


in a

Word™

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“I have a special feeling when I come back to Saint Augustine Seminary. It is a welcoming feeling, a feeling of safety, joy and happiness. God is here in his full presence.”

Charles Prejean - St. Augustine Alumnus 1954-1958

Pope Francis has advanced the sainthood cause of Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, a Black religious sister who founded the country's first African American religious congregation in Baltimore in 1829.



The recognition of Lange's heroic virtue and the advancement of her cause from servant of God to venerable was announced by the Vatican in a decree signed on June 22. The Church will now need to approve a miracle attributed to her intercession before she can be beatified.

[Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange \(1784-1882\)](#)

We do not know much about the early years of Mother Mary Lange, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. She was born Elizabeth Lange in the around 1794 in Santiago de Cuba, where she lived in a primarily French speaking community. She received an excellent education and in the early 1800s Elizabeth left Cuba and settled in the United States. By 1813, Providence directed her to Baltimore, Maryland where a large community of French speaking Catholics from Haiti was established. Elizabeth came to Baltimore as a courageous, loving, and deeply spiritual woman. She was a strong, independent thinker and doer. As a well educated, it did not take Lange long to recognize that the children of her fellow immigrants needed an education. There was no free public education for African American children in Maryland until 1868. She responded to that need by opening a school in her home in the Fells Point area of the city for the children. She and her friend, Marie Magdaleine Balas (later Sister Frances, OSP) operated the school for over ten years.

Providence intervened through the person of Reverend James Hector Joubert, SS, who was encouraged by James Whitfield, Archbishop of Baltimore, and presented Elizabeth Lange with the idea to found a religious congregation for the education of African American girls. Father Joubert would provide direction, solicit financial assistance, and encourage other "women of colour" to become members of this, the first congregation of African American women religious in the history of the Catholic Church. Elizabeth joyfully accepted Father Joubert's idea. She no longer needed to keep locked up the deepest desire of her heart. For years she felt God's call to consecrate herself and her works entirely to Him. How was this to be? At the time black men and women could not aspire to religious life. But now God was providing a way! On July 2, 1829 Elizabeth and three other women professed their vows and became the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Elizabeth, foundress and first superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, took the religious name of Mary. She was superior general from 1829 to 1832, and from 1835 to 1841. This congregation would educate and evangelize African Americans. Yet they would always be open to meeting the needs of the times. Thus the Oblate Sisters educated youth and provided a home for orphans. Slaves who had been purchased and then freed were educated and at times admitted into the congregation. They nursed the terminally ill during the cholera epidemic of 1832, sheltered the elderly, and even served as domestics at Saint Mary's Seminary.

Mother Mary's early life prepared her well for the turbulence that followed the death of Father Joubert in 1843. There was a sense of abandonment at the dwindling number of pupils and defections of her closest companions and co-workers. Yet through it all Mother Lange never lost faith in Providence. Mother Mary Lange practiced faith to an extraordinary degree. In fact, it was her deep faith which enabled her to persevere against all odds. To her black brothers and sisters she gave herself and her material possessions until she was empty of all but Jesus, whom she shared generously with all by witnessing to His teaching. In close union with Him, she lived through disappointment and opposition until God called her home, February 3, 1882 at Saint Frances Convent in Baltimore, Maryland.



Biography of Mother Lange taken from Oblate Sisters website

They Called him Brother MATT



Brother Joseph Matthaeus Connors, 1939-2023

Brother Joseph Matthaeus Connors, 83, a Divine Word Missionary known for guiding young men out of street gangs, died May 6, in Techny, IL.

Born Joseph Patrick Connors on Dec. 1, 1939, in New Bedford, Mass., he was the fourth of James and Martha (nee McNamara) Connors's five children.

He joined the Society of the Divine Word at Conesus in 1959. And in 1962, he professed vows at Techny and took the name Matthaeus. In the early years of religious life, he served as a cook, baker and butcher. From 1983 to 1990, he cared for the grounds of Holy Rosary Institute in Lafayette, LA.

When his superiors assigned him to Sacred Heart Church in Greenville, MS., they gave him the job of keeping the grounds. However, realizing the poverty and violence in the community, he felt compelled to make change. In Greenville, MS., Brother Matt undertook much-needed ministry with youth who participate in risky behavior and gangs. Those efforts eventually became Sacred Heart Youth Outreach.

He did whatever it took to render assistance—delivering clothes and food purchased with his stipend, teaching them how to read, helping boys in danger of entering street gangs and assisting boys who wished to leave gangs.

He also provided a safe haven where rival gang members—whose presence would elicit open hostility on the streets—were brothers on the basketball court. Brother Matt opened the Sacred Heart Church gym to the youth, forbade them from bringing weapons and didn't allow wearing gang colors. He became the only father figure that some of the youth knew.

A Delta Democrat Times reporter once wrote, "The work that Brother Matt has done...has mainly involved 'the boys' around Gloster Street who find themselves involved in drugs and gangs because of lack of parental authority or because they see their friends go that route. "He has clothed them, fed them, paid their way to summer school, and driven them to and from the Sacred Heart gym at night after basketball games.

Brother Matt has also given them work when they needed money, tried to find them jobs in the community and, most importantly, worked on their self-esteem and tried to improve their outlook

on the future." The young men knew they could call him day or night, and they did. Seeing his impact, local police began to call upon Brother Matt as a resource when dealing with gang-related matters.

In 1990, he brokered a deal with the police department. In return for amnesty for the youth, Brother Matt collected 26 guns, three machetes, 100 rounds of ammunition and four bags of crack, and turned the contraband over to the authorities. Four years later, rival gang members in Greenville met and fashioned a peace agreement that has stood the test of time and serves as a model for other cities.

Not all was smooth sailing, though. In the process of working with the young men, he once fell to the ground after getting decked in the face, and another time, he had to run to get away from a hail of bullets. He even stepped between two gang members with their guns drawn. He told Onward magazine, "As soon as I stepped between them, I realized that both of their guns were pointed at my head. They were out to kill each other, not me. I just got in their way. One of the guns could have gone off and I would be dead now. But they put down their guns and walked away."

Government and non-profit organizations recognized his work with youth. He received Greenville's Delta Point of Pride Award for having a positive effect on the city, as well as the city's Outstanding Citizen Award and the Man of the Year Award. He received the 1994 Jake Stein Community Service Award, presented by the Delta Democrat Times for dedicated service to making Greenville a better place to live and work. In addition to the Greenville awards, he was selected to carry the Olympic Torch on its way to Atlanta in 1996.

After a decade in Greenville, Brother Matt was assigned as parish administrator of Immaculate Conception Church in Clarksdale, MS. In 2000, he also received the Call to Brotherhood Award from the National Association of Religious Brothers Assembly. In retirement, he lived at Divine Word Residence at Bay St. Louis, MS., for several years before moving to Techny in 2020. Brother Matt's wake and funeral took place in the chapel of the Divine Word Residence on May 11. He was laid to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery at Techny, IL. Very Rev. Gus Wall, SVD new Provincial for the Southern Province was homilist. In his remarks he spoke of Brother Matt as a person who cultivated peace.

Rest in Peace Brother Matt!



Brother Matt with SVD Brothers Richard Chambers and James Heeb at Bay Saint Louis, MS

Thanks to Ms. Theresa Carson for this tribute to Brother Matt

in a word or two

Charles and Carmen Prejean are featured on our front cover for this issue. They had stopped by Saint Augustine Seminary recently and Charles, an alumnus of St. Augustine, shared many stories.


Charles attended St. Augustine Seminary from 1954-1958. After he left the Seminary he never forgot the training and spirituality from being at St. Augustine. Charles Prejean was director of Federation of Southern Cooperatives from 1968-1985. He was involved in many social programs and for 15 years was Director of Office for Black ministry in Atlanta. He has always supported and loved St. Augustine.

Alumni like Charles made a difference in society and contributed to the Church in America. Saint Augustine not only ordained priests but also strong Catholic laymen in all walks of life.



Divine Word Missionaries of the Southern Province recently held their retreat with Father John Judie as retreat master. Pictured here are some members of the Province during the retreat and Jubilee Mass.





BOWMAN-FRANCIS MINISTRY

2023 Fr. Chester P. Smith National Black Catholic Men's Conference


**THURSDAY
OCTOBER 12TH
- SATURDAY
OCTOBER 14TH**

LOCATION

MARRIOTT LOUISVILLE DOWNTOWN
280 West Jefferson
Louisville, KY 40202
Room Rates
Early Bird - \$239.00
May 1st - September 19th
\$351.00 after September 19th
Self Parking: \$40.00
Valet Parking: \$45.00

For more information, contact
The Bowman-Francis Ministry
at:
317-800-1621

Email: ministry@bowmanfrancis.org
Website: www.bowmanfrancis.org



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To register for the conference, go to:
www.bowmanfrancis.org

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SAY 'YES' TO GOD!

How will you serve Him?

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arkansas. IN A WORD is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager; consultant.

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Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>