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# Ernesto Cofiño Declared Venerable

Guatemalan, husband and father of five, he was a pioneer in pediatrics in Guatemala.

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This morning, the Holy Father authorized the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints to promulgate decrees for eleven canonization causes. Among these is the decree on the heroic virtues of Ernesto Cofiño (1899-1991), a Guatemalan, father of five, and pediatrician, a profession he carried out especially in the

service of children in needy families. For a few years he led Caritas Guatemala. He joined Opus Dei in 1956.

When he learned of the announcement from the Holy See, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, Prelate of Opus Dei, said, “Let us thank our Lord and our Lady for this joyful news and let us also be grateful to the Holy Father for wanting to make this decision. Ernesto responded to God’s grace and his vocation by living the Christian virtues in his family, in his profession as a doctor, and in generous service to those most in need: the sick, the poor, orphans. Together with his wife Clemencia, he transformed his home – blessed with the gift of five children – into a bright and cheerful home, which was an example for those who knew him.”

In an interview, the postulator of the cause, Fr. Santiago Callejo, highlights Dr. Cofiño's generous life: “Ernesto knew how to be a loving husband and dedicated father. He aimed to be a good doctor, a great professional, knowing that work was his way of serving others and changing the piece of the world God had entrusted to him. In this, he is similar to most of us: work and family are where we need to act as Jesus would. Ernesto devoted himself to serving others with all his heart. He also cared about fostering his own life as a Christian, and he encouraged those around him to grow in their spiritual lives.”

In the postulator's opinion, Dr. Cofiño “will be a familiar inspiration for the Church in Guatemala.” He adds that his reputation of holiness has spread widely in recent years: “Every day, we receive stories from many different places, although

people from his native land and – since he was a doctor – people seeking his intercession to recover their health predominate.” Callejo invites everyone “to take advantage of this new step towards his beatification by asking God for favors through the new venerable.”

## **Biographical overview**

Ernesto Cofiño was born in Guatemala City on 5 June 1899. In 1919, he started studying medicine at the Sorbonne (France). Dr. Robert Debré, who is considered one of the founders of modern pediatrics, directed his thesis. He married Clemencia Samayoa in 1933, and they had five children: Ernesto, Clotilde Clemencia, Sofía, Roberto, and José Luis.

He approached pediatrics with a profound understanding of the person, leading him not only to take care of the physical health of his

patients but also to make their problems his own. A pioneer in pediatric research in Guatemala, he fought against malnutrition and childhood diseases and held the Chair of Pediatrics at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of San Carlos (USAC).

Motivated by his faith and a desire for solidarity, he encouraged and supported initiatives to defend life; he got personally involved in many of them, benefiting expectant mothers, orphans, and street children. In addition, he offered concrete solutions to various social problems, collaborating in the founding of asylums and care centers. From 1951 to 1955, he was the director of the Educational Assistance Center (the *Centro Educativo Asistencial*, formerly the *Hospicio Nacional*); he also directed the Society for the Protection of Children (1940-1946) and the

National Fight against Tuberculosis (1945-1946). During his time leading Caritas in Guatemala, he organized the distribution of food in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In 1956, he discovered his vocation to Opus Dei, an institution of the Catholic Church founded by St. Josemaría Escrivá on 2 October 1928, which aims to encourage people in every sector of society to seek holiness in the middle of the world through ordinary work. While practicing his medical profession and taking part in numerous social initiatives, he intensified his relationship with God through daily Mass and communion, frequent confession, prayer, sacrifices in ordinary life, and other Christian practices. He had a great devotion to the Mother of God and prayed the Rosary daily. He dedicated time to studying and improving his religious

formation. He intensified his personal commitment to his friends and acquaintances, sharing his joy and faith with many people. He was drawn to the idea of putting the social doctrine of the Church into practice.

He actively collaborated with organizations for the education, professional training, and personal development of farmers, women, workers, people with very limited resources, and in the formation of university students. He continued this service to others until the age of 92.

Throughout the years, he endeavored to balance his family life and professional work harmoniously. As he once said, “profession and life are inseparable: alongside those medical-professional and social activities is my home life.” Clemencia, his wife, was a teacher.

Dr. Cofiño described her as follows: “She was the relief and support in times of difficulty, encouragement in moments of failure, and joy in the home that five children came to fill.” Clemencia passed away in 1963. From that moment on, Ernesto dedicated himself to his children more intensely, without neglecting his profession and the care of the sick and needy.

Ernesto died on 17 October 1991, in Guatemala City. He sought God’s company and consolation throughout his illness (a cancer detected in 1981, which recurred in 1991).

## **Timeline of the cause for canonization**

On 31 July 2000, the diocesan informative process on the life, virtues, and reputation of holiness of the Servant of God was opened in the

presence of the Archbishop of Guatemala City. 45 witnesses were questioned over 58 sessions. The closing session took place on 5 April 2001, in the archbishop's presence. On 15 March 2002, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome granted the decree of legal validity for the diocesan process, and a relator was appointed. Meanwhile, the preparation of the *Positio super Vita, Virtutibus et Fama Sanctitatis* of the Servant of God began. This document is 771 pages in length and was submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in February 2021.

On 15 November 2022, under the guidance of the Promoter of the Faith, the commission of theological consultants of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints gave a positive response to the question of the Servant of God's heroic exercise of virtues. A year later, the ordinary

session of cardinals and bishops pronounced in favor of the heroic virtues of Ernesto Cofiño. Finally, today, Pope Francis authorized the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree of the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Ernesto Cofiño.

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