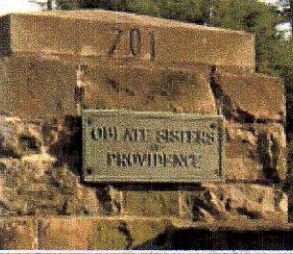




# The Lange Letter



Oblate Sisters of Providence

Winter 2008-09

Mother Mary [Elizabeth] Lange Guild News

Issue No. 52



## From the Director

Hello! My name is Sister Magdala Marie Gilbert, OSP. I am the new Lange Guild Director for the Canonization of

Mother Mary Lange. It is a great pleasure to be able to walk with all of you as we work toward the next phase of the cause. I will do my best to do all I can. Know that you are in my prayers through the intercession of Mother Mary Lange.

## New Director of Lange Guild

by Sister Mary Alice Chineworth

When Sister Virginie Fish, OSP, director of Lange Guild from its inception, offered her resignation to Sister Annette, we knew that her replacement would be someone who could fill her shoes, and the fit would be perfect.

With the Holy Spirit at work, a wonderful thing happened! Sister Magdala Marie Gilbert, OSP, a member of the Executive Board of Lange Guild, responded affirmatively to Sister Annette's request that she become the new director.

Sister Magdala Marie sees her new role as a challenge, because she has another ministry at Historic St. Francis Xavier Parish in the city of Baltimore, MD, where (see Director page 2)

**Mother Mary Lange, OSP (1784-1882): Haitian immigrant educator, a free woman of color in a slave state, who had courage, faith, compassion, unwavering trust in God's providence; founded St. Frances Academy, Baltimore, MD, 1828; foundress of Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first religious community for women of color, 1829; candidate for sainthood.**

## PROGRESS OF THE CAUSE

by Father John W. Bowen, S.S.

As Vice-Postulator of the cause of Mother Mary Lange, one of the most frequent questions I receive is about progress of the cause in Rome. The most positive part of the answer is the fact that Father Wes Spiewak, C.R., the Roman Postulator, is back in Rome working on the final form of the *Positio*, official documentation to be submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The only real worry is about the acceptance of the possible miracle to be submitted to the same Congregation. Because of advances in medical knowledge, the process is stricter than it has ever been. The Postulator has been sent the evidence of a possible miracle, but he has expressed the need for even more precise medical testimony. A recent article in a diocesan newspaper indicates that the cause of Cardinal Newman of (see Cause page 2)

Dear Friend of Mother Mary Lange:

For years each Lange Letter carried a personal message in which I shared thoughts and observations about the cause for canonization of Mother Mary Lange. I'd like to revisit that practice one more time to express thoughts of my heart as I try to move on to other services and ministries to which I have been called.



Isaiah 43:19 ("See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?") it speaks loudly to me as God calls me to switch gears and change course in ministry. I have served to the best of my ability since being appointed to promote the cause in 1989. It has been a service of love, learning and reaping of rich spiritual rewards. I have been enriched through the many relationships that, through the years, have deepened into enduring friendships. I thank God for you. Through your interest, dedication, sacrifices and generous support you lightened the task and, by God's grace, made possible the impossible. My heart is filled with gratitude. The heroic virtues and charitable deeds of Mother Mary Lange have been made known to people across the U.S. and several foreign countries. People have testified to being inspired, encouraged, and the recipient of graces (even miracles). They are determined to press on to achieve the goal of seeing this woman of African Haitian ancestry raised to the highest honors of the altar. To God be the Glory! Continue, please, to be a part of this movement. May the world see in you the tremendous workings of the Spirit because, like Mother Lange, for you the "sole wish is to do the will of God".

Wherever God leads me, whatever I do, know that my interest and commitment to the cause of Mother Lange remains constant. Remain in peace, joy and love.

In God's providential care,

Sister M. Virginie Fish, OSP

P.S. Now that I am called to other ministries, I trust that you will pray for me as I continue to do for you. My only desire is that God, in all things will be glorified.

# Promises To Keep

by Toni Moore-Duggan, President, MLG Board of Directors

"Don't follow the path, go where there is no path and begin the trail." This is a well known quote by the civil rights pioneer Ruby Bridges. Thus began the sacred journey of Mother Mary Lange who dared to live the dream of a woman of color answering the call to consecrated life. That struggle of her need to have the world recognize what almighty God already knew since the beginning of time has been recycled into the present struggle to have Mother Mary Lange raised to the highest level of the altar today. We wait, praying for our Catholic Church to recognize her call to sainthood.

In 1989, the Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, Sister Mary Alice Chineworth (official OSP "Petitioner"), appointed Sister Mary Virginie Fish, OSP Liaison and later Vice Postulator of the cause for canonization of Mother Mary Lange. Father John Bowen, S.S. was appointed Postulator. With Fr. Bowen, Sr. Virginie has laid the foundation of this sacred journey since 1989. Setting hearts on fire, they were able to build and sustain the capacity of dreaming and hoping of the day Mother Mary Lange is raised to the highest honors of the altar. I can remember Fr. Bowen and Sister Virginie working and reworking the documents of the life of Mother Lange until the documents were acceptable to the Archdiocesan Tribunal to be forwarded to Rome. They are now in the hands of our Roman Postulator. Armed with the highest level of faith, expectancy and an intimacy for the cause, Sr. Virginie put her hands to the plow and never looked

back. Her vision and her energy often seemed boundless. Nineteen years later, on September 24, 2008, Sr. Virginie Fish, O.S.P. passed the baton to Sr. Magdala-Marie Gilbert, O.S.P. as we continue this important journey.

While Sr. Virginie would never want us to underplay the role of so many others, including her office staff and volunteers in this important work, it was her drive that fueled the fire for this cause. She rallied not just her hopes, but the hopes of her sister Oblates as well as her sisters, the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHMs). It has not been an easy journey. Stressed by a system of rules, regulations and protocols, Sr. Virginie remained committed to working within the framework provided her by the Church that she loves.

Sister Virginie's enthusiasm has inspired many pilgrims to embark on this trail, planting and watering seeds of a cause that may not be realized in our lifetime. Like her foundress Mother Mary Lange, Sr. Virginie is a sacred soul of extraordinary holiness, strength and character. While these qualities are not unique, they have touched lives and given hope to many, to pray to God through the intercession of Mother Mary Lange and trust what unfolds.

While Sister Virginie appears to have quietly slipped into the background of the work of the cause, retirement from the office of the Mother Lange Guild will not bind her.

After a month sabbatical, she is replenished and eagerly awaits her next assignment from her Superior General.

Her incredible mind and scholarship continue to feed the hearts, minds and souls of all she encounters with the stories of Mother Lange.

Sister Virginie and the Oblate Sisters of Providence teach us about living the charism and virtues of Providence. They live the level of commitment that is rooted in faith and causes hope to be realized. Our answer for explaining the hope that lies within us, for this journey of a consecrated community of this size, is answered in the words of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are on their way to destruction, but for those who are being saved it is the power of God."

The other part of the quote of Ruby Bridges that is important for us to remember here is: "When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength and conviction, the only thing that can stop you is you."

## *(Director from page 1)*

she is Director of Religious Education. She has been a member of the Oblate Sisters of Providence since 1949. Until now, Sister has held many positions. However, there are none which have as much meaning for her as this latest appointment, because her relationship to the saintly Foundress has deepened through the years. As a writer, she loves to make Lange the subject of her poetry.

It will be difficult for Sister Magdala Marie to perform a double ministry, but she is not worried. She says that Mother Lange knows her allegiance to her and to her Order. She feels that the beloved Foundress will be assisting her in all the Lange Guild duties she must perform in the days and months and years ahead.

## *(Cause from page 1)*

England has similarly been delayed for more precise information.

The cause of Mother Mary Lange will advance in the Lord's time. We help that time to come more quickly by our continued and fervent prayers.

## Calendar Events worth noting:

The Annual Mother Lange Banquet of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries, Baltimore Archdiocese, will be Friday, February 13, 2009 at Martins West, Dogwood Road. The celebration honors individual adults and youths who have exhibited charisms of Mother Lange in leadership and service. (Tickets: \$50.00 per person. Information: call Therese Wilson Favors at 410-625-8472).

Festival of Sacred Song - coming Saturday, April 26, 2009 (watch for details)

Recommitment Service - Saturday, June 6, 2 pm, with Archbishop E.F. O'Brien

