



An altar dedicated to Dr. Jose Gregorio Hernandez is adorned with flowers and statues in his likeness, at the Vargas Public Hospital in Caracas, Venezuela, Feb. 5, 2019. (AP/Rodrigo Abd, File)

by Associated Press

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A man revered by millions as the "doctor of the poor" will be the first saint from Venezuela after Pope Francis approved a decree Tuesday.

A date for the canonization of Dr. José Gregorio Hernández, who died in 1919, has not been set. The Vatican in a statement said [Francis also decided to convene a formal meeting of cardinals to set the dates](#) for future canonizations, but it was not immediately scheduled.

"This historic event, long awaited by the Venezuelan people, is a recognition of the exemplary life and heroic virtues of a man who dedicated his existence to alleviating human suffering and transmitting a message of love and hope," the Archdiocese of Caracas said in a statement. "The Catholic Church recognizes his life of holiness, accompanied by a universal devotion, which today allows him to be elevated to the altar."

[Hernández was beatified in April 2021](#) after the church certified a miracle in the case of a girl who completely recovered after being shot in the head in 2017.

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Hernández, born on Oct. 26, 1864, in the western Venezuela town of Isnotu, never married and graduated as a doctor in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, in 1888. He was convinced that science was one of the main ways to get the South American country out of misery and went on to establish two research institutions as well as teach several classes at the Central University of Venezuela, the nation's oldest and largest.

He traveled to Europe to study and then to become a Catholic monk, but his fragile health was affected by Italy's cold and humid weather. He returned to Venezuela to recover and stayed permanently.

On June 29, 1919, Hernández was hit by a car while crossing a street shortly after picking up medicine at a pharmacy to take to an impoverished woman. His death was caused when his head hit the edge of a sidewalk. An estimated 20,000 people participated in his funeral procession, about a quarter of the population of Caracas at the time.

In 1986, the Vatican declared Hernández "venerable," which means that he led an exemplary Christian life. But to achieve sanctity, teams of doctors, theologians and cardinals must approve miracles attributed to him.

When Pope John Paul II, now a saint, visited Venezuela in 1996, he received a petition signed by 5 million people — at the time, almost one in four Venezuelans — asking him to declare Hernández a saint.