

AN HOUR WITH MOTHER MARY LANGE

Sr. Magdala Marie Gilbert, OSP

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First Edition

Opening Prayer with Mother Mary Lange

*Do everything in the name of the Lord
Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father
through him.*

—Colossians 3:17

Mother Lange, ask Jesus to walk with us.
Petition our good God to feed us thus
with yearning in our souls for justice.

You, Lord, know the yearning in our hearts.
Keep us near you, never to part
from your bountiful grace, love, and mercy.

Guide our feet, Lord, to do your will with grace.
As Mother Lange followed your pace
of loving all your people all her days.

Fill our minds with all that is holy,
That we might serve the poor and the lowly
with the same love you have for each of us.

Lord, you chose Mother Mary Lange to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The time did not seem ripe for a black woman to found a religious Congregation, but our time is not your time. We thank you for the life and time of Mother Mary Lange. Like her, may we never look at color or nationality, but see everyone as a child of God. Amen.

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The Spiritual Biography of Mother Mary Lange

This is a story about a courageous American woman whose life and work had a profound impact on everyone she encountered. Her legacy continues today in the work of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. It's about a woman who came to Baltimore in the early 1800s with four strikes against her: she was a woman in a culture dominated by white males; she was a Catholic in a country whose founders and a majority of the citizenry were Protestant; she was an immigrant in a nativist nation; and she was a free black woman in a slave state (Maryland). But Mother Mary Lange, OSP, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, succeeded despite the odds. She was self-assured of her role in the world.

We do not know much about the early years of Mother Mary Lange. She was born Elizabeth

Clarisse Lange around 1794 in Santiago de Cuba, where she lived in an ethnically French community. In the early 1800s, Elizabeth left Cuba and settled in the United States. By 1813, providence directed her to Baltimore, where a large community of French-speaking Catholics from Haiti had been established. Elizabeth was a courageous, loving, and deeply spiritual woman with strong, independent traits. She quickly realized that the children in her new-found neighborhood were in need of a formal education. Free public schools were not open to children of color in Baltimore until 1866. She responded to that need by opening a school in her home with her friend, Marie Magdaleine Balas (later Sr. Frances, OSP.)

Divine providence intervened once again when Rev. James Hector Nicholas Joubert, PSS, presented Elizabeth Lange with the idea to start a religious congregation that would support the education of African American girls. Fr. Joubert provided direction, solicited financial assistance, and encouraged other women of color to become members of a congregation,