

Celebrating February as Black History Month



Providence Will Provide: The Courageous Work Continues

**Servant of God, Mother Mary Lange, OSP
(circa 1794-1882)**

By Dr. Camille Brown, President: Mother Lange Guild

Many of us have heard about the courageous work of Elizabeth Clarisse Lange, who later became known as Mother Mary Lange and founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence along with her friends. Elizabeth Lange arrived in Baltimore around 1813 after leaving her home country of Santiago de Cuba. She settled into the Fells Point area of Baltimore but soon realized that children of color needed an education. Elizabeth and her friend, Marie Balas provided a free education to black children in their home. Knowing that Maryland was a slave state and that education was denied to children of color, the women worked to establish St. Frances Schools for Colored Girls (later known as St. Frances Academy). Established in 1828, St. Frances is the oldest continuously operating black Catholic school in the United States. The following year Elizabeth Lange, Marie Balas, Marie Rose Boegue and Almadaide Duchemin, with the support of Father James Hector Nicholas Joubert, a Sulpician priest, and the approval of Archbishop James Whitfield, became the first four members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (the first permanent religious community for women of African descent.) The sisters bravely worked in Baltimore, Maryland amid prejudice, hatred and oppression to educate young people, provide a home for orphans, nursing the ill affected by the Cholera epidemic of 1832, sheltered the elderly and served as domestics at St. Mary's Seminary when needed.

Mother Lange's legacy of service continues today after 192 years. The Oblate Sisters of Providence engage in a variety of ministries around the United States and beyond. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, New York, Florida and Costa Rica, the Sisters continue to serve as educators in schools to spread the Oblate charism and provide witness to their spirituality, which is "founded in and relying upon a loving Providence, is revealed in a deep, personal relationship with God and a manifest love, trust and respect for all." Sisters are also present in parishes serving as Directors of Religious Education and parish staff members. Their ministry impacts the community through this service and outreach to the wider community. Prior to the Covid- 19 Pandemic, the Oblate Sisters hosted Masses that were open to the community, retreat opportunities along with pilgrimage events and charitable events for the poor. We pray that these will resume once the Pandemic is under control.

In typical Oblate fashion, the Sisters continue their teaching ministry through education and childcare. The Mount Providence Child Development Center is located on the grounds of the Motherhouse and provides structured programs for Preschool and Kindergarten children. There is also after school tutoring available for elementary and high school students.

The Oblate Sisters of Providence offer further outreach to members of the laity to embrace Mother Lange's legacy and Oblate spirituality. By sharing in the spiritual life, prayers and apostolic works of the Community, Lay Associates have the opportunity for spiritual and personal growth while sharing their gifts with a faith community. The Non-Residential Oblate Lay Associates live in their own homes, according to their own lifestyles, reaching out to others as their gifts and talents allow. They volunteer and collaborate with the Sisters in a variety of ways.

This article would not be complete without mentioning the work of the Mother Lange Guild. Established in 1991, the Guild's central task is to promote the beatification and eventual canonization of Servant of God, Mother Mary Lange, OSP. Their work involves workshops, speaking engagements, parish and community events, promotion of Chapters across the United States focused on spreading the message of Mother Lange's Cause, special masses, the Annual Tea, recommitment ceremonies and fundraisers to promote the Cause. Guild members have established praying communities around the world in places such as Uganda, Poland, Tanzania, Ghana and Benin. The message of the Oblates and Mother

Lange's faithful courage is spreading even beyond these borders. Currently, the Guild is working on the production of a video about Mother Lange's Life and commitment to service. If you are interesting in joining the Oblates and the Guild on any of their activities, please contact the Motherhouse at 410-242-8500 or the Guild office at 410-242-6861.



So, what is the status of Mother Lange's Cause? In 1991, William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, with the approval of Rome, officially opened the formal investigation into Mother Lange's life and her union with God. In 2006, Mother Lange was officially declared as "Servant of God". This was the first step towards canonization. In 2013, Mother Lange's remains were exhumed and moved to the new Oratory located in the Motherhouse Chapel. In 2020, The Positio (the official document of Mother Lange's life explaining her life of sanctity) was submitted to The Congregation for Causes of Saints in Rome. Covid 19 has certainly slowed down their discussion and acceptance of this document. Once accepted, Mother Lange could become Venerable Mother Mary Lange. Beyond this hallmark, two miracles are needed in order for Mother Lange to be proclaimed a saint. Please join the entire Oblate Community and all who love Mother Lange in praying for her beatification and canonization. If a miraculous favor is granted, please notify the motherhouse. Until then, let us all pray the Prayer for the Beatification of Mother Mary Lange (see page 4).

Prayer for the Beatification of
Mother Mary Lange

O Almighty and Eternal God, You granted Mother Mary Lange extraordinary trust in Your providence. You endowed her with humility, courage, holiness and an extraordinary sense of service to the poor and the sick. You enabled her to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence and provided educational, social and spiritual ministry especially to the African American community. Mother Lange's love for all enabled her to see Christ in each person, and the pain of prejudice and racial hatred never blurred that vision.

Deign to raise her to the highest honors of the altar in order that, through her intercession, more souls may come to a deeper understanding and more fervent love of You.

Heavenly Father, glorify Your heart by granting also this favour (*here mention your request*) which we ask through the intercession of Your faithful servant, Mother Mary Lange.

Amen.

Nihil Obstat:
Msgr. Carroll Satterfield
Censor Liborum
Archdiocese of Baltimore

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Most Reverend William H. Keeler, DD
Archbishop of Baltimore

November 15, 1991

If favors are received, please notify:

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