

GIVE HIM A STAMP

ITALIAN AMERICAN ALLIANCE, SEEKS U.S. POSTAL SERVICE TO HONOR THE LATE FATHER VINCENT R. CAPODANNO

There are stamps for all kinds of Americans.

Celebrities. Politicians. Inventors. Even cartoon characters. How about heroes?

We have them, also. Over the years, the U.S. Postal Service has issued a number of stamps for a unique class of American warriors.

John Basilone immediately comes to mind. He was a World War II Marine gunnery sergeant commemorated on a U.S. stamp in 2005. Sergeant Basilone won the Congressional Medal of Honor as were others to be adorned on stamps such as Navy Lieutenant Commander John McCloy and Marine Sergeant Daniel Daly.

The time has come, now, for Father Victor R. Capodanno, Jr. to get his stamp.

The Italian American Alliance has taken up a special cause for all Italian Americans to support. On November 16th, the Newton, Massachusetts based organization initiated a campaign to persuade the U.S. Postal Service to bestow a stamp for Father Capodanno.

"We, as leaders of some of the leading Italian organizations ask the Congress of the United States to recognize Navy Chaplain Lieutenant Fr. Vincent Capodanno with a Memorial United States Stamp. Like many Italian Americans, he served his country in the manner in which he was called, and he did it well," so reads part of the formal request as conveyed by Tommy Damigella, chairman of the stra-

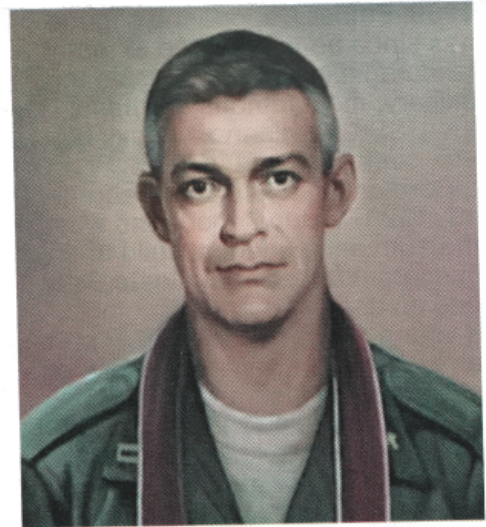
tegic planning committee of the Italian American Alliance.

Count this one of many commendable crusades undertaken by the Italian American Alliance. The group made headline news earlier in 2022 when they defeated proposed legislation in the Commonwealth to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day. An active member of the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations, the Italian American Alliance is a key front-line fighter in defense of our Italian American legacy in Massachusetts.

Dominic Amara, Ph.D., chairman of the Italian American Alliance, says a stamp for Father Capodanno is, "a worthwhile endeavor in which ordinary Americans of every stripe can have a voice. We have no standing 'committee' as such. Just a group of individuals and groups who are trying to highlight the life of a great American who exemplified the best of American, Italian American values."

The effort for a Father Capodanno stamp was announced at a recent ceremony at the 9/11 Memorial in Newton. "Many individuals and organizations have already voiced their support of the initiative," says Dr. Amara. "Although the Italian American Alliance and the Pirandello Lyceum got the ball rolling...since then many others have become equal participants. If you or your organization would like to participate please contact us."

Since this is the first time the



Father Vincent R. Capodanno

alliance has tried to win a stamp for an Italian American hero, "we sincerely solicit suggestions and hands-on assistance. This is very grass roots," says Dr. Amara.

Colonel Vincent Basile, (RET), heads the effort for the alliance, "to recommend to the U.S. Postmaster General that a commemorative stamp be created to keep alive the memory of this outstanding Italian American who gave the last full measure of his life for God, family and country," says Dr. Amara.

Father Capodanno remains one of the great heroes of the Vietnam War. A chaplain in the 1st Marine Division, 5th Marine Regiment's 3rd Battalion, he witnessed heavy combat on September 4, 1967. Father Capodanno left his post to assist a Marine unit in the field, overrun by the enemy. His self-sacrifice encompassed rescuing comrades, caring for the wounded, bestowing rites and prayers for the seriously injured. He was hit by mortar fire but refused medical care. He gave up his breathing mask to one Marine pinned down in a trench when poison gas was unleashed by the enemy. That day of battle proved the last for Father Capodanno. He was killed by enemy fire when he tried to rescue a medic.

Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously, in 1969, Father Capodanno's name has since been attached to many landmarks inside and outside the military; most famous, perhaps, is the USS Capodanno, a Navy frigate, commissioned in 1973.

Born on Staten Island, February 13, 1929, Victor Capodanno was the 10th and youngest child to an immigrant father from Gaeta, Italy, and an Italian American mother. As a young adult, he took night courses at Fordham University while employed as an insurance clerk. He became a priest in 1958 after he entered the Maryknoll Missionary Seminary in Ossining, New York.

Although a number of military men and women have stamps to commemorate their service, Father Capodanno will, nonetheless, be a unique addition if approved by

the postmaster general. "Only a handful of chaplains have earned the Medal of Honor," claims Mr. Damigella. "Navy Lt. Vincent Capodanno, whose bravery and selflessness were exemplified during the Vietnam War, is one of them."

A stamp to commemorate Father Capodanno will not only highlight his courage under fire, but, underscore the important contributions made by priests, ministers and rabbis in service to the military. Mr. Damigella says, "Chaplains are not just religious advocates for service members. They're also relied upon for moral and spiritual well-being, with an ability to be calm in the most harrowing of circumstances."

A Navy chaplain by definition, Father Capodanno saw himself a full-fledged Marine. "He earned the nickname 'Grunt Padre' for living, eating and sleeping in the same

conditions as the Marines with whom he served," says Mr. Damigella. "In the community where they were stationed, he organized outreach programs, started libraries and gathered and distributed gifts for the local people. He spent hours reassuring the weary, consoling the grieving and listening to confessions."

Father Capodanno requested, and was given, a six month extension when the original period of his service ended. He had two months remaining in Vietnam when battle ensued to take his life.

Editor's Note: If you want to help the Italian American Alliance obtain a stamp in honor of Victor R. Capodanno, Jr., please contact Dominic Amara, Ph.D., at domamara@aol.com and/or Virginia Gardner at viriniagardner@aol.com.



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