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**On Sunday, Lay Teacher Will Be
The First Puerto Rican Beatified
By The Roman Catholic Church**

By IZASKUN E. LARRAÑETA

Day Staff Writer

He is relatively unknown. But on Sunday, Carlos Manuel “Charlie” Rodríguez will make history, becoming the first Puerto Rican and second layperson in the Americas to be beatified by the Roman Catholic Church.

Beatification is a process through which the church recognizes a deceased person as worthy of public veneration. It is a step toward being declared a saint.

Rodríguez was born in Caguas, Puerto Rico, on Nov. 22, 1918. He was one of five children born to a poor, devout Catholic family.

Not many Puerto Ricans living in southeastern Connecticut have heard of Charlie yet, but he was a pioneer and patron of the liturgical movement in Puerto Rico. About 2,000 people from Puerto Rico are traveling to Rome for the beatification ceremonies.

Rafael Ortiz of Norwich will be making the pilgrimage to Rome. He knew that he could not miss this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

“I first heard about Charlie when I was visiting family in Puerto Rico for the Christmas holidays,” said Ortiz. “I was very proud that the church was recognizing a Puerto Rican for the first time. I am really uplifted, grateful and thankful to God that there is such a good example for our community.”

Artist A. Vonn Hartung, was commissioned to paint the portrait of Carlos Manuel “Charlie” Rodríguez, an experience Hartung says that “absolutely changed my life.”

A. Vonn Hartung, an artist from Waterford who has lived in Puerto Rico for the past 16 years, was commissioned by a Cuban priest, the Rev. Julio Garcia, to paint a portrait of Rodríguez.

“It has absolutely changed my life,” said Hartung. “Before I started to paint, I thought about it for weeks. I thought of what I considered a saint was. I prayed about it. It was a very intimate and spiritual process. I realized how great and humble this man was, and how he lived his life simply.”

Hartung interviewed Rodríguez’s friends and relatives so he could get a sense of who he really was. When he showed the finished portrait to Rodríguez’s two sisters, who are now in their 80s, they were silent, he said.

“They got up and went to the portrait and said, ‘Now speak,’” said Hartung. “It was a very emotional experience. They said it looked exactly like him.”



“[Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodríguez Santiago](#)”

Oil portrait-
at Pontifical North American College, Vatican

The portrait is painted with various symbolic elements, which Hartung said express a visual prayer. Charlie, he said, tells us to listen for the call of the Lord, which is symbolized by an open door. “The light from the path falls upon his left shoulder and leads us to the lamb, symbol of his Savior, and (to) his beloved land, Puerto Rico,” said Hartung.

The archbishop of San Juan, Mons. Roberto González Nieves, commissioned Hartung to paint a second portrait of Rodríguez, which will be presented at his beatification in Rome. It is similar to the first portrait except it is bigger and has St. Peter’s Basilica and the Cathedral of San Juan in the background.

“I came to understand Carlos Manuel through these paintings,” said Hartung, “He is very important because he is a layman. Anyone can follow the footsteps of Christ.... Sainthood is open to us all.”

At the Centro Universitario Católico in Rio Piedras, Rodríguez taught priests, religious sisters and brothers and laypersons about the doctrines of the church. He directed three discussion groups in three towns, conducted religious classes and published a weekly liturgical bulletin. Priests who listened to him explain philosophical and theological concepts said they never heard a person so brilliant in those fields. Rodríguez died of intestinal cancer on July 13, 1963 in his home town of Caguas. Those that were by his deathbed said that he did not complain, and among his final words were, “Let us pray.”

In 1997 Pope John Paul II declared Rodríguez “Venerable,” which means that he lived an extremely holy life. Two years later the Vatican officially recognized that a woman who had terminal cancer had been miraculously healed in 1981 after prayers to Rodríguez for healing.

Rodríguez would have to perform another miracle after his beatification before he can be officially deemed a saint.

The bishops of Puerto Rico declared the year starting on April 29, 2001 and ending this Sunday as the year of the Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.

Churches in our area are also spreading the word of Charlie's beatification.

Sister Mary Jude Lazarus, director of Hispanic Ministries for the Catholic Diocese of Norwich, said that many Puerto Ricans outside of Puerto Rico have not heard of Rodríguez.

She said the parish of Sagrado Corazón de ,Jesus Iglesia in Willimantic would have a Mass on Saturday and a celebration afterwards, in honor of Rodríguez's beatification.

"We will show a video about him so we could get to know him better," said Sister Mary Jude. "We will be emphasizing Puerto Rican culture."

At St. Mary Star of the Sea Church in New London, following the 11:30 am. Spanish Mass Sunday, there will be a special fiesta which will also feature the videotape of Rodríguez's life. Cards with a special prayer for Rodríguez will be distributed.