

Mother Lange decree is first step toward petition for sainthood

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Archbishop William H. Keeler announced the beginning of a process whereby Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, OSP, could be declared a servant of God which ultimately might lead to her canonization.

The decree was issued April 28 at the motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Archbishop Keeler referred to Mother Lange as a woman of faith and courage.

"Today, with both joy and anticipation I am pleased to announce some first steps toward the possible cause of canonization for Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange," said the archbishop.

He also said the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had no objection to these preliminary steps.

"Therefore," continued Archbishop Keeler, "I am issuing the decree required by the Norms of the Congregation and asking that any writings of Mother Lange or historical documents pertaining to her life and work be sent to me for review by properly designated and qualified experts."

Sister Virginie Fish, OSP, a member of the Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange Guild, said the process "actually began in 1948 when a school and convent in Cuba were named after Mother Lange. It's been snowballing ever since."

According to Father William Au, director of public relations for the archdiocese, the formal canonization process has not begun — only the preliminary steps to the process.

Those include receiving permission from the Holy See in Rome to start the process, checking with other bishops in the region to make sure they agree this is a worthy cause to pursue, and collecting data on the individual.

Subsequent steps include appointment by the local bishop, in this case the archbishop of Baltimore, of a tribunal and a historical commission to study the case.

It could take years for Mother

Lange's canonization to be finalized.

"Things happen in God's time," said Sister Virginie. "In 1829, through Mother Lange, God gave the church the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Now we give the church Mother Lange."

It is believed that Mother Lange was born around 1784 in what is today Haiti to a well-off family.

She, along with hundreds of others, fled that country in the late 18th century when a revolution occurred.

By 1818 and perhaps even earlier, Mother Lange was educating black children in her own home in Baltimore and at her own expense with another female-black refugee. At the time, there was no public education for blacks in Baltimore.

In 1828, with the help of Sulpician Father James Hector Nicholas Joubert, Mother Lange and two other black women started the first black Catholic school in the American church. A year later four black women, including Mother Lange, pronounced vows in the first black Catholic religious order in the country. Thus, in 1829, Mother Lange became the first mother superior of the order. That order remains today as the Oblate Sisters of Providence.



Mother Lange

African American nun founded the the Congregation of the Oblate Sisters of Providence

Mother Lange continued her work educating black children and strengthening the Oblate order despite racism and lack of funds. She died in 1882 and is buried at the New Cathedral Cemetery on Old Frederick Road.

Members of the Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange Guild will now assist in obtaining any writings and data of hers from archives in other dioceses.

Currently there are 13 members in the guild, including archivists, theologians, clergy, religious and lay people.