



The Lange Letter



Oblate Sisters of Providence

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Mother Mary [Elizabeth] Lange Guild News

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Mother Mary Lange: Refugee and Immigrant

by Fr. Donald Fest, SSJ

If you look around our country at some of the older cities you might notice the old churches built several generations ago. Many are huge, magnificent structures built by immigrants - people from foreign lands - most who traveled to this land with no more than the clothes on their backs. They came for a better life. They came for opportunity. Many came to escape famine, war, or lack of work back in their own countries.

What is amazing is once they arrived in this country with their meager possessions, these men and women wanted to build -- and indeed did build -- some of the most beautiful churches in our cities. This happened because of their deep and abiding faith which carried them through life, even traveling over an ocean, into a place that was very strange to them. Once here, most of them would not encounter anyone who spoke their language when they left their neighborhoods.

It was no different with Mother Mary Lange. When she arrived on these shores in the port of Baltimore, Maryland, she was merely a young refugee from Haiti with very few possessions. She had many strikes against her: she was a woman, black, a foreigner and she did not speak English - and all this in a slave state. Like all the millions of other immigrants who came to this country, she also helped to build a Church - not one of brick and mortar, but one of souls for Christ. What vision she

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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.



PACA STREET, Baltimore, MD, USA

Homily by Fr. John W. Bowen, SS

A pastor was speaking at the 100th anniversary of his parish: "For 100 years priests and people

Feb. 3rd, A Special Celebration, At St. Mary's Spiritual Center.

of this parish have had only one idea". It was not what he meant literally, but what came through! We are not restricted to one

idea after 127 years since the death of Mother Lange. The liturgical readings give two major ideas and many lesser ones.

In the Gospel of Mark, the woman, afflicted with hemorrhages for 12 years, had faith in Jesus' healing power. Making her way through the crowd, all she did was touch his garments to be healed. One touch and she was healed! Elizabeth Lange, before she became Mother Mary Lange and even after, touched Jesus in her devotion to him in the Eucharist. She touched Jesus in her studies as well as in the generations of students she instructed. She touched Jesus in the sick to whom she volunteered to minister. She touched Jesus in all the oppressed, the hungry, the abandoned. These same people, only with

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Above photo: St. Mary's Spiritual Center altar, Mother Lange portrait, BVM statue;

Photo to the right: Feb. 3 concelebrants: Fr. David Arsenault; Deacon, Siegfried Presberry, Fr. John W. Bowen, SS & Fr. John Kemper, SMSC Director.



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Above photo: Feb. 3 Oblates, guests - Sisters Trinita, Reginald, Marie Vianney, Katherine O'Neil, IHM, Julia, Avila, Virginie, Claudina, Annette.

Photo to the right: Welcome by Sr. Reginald, OSP.
Photo below: Fr. David Arsenaault, Huntingdon, PA; Dcn. Siegfried Presberry, St. Mark, Catonsville, MD.

had to gather women of color with her and establish the Oblate Sisters of Providence! What courage and conviction drove her to establish a

school for black children when it was illegal! She did all this as the expression goes: "Against all odds."

Her contributions, and through her those of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, to our country down the years has been monumental. The presence of the Catholic Church in the African American community existed in many places because of them.

A Special Celebration,

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different faces and needs, are still waiting to be touched by Jesus' mercy, and to be recognized by us in our touch.

The letter to the Hebrews mentions the "cloud of witnesses". We rejoice in the large number of pilgrims gone on record to promote Mother Lange's cause, but we would like other witnesses as well. 1) Witnesses of her early life in Haiti before the Slave Rebellion and independence from France in 1804. We have been to northern Haiti where evidence indicates she came from – not far from the mountaintop citadel built for the emperors of Haiti. But no parish records have survived, and records taken back to France reveal nothing of the Lange family. 2) We know that Haiti had some fine schools before independence, but little is known of them now. So we do not know of the extent of Elizabeth Lange's good education. 3) It is likely that Elizabeth's father sent, or took the family, to refuge in Cuba. No records have been found. Refugees didn't stay long if they were unwilling to give loyalty to Spain. As Mother Lange herself testifies, she was French to the core.



Her life speaks not only to us, but to our entire nation of the enormous contribution immigrants have made to our country, especially in this day and age when so many people frown upon them and want them gone. Who else could have accomplished what Mother Lange accomplished – against all odds? Her coming to this land was indeed *providential!*

Let us invoke her on behalf of all men and women and children who come to us as immigrants. They come with gifts and talents, with a desire to work hard and contribute much, with a determination and vision unlike what most of us are used to seeing.

Watch over them Mother Mary Lange as you did those early sisters who gathered with you. Pray to God on their behalf and on behalf of all people who seek a better life, a brighter future, and a place to call home.



PayPal Using www.motherlange.org you can now donate on the Internet through PayPal. Click on donate; it will direct you to the bottom of the page where you can pay online. This will save you a stamp. Credit Cards are now accepted at the Mother Lange Office, 410-242-6861 We are grateful for all donations and orders of Memorabilia.

Happily we know Elizabeth was in Baltimore in 1812 because of her membership in 3 pious societies and baptismal records at St. Patrick's, Fells Point. It would be good to know what street she lived on and in which house! The rest of her career here we have in Fr. Joubert's diary that became part of the Sulpician community annals. How we long to touch Jesus in other aspects of her life, adding to the cloud of witnesses in our hands and in our records.

On this day marking the anniversary of her early morning call to glory, and the final ministrations of her longtime friend, Fr. Anwander, we ask the Lord to help us find even more about her life. We pray that

we, too, can bring the touch of Jesus to so many in need as she did: the children, the sick and elderly, the poor. We place all the needs of her Oblates of Providence (vocations, the cause for canonization, the coming Chapter of election, etc.) and the Church, into the hands of Divine Providence even as Mother Lange did!

