News



Jesuit Fr. Leo O'Donovan is seen in a 2017 file photo. (Wikimedia Commons/Netherlands Embassy/Stephen Voss)



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Jesuit Fr. Leo O'Donovan, former president of Georgetown University, will deliver the invocation at Joe Biden's presidential inauguration on Jan. 20.

O'Donovan confirmed to NCR that Biden had personally called him and invited him to offer the prayer at the inauguration, which will mark the election of the nation's second Catholic president, and that he had accepted.

O'Donovan is a longtime friend of the Biden family. In 2015, he presided at the funeral Mass for Biden's oldest son, Beau, after he died of brain cancer at the age of 46.

Biden is known to be close with a number of Jesuit priests, and while he was vice president, he occasionally attended Mass at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Georgetown. In 1992, when Biden's son Hunter was a senior at Georgetown, O'Donovan invited the then-senator from Delaware to give a lecture at the Jesuit university on his faith and public life. Biden told O'Donovan at the time it was the "toughest assignment he's ever had."

More recently, just days after his presidential election, on Nov. 12, Biden appeared at a virtual fundraiser for Jesuit Refugee Service, where O'Donovan now serves as director of mission. On that occasion, Biden announced that he would raise the annual admission target of new refugees into the United States to 125,000, marking a sharp increase to the Trump administration's cap of 15,000 individuals.

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Previously, in 2018, Biden penned the foreward to O'Donovan's book *Blessed Are the Refugees: Beatitudes of Immigrant Children*.

Catholics have a long history of participating in prayers for inaugural events. In 1937, Fr. John Ryan offered the benediction at President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration. Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston offered the invocation at the inauguration of the nation's first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, in 1961. More recently, in 2017, New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan provided a Scripture reading at

the inauguration for President Donald Trump.

While other specific details of the inauguration lineup of speakers have yet to be announced, the Biden-Harris transition team announced last month that on the eve of the inauguration, there will be a memorial to honor lives lost to COVID-19, which will include the ringing of church bells throughout Washington, D.C.

This story appears in the **Inauguration 2021** feature series. View the full series.