



UMB News

Face to Face: Mother Mary Lange Catholic School

November 20, 2020 | By [Alex Likowski](#)

“It’s been said that faith makes possible that which circumstance renders implausible.” With those words Archbishop William Lori began to explain in a *Baltimore Sun* op-ed last year the remarkable history and the continuing impact of an amazing woman — Mother Mary Lange.

Born in Cuba in the 1780s, Elizabeth Clarisse Lange came to the United States, settling in Baltimore in in the early 1800s. She saw here a great need for the education of children in the city’s rapidly growing free Black population. Lange founded the first religious congregation of women of African descent in the United States, the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The school the sisters created 192 years ago was the first Catholic school for children of color in America, and it continues to this day — now known as St. Frances Academy.



Artist's rendering of the Mother Mary Lange Catholic School learning commons

Mother Lange and the Oblate Sisters of Providence endured racism, poverty, and many other challenges, providing night classes for women, vocational training, and crisis support services along with educating children. That need and so much more continues to this day, what Archbishop Lori

described as “that pervasive inequity and inability to access quality education.”

“It’s in the spirit of Mother Mary Lange,” he wrote, “that we are putting our determined efforts and resources in service to the young people of our community by breaking ground for the first Catholic elementary school in the city of Baltimore in nearly six decades.”

Opening in fall 2021 with 400 pre-K through eighth-grade students, the \$24 million school will expand to include more than 500 in the first few years. The three-level, 66,000-square-foot structure is located on the west side of MLK Boulevard, across from UMB and just north of the University of Maryland BioPark. The school includes a STEM suite with a science lab, makerspace, and robotics center. It has a digital media center, art and music rooms, and a regulation-size gymnasium with a performance stage. Outside, there’s a soccer and lacrosse field with an exercise circuit.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore expects 80-90 percent of the students will need tuition assistance, and close to a million dollars in grants and aid has been lined up for the first year, with public and private partners.

Students, fundraising, building design, and even the naming of the new school have been a shared community project. Longtime community and civil rights activist Ralph Moore has called Mother Lange “the mother of literacy in this area.” And Moore and others, along with Archdiocese leadership, have taken Lange’s cause even further, calling on the Vatican to canonize Lange and make her the first African American saint. Mother Lange is already considered a “Servant of God,” the first step toward sainthood.

This month, which is National Black Catholic History Month, Archbishop Lori led a prayer service urging prayer in support of sainthood. He told congregants at St. Ambrose Church, “We hope to continue Mother Lange’s example and legacy of educating the young people in our city and opening as best we can the doors of opportunity.”

Joining University of Maryland, Baltimore President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, on his weekly program, *Virtual Face to Face with President Bruce Jarrell*, were James Sellinger, chancellor of education for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and Alisha Jordan, principal of Mother Mary Lange Catholic School. Watch the entire conversation by accessing the link at the top of this page.

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