



**Mother Mary (Elizabeth) Lange, OSP
(c. 1794-1882)**

Foundress and first superior of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Born and raised in Cuba to a free woman of color, she came to the United States when she was a young woman, eventually settling in Baltimore. She lived in the Fells Point neighborhood of the city, where she opened a school for black children with her good friend and fellow immigrant, Marie Magdaleine Balas. A devout Catholic, she was active in her parish, St. Patrick's, and a member of a confraternity founded by the Sulpician Fathers at the seminary they operated on Paca Street. In 1828 she was introduced to Sulpician Father James Hector Joubert (1777-1843), who at that time was ministering to members of the Haitian refugee community who worshipped at St. Mary's Seminary Chapel. He was interested in opening a school for the daughters of this community. Elizabeth and Marie were recommended as teachers. He met with the two women and was deeply impressed with them. As they discussed plans for the school, he proposed founding a new religious community that was dedicated to teaching children of color. Within the year, Elizabeth, Marie, and two other women, Rosine Boegue, an immigrant from Haiti, and Almaide Duchemin, who had been Elizabeth and Marie's student at their school in Fells Point, were living in community at a house they rented near St. Mary's Seminary. Here they began their religious training and opened a school. The following year they received permission to form the first religious community for women of color in the United States. Two years later Pope Gregory XVI approved the community as an apostolic order dedicated to the education of African American children on October 2, 1831. Elizabeth took the religious name of Mary and was appointed the first superior general. Committed to serving where they were needed, the community soon expanded their ministries and opened an orphanage and a widow's home. They also conducted home visitations, acted as nurses during Baltimore's yellow fever epidemics, operated a night school for adults, and offered spiritual direction, bible school, and vocational training to members of Baltimore's African American community.

Over their history, the Oblates have established foundations across the United States, as well as in Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Africa.

In 1991 Mother Lange's cause for canonization was introduced. She is now known as a "Servant of God."