

## Mother Teresa stamp to be issued Sept. 5

Tom Gallagher | Sep. 2, 2010



(CNS/Courtesy of the U.S. Postal Service)

Nobel Peace Prize honoree Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta is now among the hallowed company of actress Katharine Hepburn, the Mackinac Bridge in Michigan, the Lunar Year, distinguished sailors, Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Bill Mauldin, Cowboys of the Silver Screen, the celebrated singer Kate Smith, pioneering African-American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, and the Negro Baseball League.

Why? All of these distinguished individuals and subjects are part of the 2010 U.S. Stamp Program.

On Sept. 5, the anniversary of Mother Teresa's 1997 death, the U.S. Postal Service will issue the Mother Teresa commemorative stamp.

Award-winning artist Thomas Blackshear II of Colorado Springs, Colo., captured a joyful, smiling image of Mother Teresa for the stamp.

In her message celebrating the recent centennial of Mother Teresa's birth on Aug. 26, the Missionaries of Charity Sisters' superior general, Sr. M. Prema, quoted Mother Teresa: "A smile generates smiles and love generates love."

Both the stamp issuance and the centennial celebrations have not been without controversy.

The Madison, Wis., atheist group Freedom from Religion Foundation protested on the grounds that the U.S. Postal Service guidelines suggest not issuing stamps that honor religious groups.

An uproar was created when the owner of the iconic and tallest building in New York City, the Empire State Building, rejected multiple requests to light the upper floors of the building in blue and white, the colors of the saris Mother Teresa's sisters wear, to honor the centennial of her birth Aug. 26. The private company lights the building's upper floors to honor major religious holidays throughout the year, but has a policy against honoring individual religious figures.

Taking advantage of the Empire State Building controversy, the USS Intrepid, a massive warship now

permanently docked in the Hudson River in midtown New York City and housing a museum, announced it would turn on its lights Aug. 26 to honor the antiwar, pro-life Mother Teresa.

The Catholic bishops of Buffalo, N.Y., and St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, asked the public authority that operates the Peace Bridge, which spans the Niagara River between Buffalo and Fort Erie, Ontario, to honor Mother Teresa's birth centennial by lighting up the Peace Bridge. The bridge operator agreed based on Mother Teresa's humanitarian work.

According to David Failor, executive director of Stamp Services in the U.S. Postal Service, "It would be hard to honor people in society without a religious background."

Failor, who is a Nebraska native, pointed out that Fr. Edward Flanagan was honored with a stamp not because he was a Catholic priest, but because he was the pioneering founder of Boys Town, a place for homeless youth in Omaha, Neb.

The 12 guidelines known as the "Stamp Subject Selection Criteria" are set by the U.S. Postal Service and the 14 members of the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee and have "evolved over the years," Failor said. "Mother Teresa is being honored for her humanitarian work."

Each year over 50,000 requests are submitted to Stamp Services for the 20 annual new stamp subjects. Failor and his team of some 20 employees in the nation's capital oversee the work of the advisory committee, whose subject and design committees sift through the ideas.

"The stamp program has room for fun and the pretty subjects that put a smile on people's faces," said Failor. "The program also has room for serious subjects that are educational and inspirational."

After the subject is identified, four contract art directors identify an artist they think will be able to capture the subject. Blackshear, an experienced artist who has already painted 20 stamps, was selected to create the Mother Teresa stamp.

"I got the call in early 2009 to create the Mother Teresa stamp and was thrilled," said Blackshear. Though not a Catholic, he is no stranger to the church. In 2006, he presented a show at the Vatican that included a painting of Pope John Paul II.

"As I began my work, I couldn't get Bob Peak's TIME magazine cover of Mother Teresa out of my mind," said Blackshear, an apprentice of the legendary illustrator and painter Mark English.

Seeking a clean and clear image, Blackshear presented three images of Mother Teresa to the stamp advisory committee: solemn, holy and smiling. The committee chose the joyful image. Blackshear then produced a color rough of the image. After receiving approval of the color rough, he proceeded with the final artwork.

For most stamps, the actual finished art appears on a 4-by-7-inch or 5-by-8-inch canvas. Blackshear, who wanted to get life and beauty and vibrant colors in the Mother Teresa image, started with watercolors. He submitted his final image as acrylic on an artboard. From start to finish, it took almost two months to complete the project.

Postmaster General John E. Potter approved Mother Teresa as a subject and approved the actual image.

The average print run for commemorative stamps is between 30 million and 100 million. The Mother Teresa stamp print run will be 60 million. The stamp will cost 44 cents.

"Mother deserves this honor," said Jim Towey, a friend of Mother Teresa who served as her legal counsel in the

United States and was also the director of White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives from 2002 to 2006. "For over 30 years, her sisters in the United States have provided wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor," he said.

"Wouldn't it be nice if the stamps were free, too?" Towey added with humor.

Retired Charlotte, N.C., Bishop William Curlin, a friend and spiritual advisor to Mother Teresa, summed up the Catholic view of Blessed Mother Teresa: "Mother Teresa's legacy is to help us center our lives in fulfillment of Christ's command to love God with all our heart and love our neighbor as oneself."

[Tom Gallagher writes the *NCR* Mission Management column. On behalf of the Missionaries of Charity and the Office of Postulation for the Cause of Sainthood of Mother Teresa, Gallagher served on a pro bono basis as the first lay administrator of the Mother Teresa of Calcutta Center Inc., a New York State not-for-profit organization whose mission is promote authentic knowledge of and devotion to Mother Teresa. In this capacity, Gallagher wrote the U.S. Postal Service in 2004 recommending Mother Teresa as a candidate for the commemorative stamp program. His e-mail address is tom@tomgallagheronline.com.]

### Online resources

Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee  
[www.usps.com/communications/organization/csac.htm](http://www.usps.com/communications/organization/csac.htm)

Mother Teresa of Calcutta Center  
[www.motherteresa.org](http://www.motherteresa.org)

### National basilica to host stamp-issuing ceremony

The "First Day of Issue" ceremony for the Mother Teresa stamp will be the afternoon of Sept. 5 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

Attending the ceremony will be James H. Bilbray of the postal service board of governors; Postmaster General John E. Potter; Apostolic Nuncio to the United States Archbishop Pietro Sambi; Auxiliary Bishop Barry C. Knestout of Washington; Msgr. Walter R. Rossi, cathedral rector; and Sr. M. Leticia, the provincial superior of the Missionaries of Charity. The artist, Thomas Blackshear II, was also expected to attend.

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