

## **NEW YORK CITY STREET CO-NAMED FOR REMARKABLE BELGIAN PRIEST**

### ***FATHER DAMIEN WAY***

The stretch of 33rd Street between First and Second Avenues in Manhattan will be co-named “Father Damien Way” in honor of the Belgian priest who dedicated his life to the lepers of the Hawaiian island of Moloka’i, and who was canonized by the Vatican in 2009.

His Eminence Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan and the Honorable Geert Bourgeois, Minister-President of the Government of Flanders, will celebrate the street co-naming together in an inauguration ceremony at the Chapel of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary on 33rd Street on Monday, May 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 PM. Also in attendance will be Hon. Rosie Mendez, New York City Council Member for District 2 and Hon. J. Kalani English, Hawaiian State Senator for District 7.

*“Following in the steps of Jesus’ ministry to the lepers, Fr. Damien challenged the stigmatizing effects of disease, giving voice to the voiceless and ultimately sacrificing his own life to bring dignity to so many.” -*  
President Barack Obama

Jozef De Veuster was born to a modest family in Belgium in 1840. In spite of his father’s plans for him to take charge of the family business, he entered the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Leuven, took the name of Damien, and left for Hawaii as a missionary in 1864. After ministering in Honolulu, Damien moved to Kalaupapa, a settlement where people with Hansen’s disease, (which was then called leprosy) lived in forced exile on an isolated peninsula on the north shore of Molokai. Deprived from help and basic care the sufferers of this paralyzing, disfiguring and then untreatable disease had to survive in the most harsh and hopeless conditions. Aiming to restore in each leper a sense of worth and personal dignity, Damien constructed chapels and taught the people how to farm and play musical instruments. When he discovered in 1884 that he had lost all feeling in his feet, it was an unmistakable sign that he had contracted leprosy. He would continue to take care of his fellow patients until he succumbed to the disease in 1889. He was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009.

Saint Damien’s self-sacrifice has inspired and fascinated people all over the world. His legacy of faith, compassion and dedication to the most vulnerable among us continues to be an inspiration to many. He was a priest and a healer, a community leader and an early human rights activist, and a catalyst for the current movement to eliminate neglected infectious diseases. He is the spiritual patron of the outcast and those afflicted with Hansen’s disease and HIV/AIDS.

The New York Regional Hansen’s Disease Center at Bellevue Hospital on Manhattan’s East Side 33rd Street is the sole treatment center for the disease in the New York City area at present. It continues Father Damien’s legacy through the treatment of physical and emotional care of patients suffering from this affliction. The chapel of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary on 33rd Street shares the name of the religious order of Father Damien, and serves as a meditation place for the local medical facilities. That makes this part of 33rd Street a fitting place for honoring and remembering this remarkable Belgian personality from Flanders.



For more information about Father Damien’s story and the street co-naming, please contact Nicolas C. Polet, Director of Communications & Public Affairs: [Nicolas@flandershouse.org](mailto:Nicolas@flandershouse.org) – (212) 584-2200 ext. 2004

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