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Pope Francis recognized the martyrdom of an Italian missionary killed in Myanmar and seven Romanian Catholic bishops — one of whom was secretly named a cardinal by St. Paul VI — persecuted during the communist era.

Pope Francis also advanced the sainthood causes of six other candidates during a meeting March 19 with Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes.

Among the decrees the pope signed was one recognizing the miracle needed for the beatification of Mother Maria Emilia Riquelme Zayas, who founded the Missionary Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate. She was born in 1847 in Granada, Spain, and died there in 1940. The pope recognized the martyrdom of Fr. Alfredo Cremonesi, a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, who worked nearly 30 years in the mountains of Myanmar, then known as Burma, despite periods of intense hardship and conflict.

Born in 1902, the priest went by boat to Burma to serve the Karen people living in isolated villages. He survived the same difficulties as the people when Japanese

troops occupied the nation during World War II and he refused to leave when Karen guerillas launched a rebellion against the new government formed when the nation achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1948.

Now considered the longest running civil war in the world, the conflict included government attacks on the villages where Cremonesi lived. In 1953, soldiers shot him and others, believing they were part of the rebel groups.

Pope Francis recognized the martyrdom of seven bishops of the Eastern-rite Romanian Catholic Church, who died during a fierce anti-religious campaign waged under the communist regime in Romania, which was then violently overthrown in 1989. The pope is set to visit Romania May 31-June 2.

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One of the bishops — Bishop Iuliu Hossu of Gherla — had been named a cardinal by St. Paul VI "in pectore" or in his heart, withholding publication of his name until 1973. The bishop died in 1970 at the age of 85 after living under house arrest since he was released from prison in 1955.

The other bishops the pope recognized as giving their lives for the faith were:

- Auxiliary Bishop Vasile Aftenie of Fagaras and Alba Iulia, who died in 1950 at the age of 50.
- Bishop Valeriu Traian Frentiu of Oradea Mare, who died in prison in 1952 at the age of 77.
- Auxiliary Bishop Tit Liviu Chinezu of Fagaras and Alba Iulia, who died in prison in 1955 at the age of 50.
- Bishop Ioan Suciu, the apostolic administrator of Fagaras and Alba Iulia, who died in 1953 at the age of 45.
- Bishop Ioan Balan of Lugoj, who died in 1959 at the age of 79.
- Bishop Alexandru Rusu of Maramures, who died in prison in 1963 at the age of 78.

The recognition of the martyrdom of Cremonesi and of the seven bishops clears the way for their beatification.

During the meeting with Becciu, the pope also moved forward the sainthood process for five Italians — one priest and four women who all founded religious

congregations — by recognizing they lived the Christian virtues in a heroic way.