

# Mother Mary Lange - ecumenical inspiration

J. Nicholas Reddick, a former student of St. Joseph School in Mobile, Ala., was taught by the Oblate Sisters of Providence. He desired to make a contribution to the cause for canonization of Mother Mary Lange. The following is the result of his research.

The setting was Catonsville, the date circa 1872. The protagonists were Anglican nuns sent to America from England to assist priests of Mount Calvary Episcopal community. The plot: an attempt to replicate what God had wrought in the Catholic community.

Elizabeth Lange, later, Mother Mary, had founded with Sulpician Father James Hector Joubert in Baltimore the first congregation of women of African ancestry to serve primarily children of color through education.

Reverend Perry, the assistant Episcopal priest, was inspired by what had been accomplished through Mother Lange and the Oblate Sisters since 1829. With the help of one of the English (Anglican) sisters, he desired to form in the Episcopal communion, a "sisterhood," he said, "founded (like that) by a courageous black woman (Mother Mary Lange)." He believed, as had his Catholic predecessor, Father Joubert, that "the aid of sisters (now Americanized Episcopalian nuns) will be found (to be) of the greatest importance, if not absolutely essential" in the care and education of black people.

Two All Saints English (Anglican) archival pictures stand out. One identifies one of the sisters as "Sister" Virginia, who was really an Oblate. The archival report speaks of the identification of two black women who received Anglican habits in approximately 1881.

Reddick, the researcher taught by the Oblate Sisters in Alabama, notes that what had transpired seemed to have had "a direct link with our own Mother Mary Lange." "Mother Lange," he writes, "had a very positive spiritual effect on all men seeking the will of God!"

We know that from the earliest days, though founded for the Catholic education of children of color, Oblates never refused ministrations to anyone. Reddick offers his research in the hope of demonstrating that ecumenism was encouraged and

practiced by Mother Lange and the early Oblate Sisters.

Scripture reminds us that time is no obstacle with God.

In light of the stupendous outpouring of God's grace of conversion by 10 Episcopal nuns of the All Saints' Sisters of the Poor congregation and their chaplain in communion with Rome, we are reminded that with God "One day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pt 3:8, Ps 90).

Was the seed planted 180 years ago in Baltimore the nurturer of inspiration granted to both Reverend Perry and today's Anglican nuns in Catonsville? Does it resonate with the conversion that took place at All Saints Chapel Sept. 3, when the Episcopal nuns embraced the Catholic faith? God knows. However, we congratulate and welcome the sisters and chaplain sealing their communion with the church of Rome. To God be all the glory.

*Sr. Mary Virginie Fish , an Oblate Sister of Providence, is the former Director of the Mother Lange Guild.*