



Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange  
*Foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence*

Mother Lange was born around 1789 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. She came to Baltimore, where a great number of Catholic, French-speaking refugees had settled. Although Elizabeth was a refugee, she was well-educated and wealthy due to money left to her by her father.

Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, there was no public education for Blacks in Baltimore since Maryland was a slave state and the education of slaves was outlawed. Mother Lange took charge of educating Black children in her own home in Baltimore at her own expense with another female refugee.

Archbishop James Whitfield challenged Elizabeth to establish a religious order of women for the education of Black children. In 1828, with the help of Sulpician Father James Joubert, S.S., Mother Lange and two other Black women started the first Black Catholic school in the Catholic Church in America. A year later, on July 2, 1829, three Black women, and Mother Lange pronounced vows to become the first religious order of women of African descent. She took the name Mary at her profession of vows. Mother Lange served as the first mother superior of the order from 1829 to 1832, then again from 1835 to 1841. Despite discouragement, racism and a lack of funds, Mother Lange continued to educate children and meet the total needs of the Black Catholic community.

She died on February 3, 1882 and is buried in the New Cathedral Cemetery on Old Frederick Road. Today the Oblate Sisters of Providence number 125 sisters, 20 associates and 16 Guild members. Their motto: Providence will Provide!