



Mother Mary Lange

Circa 1794-1882

Archdiocese of Baltimore

We do not know much about the early years of Mother Mary Lange, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. She was born Elizabeth Lange in the around 1794 in Santiago de Cuba, where she lived in a primarily French speaking community. She received an excellent education and in the early 1800s Elizabeth left Cuba and settled in the United States. By 1813, Providence directed her to Baltimore, Maryland where a large community of French speaking Catholics from Haiti was established. Elizabeth came to Baltimore as a courageous, loving, and deeply spiritual woman. She was a strong, independent thinker and doer. As a well-educated, it did not take Lange long to recognize that the children of her fellow immigrants needed an education. There was no free public education for African American children in Maryland until 1868. She responded to that need by opening a school in her home in the Fells Point area of the city for the children. She and her friend, Marie Magdaleine Balas (later Sister Frances, OSP) operated the school for over ten years.

Providence intervened through the person of Reverend James Hector Joubert, SS, who was encouraged by James Whitfield, Archbishop of Baltimore, and presented Elizabeth Lange with the idea to found a religious congregation for the education of African American girls. Father Joubert would provide direction, solicit financial assistance, and encourage other "women of colour" to become members of this, the first congregation of African American women religious in the history of the Catholic Church. Elizabeth joyfully accepted Father Joubert's idea. She no longer needed to keep locked up the deepest desire of her heart. For years she felt God's call to consecrate herself and her works entirely to Him. How was this to be? At the time black men and women could not aspire to religious life. But now God was providing a way! On July 2, 1829 Elizabeth and three other women professed their vows and became the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Elizabeth, foundress and first superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, took the religious name of Mary. She was superior general from 1829 to 1832 and from 1835 to 1841. This congregation would educate and evangelize African Americans. Yet they would always be open to meeting the needs of the times. Thus the Oblate Sisters educated youth and provided a home for orphans. Slaves who had been purchased and then freed were educated and at times admitted into the congregation. They nursed the terminally ill during the cholera epidemic of 1832, sheltered the elderly, and even served as domestics at Saint Mary's Seminary. Mother Mary's early life prepared her well for the turbulence that followed the death of Father Joubert in 1843. There was a sense of abandonment at the dwindling number of pupils and defections of her closest companions and co-workers. Yet through it all Mother Lange never lost faith in Providence. Mother Mary Lange practiced faith to an extraordinary degree. In fact, it was her deep faith which enabled her to persevere against all odds. To her black brothers and sisters she gave herself and her material possessions until she was empty of all but Jesus, whom she shared generously with all by witnessing to His teaching. In close union with Him, she lived through disappointment and opposition until God called her home, February 3, 1882 at Saint Frances Convent in Baltimore, Maryland.

Timeline

1783-1784

Elizabeth Lange was born (various census reports)

1787-1793	Lange family fled Haiti to Cuba
1802-1812	Immigrated to the United States
1818-1828	Opened first Catholic school for children of color
1828	Began religious formation.
1828	Founded St. Francis Academy.
July 2, 1829	Made religious consecration.
1829-1832	Foundress and first Superior (and 1835-1841).
1832	Receives approval of Congregation from Rome.
1832	Serves as nurse for cholera victims.
1833-1875	Serves as Treasurer.
1849-1851	Serves in Seminary Ministry.
1851-1857	Becomes Mistress of Novices.
1851-1857	Chosen Assistant Superior by Mother Gertrude.
1857	Principal and Superior of St. Benedict's School, Fells Point.
1858 & 1867	Director of Novices.
February 3, 1882	Mother Mary Lange dies.

Prayer for the Beatification of Mother Mary Lange

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 sick. You enabled her to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence and provide 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 a more fervent love of you.

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