, the diocese had to pursue a ‘historic Cause’ and prove that Gallitzin had a long and widespread reputation for holiness.

The day before the task force first met, atheists demonstrated at St. Michael’s Church in Loretto and harassed churchgoers. A church official quipped that Gallitzin’s Cause must be just since the Devil chose that week to make mischief!

The task force carefully examined Prince Gallitzin’s writings to assess his adherence to Catholic doctrine. They also investigated popular interest in Gallitzin since his death in 1840. Evidence collected included the many books written about Gallitzin and pilgrimages to Loretto where thousands of visitors have toured Gallitzin’s tomb and signed registers at the Chapel House, once Gallitzin’s home and now a museum. Cambria County also boasts a town, a forest and a state park named for Gallitzin.

After assessing the evidence, the task force initiated a Cause for canonization. They considered it appropriate that such Cause originate from the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown where Prince Gallitzin spent most of his life.

Bishop Joseph Adamec received the task force’s recommendation in January 2005. In March he sent it to Rome requesting a “Nihil Obstat” – a statement that no impediments exist for the Gallitzin Cause. The turnaround time was swift. By June, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved the petition for a “Nihil Obstat” and declared Gallitzin a “Servant of God.”

The diocese’s next step was to prove to Rome that Prince Gallitzin possessed Heroic Virtue and should be declared Venerable. Collecting evidence for this determination would take eight more years. The diocesan process followed procedures outlined in a 2007 Vatican document “Sanctorum Mater ... Instruction for Conducting Diocesan or Eparchial Inquiries on the Causes of Saints.”

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Bishop Adamec formally opened Prince Gallitzin's Cause at a Mass at St. Michael the Archangel Basilica in Loretto, PA, on March 11, 2007. During the Mass, all appointees took solemn oaths to fulfill their duties and to keep the process secret.

Betty Seymour was appointed diocesan postulator with Frank as assistant postulator. The Seymours were charged to collect materials including original letters/documents/writings by Gallitzin and letters and other materials about him and to promote devotion to his Cause.

Monsignor Michael Servinsky was named “Delegate Instructor,” Bishop Adamec’s representative charged with coordinating all facets of the Cause.

The diocese also established Theological and Historical Commissions. The Theological Commission was to examine Gallitzin’s own writings while the Historical Commission also reviewed secondary materials about him.

Although the Seymours had spent decades collecting materials about Gallitzin, their research now took on a new dimension. They sent official diocesan letters to 30 archives, libraries, religious institutions and museums in the United States and Europe. Courthouses in all counties of Gallitzin's missions were diligently searched for all legal documents involving Gallitzin.

Multiple fires at the then St. Francis College in Loretto had destroyed many original Gallitzin materials but the amount remaining was still formidable. Prince Gallitzin had corresponded with many individuals including Bishop John Carroll and the bishop's cousin, Charles Carroll (signer of the Declaration of Independence), other wealthy donors, fellow priests, bankers, newspapers and family, friends and others in Germany.

Archives that provided original letters and documents of Gallitzin’s included: the Associated Archives in Baltimore, Mount Saint Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, MD; Saint Vincent Archabbey and College in Latrobe, PA; St. Francis University in Loretto; Georgetown University; the University of Notre Dame; Prince Gallitzin Chapel House, Loretto, PA; Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center, Wynnewood, PA; Pennsylvania Archives, Harrisburg, PA; LWL- Archivant Fur Westfalen Munster, Germany; Universitats-und Landesbibliotek Munster, Germany; Achivio di Propaganda Fide, Citta del Vaticano and Archive of the Oeuvres Pontificales Missionaires, Lyon.

Betty believes that the Holy Spirit guided the process all along. One of her most extraordinary finds was a collection of Gallitzin letters located in a museum in Munster, Germany. All of course were in German or French. When Betty asked for translations, her German contacts did it for free as did the German-to-English translator Anja Wagner and the French translator, Fr. Ledoux, a member of the Historical Commission. The translations took three years.

Eventually, the Seymours located one hundred four original letters written by Gallitzin, with an added 27 found in publications. These included several letters written by Gallitzin when he was 17 and one when he was only 11. To this were added eight booklets and a compiled book of original writings. There were forty-four letters “to and about” Gallitzin, and sixty-one articles on/about Gallitzin from 1781 through 1970; most of these letters were produced within his lifetime. With an extensive bibliography, major books copied and all official forms needed the total pages were 6,445.

By 2013, the Seymours had copied, analyzed and assembled thousands of documents supporting the Gallitzin Cause. They worked closely with Father Luis Escalante, the Roman Postulator working toward Gallitzin's canonization. Dr. Escalante was appointed Roman Postulator in January 2013 during a visit to the Diocese.

The last phase of the diocesan inquiry was the testimony of about 20 witnesses who attested to the impact of Prince Gallitzin during his lifetime and down to the present day. Coordinated by Father Byrnes, Judicial Vicar of the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese, these interviews were conducted under oaths of secrecy with the witnesses themselves a cross-section of those knowledgeable about or influenced by Gallitzin. One respondent was a descendant of the Hugh McConnell family whose orphaned ancestor was raised by Gallitzin and another was a direct descendant of Captain Michael McGuire. Also interviewed was Monsignor Paul Lenz whose years of research on Gallitzin provided invaluable assistance to the Cause effort. The diocese even interviewed a relative of Gallitzin whose Mother had been a Gallitzin Princess.

On October 30, 2013, the diocesan inquiry officially concluded with another Mass at St. Michael’s. The principal celebrant at this Mass was Bishop Mark L. Bartchak (who had replaced Bishop Adamec). Father Luis Escalante concelebrated and that following week he hand delivered three large sealed cases of Gallitzin files to the Vatican.

The next steps in the canonization process reside with the Vatican and are expected to take years. The Congregation of the Causes of Saints will carefully evaluate Gallitzin materials provided by the Seymours and others. Additional processes will follow. If all goes well, Prince Gallitzin will eventually be determined to have lived a life of heroic virtue and established a fame of sanctity and will be declared Venerable.

Miracles are required for the final two stages: beatification and canonization. Any miracles under investigation for Prince Gallitzin fall under the secrecy rules and cannot be discussed. Over the years, several people have reported favors through Prince Gallitzin but Betty stressed that the miracles needed for sainthood must be current, directly attributed to Gallitzin and proven beyond any doubt.

The Seymours remain optimistic about the process and are excited about having a saint from around the corner.

As Frank said:

“As a kid going to parochial school, I prayed to saints from overseas. Prince Gallitzin would be a saint from our neighborhood. We can walk the same paths he walked, touch the same things he touched, encounter the same things he loved in nature and experience first hand the things he felt as he made his way around Pennsylvania. He's right here for us not at a distance.”

Many parish priests are outstanding pastors and make a difference to their parishioners. Few are remembered and honored beyond their lifetimes. Prince Gallitzin is one of these notable few. More than two hundred years after his ministry began in the Alleghenies, Prince Gallitzin is still very much a shepherd in the midst of his flock.
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INTERCESSORY PRAYER TO PRINCE GALLITZIN

O God, light of the faithful and shepherd of souls, who sent Servant of God Demetrius Gallitzin to serve God's people in the Allegheny Mountains, feeding your sheep by his words and forming them by his example, pour out your Spirit to sow seeds of truth in people's hearts and to awaken in them obedience to the faith.

May the Gospel continue to be preached and the Sacraments bring power and grace to the faithful. By the example of this man of faith, Demetrius Gallitzin, may your people advance in the path of salvation and love.

Confident of your faithfulness to us, we humbly ask you, our God, to grant us the favor of (name your intention). May Christ's saving work continue to the end of the ages, and may we feel a more urgent call to work for the salvation of every creature. We pray this, as did your priest Demetrius Gallitzin, through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Material for this article was largely based on the author's 2014 interviews with Frank and Betty Seymour. Other sources were a six-part series on Gallitzin's canonization process appearing in The Catholic Register, official publication of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, from February 18, 2008 to April 28, 2008; an October 21, 2013 article by Msgr. Timothy Stein in The Catholic Register entitled "October 30 Mass at Basilica Will Mark Conclusion of Diocesan Phase of Prince Gallitzin Cause"; and a March 10, 2007 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article by Ann Rodgers titled "Sainthood sought for Gallitzin".

Betty and Frank Seymour.
Courtesy: Blanche McGuire

Pennsylvania Historical Marker for Demetrius Gallitzin.
Courtesy: Kathleen M. Washy.

Souvenir postcard of Father Gallitzin's Chapel, rectory, and statue.
Courtesy: Sisters of St. Joseph of Hazle Archives