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Servant of God Sister Blandina Segale, nicknamed "The Fastest Nun in the West," will soon be declared "Venerable," an important step toward canonization, revealed a press conference in Albuquerque, N.M., Jan. 3, 2025. Sister Blandina is pictured in an undated portrait. (OSV News/New Mexico History Museum)

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A religious sister who befriended Billy the Kid, calmed a lynch mob and testified against human trafficking is one step closer to canonization. Servant of God Sister Blandina Segale — an Italian immigrant who ministered during the days of the Wild West — is close to being named "Venerable," said Allen Sánchez, the petitioner of her cause, at a Jan. 3 press conference.

Like Jesus Christ, Sister Blandina reached out to the peripheries, said Santa Fe Archbishop John C. Wester at the press conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, a place where Sister Blandina served for years.

"Jesus was her everything," he said.

Sánchez said he believed the spirituality of Sister Blandina can be summed up in one sentence: "Who are the vulnerable and what do they need from me?"

According to Sánchez, Vatican historians recently have reviewed the "positio," a vetted record of her life, and voted yes to advance her cause.

So far 49 people credit Sister Blandina with a miracle due to her intercession, explained Sánchez. After one of those occurrences is officially deemed miraculous by the church, the soon-to-be Venerable Blandina Segale will be on her way to beatification. A second verified miracle would be needed to advance her cause to the final step: canonization.

Maria Rosa Segale was born Jan. 23, 1850, in Cicagna, Italy, and moved with her family to the United States in 1854. (Sánchez indicated that, if canonized, Sister Blandina would be the patron saint of immigrant children). After graduating from school, she joined the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, who trace their roots to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Segale received the name Sister Blandina in honor of St. Blandina, a martyr during the Roman persecution.

Throughout her life, Sister Blandina founded numerous institutions, including public and Catholic schools and hospitals in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. In Cincinnati, she and her biological sister, Sister Justina, founded a resettlement home for newly arrived Italian immigrants called the Santa Maria Institute. Her life is filled with larger-than-life feats, many of them captured in her diary. The diary was meant to be an account for her sister. At the urging of New Mexico's governor, Sister Blandina's diary was published in 1932 as "At the End of the Santa Fe Trail."

Once, Sister Blandina persuaded a dying young man to forgive his killer, whom she publicly escorted past an angry mob so he could beg forgiveness in person. Her courageous efforts prevented the mob from executing the man and allowed justice to take its course instead.

Another time, she provided medical care to a member of Billy the Kid's gang. Later, when the notorious outlaw attacked a stagecoach Sister Blandina was in, he recognized her and let the travelers go in peace.

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She frequently was an advocate for people who were disadvantaged. According to a Jan. 2 press release, "Sister Blandina and a young woman she saved from the hands

of criminals trafficking young girls for prostitution were the first women to testify in the United States Congress on human trafficking."

Since Sister Blandina's death in 1941, stories of her life have been featured in books, magazines and on screen, including the show "Death Valley Days" (Episode "The Fastest Nun in the West") and a CBS documentary called "Sister Blandina, a Saint for Cincinnati."

A biography from the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati notes that the courageous and hard-working religious sister was seen as sainted in her own time. It relayed how a Cincinnati Post journalist wrote in 1931 about Sister Blandina's return to Italy after 77 years: "Four years old ... when she left her native land; at 81 she returns. She is going to see the Pope about placing Mother Elizabeth Seton among the saints, but people say that S. Blandina is saint enough herself, canonized by 60 years of faithful doing."