

"Hooked" Mother Lange and Me

By Marlene Rigaud Apollon

If, in February 2000, someone had told me that I would become an advocate for the cause of a candidate for canonization, I would have probably answered "Not me." I would have thought that I was much too shy, much too busy and, most of all, not religious enough to get involved in such an endeavor. Why then did I get so captivated by Elizabeth Lange, that woman now known as Mother Mary Lange, whose life was so wrapped in mystery?

It all started in the beginning of March 2000 while I was still living in Baltimore. A friend asked me if I could meet their group of Haitians and Haitian-Americans from the Washington metropolitan area at the Mother House of the Oblate Sisters of Providence-- the starting point of a "pilgrimage to the source" journeying in the steps of Mother Lange--the woman of Haitian origin who had founded that religious order. Feeling that it was my duty, as one of the rare Haitian-Americans in Baltimore, to welcome them in "my" city, I agreed.

At the time, few Haitians had heard of that woman, born in Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, who today, the Catholic Church considers a candidate for canonization. Personally, I had vaguely heard that she was Haitian but I knew nothing else about her. In preparation to meeting the pilgrims, I searched the Internet and came across an article describing her accomplishments and talking of the dedication by then mayor Martin O'Malley, now governor of Maryland, and of the blessing by Cardinal Keeler of a monument on the site where the congregation had started.

I hurried there, in part because I didn't want to admit my complete ignorance of the matter. But, as I said in my article I wrote later: "A Saint for the Diaspora," that in front of that monument, I had a tender thought for that refugee from my homeland who had known the hardships of exile, racial discrimination and financial difficulties, etc., and had overcome them so magnificently.

The day of the pilgrimage, I had planned to just say a few welcoming words and leave but I stayed the entire day, so fascinated was I by her story, a fascination that kept on growing as I learned more about her; a fascination that, in September of that year, motivated me to accept the chairmanship of the *Haitian-Americans United (HAU) for Mother Mary Lange Chapter*, the first Haitian-American chapter for the promotion of her cause.

Eight years later, although I have since moved to Florida and no longer live in the shadow of Mother Lange, my fascination for her continues to drive me to promote her cause the best I can. Through it all, I hope and pray that I will see the day when the Church will officially recognize her as the saint that she is for me.

Ed. Note: Marlene Apollon has authored several books. Her latest: *To Reconquer the Haitian Ideal: A voice from Yesterday for Today and Tomorrow* is a tribute to her grandfather, Louis Mercier, a great Haitian educator, historian, elder statesman, etc.