



SUPERIORE GENERALE  
DELLA CONGREGAZIONE DEI CHIERICI MARIANI  
DELL'IMMACOLATA CONCEZIONE DELLA B. V. M.

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**CIRCULAR LETTER FOR THE OPENING OF THE BEATIFICATION PROCESS  
OF THE SERVANT OF GOD FABIAN AND FOUR COMPANIONS, MARTYRS**

Rome, Easter, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Prot. N. 52/2021

*Mother of the Saints, the Church has always preserved their memory  
by proposing to the faithful examples of holiness in the sequela Christi.*

“Sanctorum Mater”

Instruction of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints  
for conducting diocesan or eparchial inquiries  
in the causes of Saints

Dear Confreres:

In spite of the tremendous difficulties caused by the pandemic, the Jubilee celebrations of the 350th Anniversary of our Congregation bring the blessed fruits of God's benevolence to us.

One such fruit is the reception of the consent from several Church institutions and the commencement of the beatification process of the Servant of God Fabian and four companions, priests of the Congregation of Marian Fathers: Andrew, Eugene, Janis and Vaclovas (also known as Vladas). Our Congregation is the originator of this process while the bishop in whose territory the process has already been initiated is the Metropolitan of Warsaw. This process took shape in recent years, although its history concerning the first three Servants of God is already several years old.

**The development of the process of the Servant of God Fabian and 4 companions**

On May 31, 2003, the process of the 20th Century Catholic martyrs of the Communist Regime was opened in St. Petersburg, Russia; it was entitled: “Causa Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii Servorum Dei Eduardi Profittlich Archiepiscopi titularis Hadrianopolitani in Haemimonto Administratoris Apostolici Estoniensis, ex Societate Iesu et XV Sociorum.” Three of our confreres-priests were included in this process from the beginning: Fabian Abrantowicz, Andrew Cikoto and Janis Mendriks. Once begun, this process underwent various changes and was very-slow moving. Therefore, the Postulator of the Archdiocesan Process in Moscow made numerous, although informal, suggestions that the Congregation of Marian Fathers should withdraw its members from the joint Moscow process. As a consequence, on January 4, 2019, the General Council opted to retract the above-mentioned three Servants of God, members of our Congregation, from the process conducted by the Archdiocese of Our Lady in Moscow and to transfer the matter to another diocese, so that our Congregation would also become the sole originator of the process.

There were two reasons for which we decided to ask Card. Kazimierz Nycz, Metropolitan of Warsaw, to conduct the process of Fabian and two companions. First, it was necessary to establish – as per the guidelines of the canonization law (see *Sanctorum Mater*, art. 21, § 1) – that it was not possible to conduct the process in the dioceses where

the Servants of God have died or to locate the places of their burial. They gave their lives in prisons and were buried either in mass graves or graves which are impossible to identify today. This was also one of the reasons for initiating the joint process in Moscow. Secondly, at the time of their death, two of the three Servants of God belonged to the Polish Province, and it is in the archives of this Province in Warsaw that the most important documentation for the process can be found. Such a situation is indicated in the Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* (cf. art. 22, § 1), when it discusses the possibility of conducting a process in the diocese that contains most of the evidence.

Cardinal K. Nycz showed great kindness towards our Congregation and consented to our request, thus making it a process of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, which is highly experienced and has many specialists in the field of conducting beatification processes. For our part, the greatest responsibility rests with the Polish Province as the appropriate administrative entity for direct relations between the Congregation of Marian Fathers and the Archdiocese of Warsaw. By a letter dated May 11, 2018, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints established the new process under the title: “Varsaviensis Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii Servorum Dei Fabiani Abrantowicz et II Sociorum, Sacerdotum Congregationis Clericorum Marianorum ab Immaculata Conceptione Beatae Virginis Mariae in odium Fidei, uti fertur, interfectorum.”

During the transfer of the process of the Servant of God Fabian and two companions, a possibility presented itself – of which the Office of the Postulator General of our Congregation was previously aware – to add to the process another two of our confreres who were reputed martyrs. These men are: Eugene Kulesza, a priest of the Polish Province, and Vladislovas (or Vladas) Mažonas (also: Mažonavičius), a priest of the Lithuanian Province. It is generally believed that they both gave their lives for the Faith, and the evidence of their fidelity to God and the Church is indisputable. The memory of their martyrdom has endured throughout the years, and many people were anxiously awaiting the opening of their process; they had a reputation as martyrs. The fact that they were not included in the joint process, initiated in 2003 by the Archdiocese of Our Lady in Moscow, to which the other candidates from the Congregation of Marian Fathers (Fabian Abrantowicz, Andrzej Cikoto and Janis Mendriks) had been submitted, was due to several reasons: the hurried manner of collecting the testimonies and in a related way, a certain distractedness on the part of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, as well as the relatively short period of time that had elapsed between the gaining of independence by countries previously dominated by communism and the beginning of the process. As early as the first months in the process conducted by the Archdiocese of Moscow, members of our Congregation and some lay faithful began to voice strong opinions that other Marians who had been martyred for Christ and the Church should be added to the process in addition to the three original candidates. Consequently, in its session on January 4, 2019, the General Council unanimously decided to ask both the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Archdiocese of Warsaw to include the two aforesaid priests. Finally, after examining the archives of the Dicasteries of the Holy See and obtaining the *nihil obstat* from them, by a letter dated February 9, 2021, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved the inclusion of both candidates for the altars and opened the process of the Servant of God Fabian and 4 companions entitled: “Varsaviensis Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii Servorum Dei Fabiani Abrantowicz et IV Sociorum, Sacerdotum Congregationis Clericorum Marianorum ab Immaculata Conceptione Beatae Virginis Mariae in odium Fidei, uti fertur, interfectorum”. This concluded all formal matters related to the initiation of the process and our Congregation’s assuming the responsibility for it, as the originator of the cause.

## Brief biographies of the Servants of God

**The Servant of God Fabian Abrantowicz** was born on Sept. 14, 1884. After graduating from the Seminary of the Mohyliv Diocese in St. Petersburg, Russia, and also from the Spiritual Academy, also in St. Petersburg, he was ordained to the priesthood on Nov. 9, 1908. He then carried out various pastoral duties. He obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leuven, Belgium. In 1914, he began working pastorally in St. Petersburg, where he was also appointed a seminary professor. After the fall of the Russian Empire and the closure of the seminary in St. Petersburg by the Bolsheviks, Bishop Z. Łoziński appointed him rector of the seminary of the Diocese of Minsk (Belarus). When the Bolsheviks occupied Minsk in 1920, F. Abrantowicz went to Nowogródek (Poland) and continued his pastoral work. In 1922, Bishop Z. Łoziński named him a professor of the newly organized lower seminary in Nowogródek and then the judge of the church tribunal, post-synodal inspector, censor of religious books, member of the diocesan administrative body and the seminary's supervisory council. In 1923, F. Abrantowicz was named Chapter prelate and then the commissary and inspector of monasteries. In 1924, he became a Vicar General of part of that diocese.

F. Abrantowicz joined our Congregation in 1926 and started his novitiate in Druya (Belarus). Initially, he served in Druya, but on May 5, 1928, Pope Pius XI named him archimandrite and ordinary – apostolic administrator for Russian Catholics of the Eastern Rite for the entire China with headquarters in Harbin. At the beginning, trying to set up the mission entrusted to him, he ran into tremendous difficulties. There were shortages of just about everything, while his contacts with the Holy See were restricted. However, he undertook his new responsibilities with faith. A year later, he opened a shelter and school for Russian boys – orphans from the border lands. With time, this orphanage was transformed into the St. Nicholas High School. Since the majority of Russians were Orthodox, he also took them under his pastoral care. From 1930-1932, Fr. Fabian also fulfilled the duties of the Ordinary of the Roman Rite.

In April 1939, Fr. Abrantowicz went to Rome on an *ad limina* visit. He also participated in the General Chapter of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, and in August of the same year, he departed for Poland. In addition to visiting the Marian monasteries, he also went to see his closest family in Nowogródek. The outbreak of World War II on Sept. 1, 1939 found him there. Before returning to Rome, he decided to visit in Lviv the local Greek Catholic Bishops, A. Szeptycki, J. Slipyj and M. Czarnecki. He fell ill and stayed at the local hospital, following which he resolved to leave the region occupied by the Soviet Union and to reach the German-occupied territories. At the border crossing in Rawa Ruska, he was detained by the Germans who then delivered him to the Soviet border guards. On Oct. 22, 1939, Fr. Fabian was arrested and transported to the NKVD (Russian acronym for *People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs*) in Lviv. There he was speedily charged with membership in a Catholic religious congregation, actively opposing the Soviet authorities, and activities opposed to communism. In January 1941, Fr. Fabian was transported to Burytki prison in Moscow. On Apr. 23, 1942, a special NKVD unit sentenced him to 10 years of work in a labor camp in Karaganda (Kazakhstan), but – for unknown reasons – he never left the prison. On January 2, 1946, he died there *ex aerumnis carceris*, having given a moving testimony of Faith not only to his fellow prisoners, but even to his executioners who cruelly tormented him, thus causing his death.

**The Servant of God Andrzej (Engl.: Andrew) Cikoto** was born on December 5, 1891. He was ordained a priest in St. Petersburg, Russia, on June 13, 1914. He worked first as a pastor of the Mołodeczno (Maladzyechna) parish in Belarus, and then he was named the

procurator of the Minsk seminary and a professor of fundamental theology. Following the closing of that seminary, he returned to the Vilnius Diocese and joined the Congregation of Marian Fathers. He made his religious vows on September 24, 1920. He returned after a brief stay in the U.S. and began organizing a Marian house in Druya (Belarus), while carrying out a number of different activities: pastoral, educational, charitable, cultural and social. In 1933, the General Chapter elected him Superior General, which office he fulfilled creatively and with care for the Congregation. As a new Superior General was elected in 1939 and the Servant of God Fabian Abrantowicz imprisoned by the NKVD, Pope Pius XII appointed Fr. Cikoto the Apostolic Administrator of the Eastern Rite Catholics in Harbin; because of this, Fr. Andrew converted to the Eastern Rite. On December 22, 1948, the Chinese militia surrounded the Harbin mission and arrested all of the Marians, including the Servant of God Andrew and several lay people. Three days later, they were all handed over to the NKVD. First, the Servant of God was imprisoned in the Siberian city of Chita. He was accused, among other things, of inciting people against the Soviet Union and espionage for the Vatican. On Sept. 28, 1949, the NKVD passed a sentence: 25 years of forced labor camps. Father Andrew was held in several labor camps, and finally was brought to Tayshet. While in the labor camps, he endeavored to celebrate the Eucharist daily, he heard confessions, distributed Holy Communion, and became a model for other priests and the faithful. His health, ruined from the very beginning by severe interrogations, continued to deteriorate. He died *ex aerumnis carceris* in the prison hospital in "Ozernoye" on February 13, 1952.

**The Servant of God Eugeniusz (Engl.: Eugene) Kulesza** was born on March 8, 1891. He joined the Congregation of Marian Fathers on January 1, 1915. He was ordained a priest on October 2, 1921. On January 10, 1924, he obtained a doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of Fribourg, Switzerland. From 1926, he served in the Bielany College of the Marian Fathers in Warsaw: first as a secretary, a teacher of the propaedeutics of philosophy, of religion, a tutor and a confessor of the students, and from 1936, as an efficient director and a talented representative of the Congregation before the school and the Polish State authorities: among other things, he conducted the financial organizational reform of the College. In 1938, after the Polish administrative authorities removed the Belarusian Marians from the religious house in Druya, his superiors sent the Servant of God Eugene there to save that institution, which was going through serious difficulties. Father Eugene made himself quickly known as a good superior, a talented director, an enthusiastic man of great personal holiness. From the time of the Soviet occupation in 1939, he devoted himself to pastoral work: he preached sermons and retreats, tirelessly heard confessions, inspired priests and nuns, instructed them on how to defend the Faith and the faithful persecuted by the Bolsheviks, and warned against involvement in political matters. After the outbreak of the German-Bolshevik war in 1941, he was arrested on June 30, 1941 and murdered by Soviet soldiers fleeing from the Germans. A few days later, the faithful found his body and buried it at the church in Druya. He was immediately and spontaneously declared a martyr by the faithful.

**The Servant of God Vladislovas (also known as Vladas) Mažonas** was born on June 24, 1881. He was ordained a priest on June 29, 1906. He joined the Congregation of Marian Fathers on September 4, 1924, after which he also served in Mariampole as a youth educator and editor of the then-known Catholic periodical *Šaltinis*, where he wrote about the persecution of the Church in the Soviet Union. From 1932-1934 he conducted a pastoral ministry for the Lithuanians in London. In 1934, he was sent to Harbin in

Manchuria to assist at the Russian Ordinariate of the Byzantine-Slavic Rite run by the Congregation of Marian Fathers. Dedicated and creative in his service, he was also a deputy superior of the mission, educator and teacher of religion in all of the schools of the Ordinariate, the editor of the magazine *Katolicheskiy Vestnik*, the official journal of the Ordinariate. In 1938, he returned to Marijampole in Lithuania, where he again served as the editor of the magazine *Šaltinis*. After the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet army in 1940, NKVD arrested Fr. Vladas on June 14, 1941 and deported him to Kraslag, at the Rieshoty station, camp 7, in the vicinity of Lake Baikal, in Krasnoyarsk Krai in Siberia. He was subjected to very severe interrogations and torture there, which irreparably ruined his health. He was accused of being a rioter and an instigator of hostility against the Soviet Union, based on religious motives and his personal convictions. On April 21, 1942, he was sentenced to death. However, the sentence was not carried out; instead, it was decided to send him to Moscow for further interrogations. He arrived in Moscow only in February 1944 and was immediately hospitalized in the prison hospital of Butyrki, where he died in January 1945, *ex aerumnis carceris*, his faith unbroken until the end.

**The Servant of God Janis (Engl.: John) Mendriks** was born on January 21, 1907. He joined the Congregation of Marian Fathers on October 26, 1926. On April 3, 1938 he was ordained to the priesthood. He served zealously in the Marian Fathers' parish in Vilani and in several nearby parishes. During World War II, he ministered in various locations. When the German army occupied Latvia, he was appointed pastor in Ostrone (Latvia). During his ministering in that parish, partisans killed a policeman who had collaborated with the Germans. The occupying authorities ordered a solemn Catholic funeral, but the Servant of God refused, because the man openly lived in sin with a concubine without entering into the sacrament of marriage. On the night before the funeral, unknown people filled the prepared grave with dirt and dug another one outside the cemetery grounds. The occupying authorities placed the blame on Fr. Janis – the parish priest. He was subjected to multiple interrogations and threats to be sent to a concentration camp. With his religious superiors' consent, the Servant of God fled and went into hiding for about two years until 1944, when the Soviet re-occupation began and Fr. Janis was able to resume his service as a parish priest. On October 25, 1950, he was arrested by the Soviet secret police. On March 24, 1951, he was sentenced to 10 years of forced labor at a camp in Vorkuta for "anti-Soviet activism." While in the labor camp, Fr. Janis, full of zeal for saving souls, continued his pastoral work among the prisoners secretly and devotedly. In the wake of the political thaw after Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, the prisoners began a strike to regain freedom. The camp authorities called in the armed forces, which surrounded the camp on August 1, 1953. Convinced that he, as a priest, should be where the people were dying to prepare them to meet God, the Servant of God Janis moved to the first row of the prisoners. He was shot dead while reciting the formula of absolution: "Misereatur vestri Omnipotens Deus "

Dear Confreres,

The Church has always safeguarded the memory of the saints, proposing their example of holiness to the faithful in following Christ (cf. *Sanctorum Mater*). As sons of the Church, we have a duty to undertake the effort of unearthing from the past and proposing such confreres of ours who, remaining strong in faith until the end, gave their lives for Christ in the service of men. The biographies of the five Servants of God given in this letter as brief outlines should be carefully studied, prepared and presented for evaluation by the appropriate commissions as part of the beatification process for the recognition of their martyrdom. In the case of martyrs, the process of recognizing a miracle as a sign of a special intervention of God, which confirms to the Church God's wish to

raise the candidate to the altars, is no longer conducted. Martyrdom itself is a revelation of God's power and the perfect imitation of Christ's Passion.

It is in the properly-understood best interest of both the beatification process of the Servant of God Fabian and 4 companions, as well as our religious community, to spread knowledge about them among the faithful and to encourage them to pray for their beatification, or to pray for favors and miracles through their intercession. Such is our task. Therefore, I encourage you to learn more about the lives of the Servants of God, to study historical and theological aspects related to their lives and teachings, to write papers about them concluding your seminary course, etc. Vice-postulators of this process will be appointed soon. We hope in the Lord's mercy that these candidates will be raised to the glory of the altars as credible witnesses of the Crucified and Risen Christ. We entrust the future of the process to God Himself, as we pray:

Almighty and merciful God, You granted Your servant Fabian and four companions – our confreres – Andrzej, Eugeniusz, Janis and Vladas, the grace of martyrdom and called them to be witnesses of Your Son's Passion and Resurrection. May they be raised, we pray, to the glory of the altars, while we, living out the charism of our Congregation, may faithfully devote our lives until the end in the service of the Church, for the salvation of the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



*Andrzej Pakula*  
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