

Polonia Remembers Their Accomplishments

Blessed Mary Angela Truskowska Foundress of the Felician Sisters



Blessed Mary Angela, baptized Sophia Camille, was born in Kalisz, Poland, on May 16, 1825. Her parents, Joseph and Josepha Truskowski, were well-educated, devout Catholics and loyal patriots.

Sophia was a very intelligent, generous, vivacious but frail child, who began her education at home under a private tutor. When the family moved to Warsaw in 1837, Sophia was enrolled in the prestigious Academy of Madame Guerin.

Due to ill health, Sophia withdrew from the Academy and continued her education at home where she availed herself of her father's vast library. She read extensively and studied the causes and effects of contemporary social problems. Her father, in sharing his experiences as judge in the juvenile courts, broadened her knowledge of the social evils of her day and helped shape her sense of justice in an unjust world.

In 1848 at the age of 23, Sophia experienced what she called a "conversion", or great change in her spiritual life. She was enlightened by the Lord during her prayer in the cathedral of Cologne that, despite her love of prayer and solitude, she was destined to go among the suffering poor and to serve Christ in them. She assumed the name Angela after entering the Third Order of St. Francis.

Angela undertook the moral and religious education of poor, neglected children, gradually extending her spacious heart to the downtrodden, the exploited, the aged and homeless. With her father's financial support and her cousin Clothilde's assistance, she rented two attic rooms. This center then became the acclaimed "Institute of Sophia Truskowska."

On November 21, 1855, Angela founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice, the Felicians. Mother Angela determined that the aim of her Congregation was that "in all and by all, God may be known, loved and glorified."

When the Church called, the Felician Sisters responded. Their many ministries ranged from social and catechetical centers to converted makeshift hospitals for wounded guerrilla fighters, including both Russians and Poles, the oppressors with the oppressed, with a charity that made no distinctions.

At the age of 44, the Foundress moved aside and placed her Congregation in the hands of another. She continued to exert influence through letters, petitions, and even confrontations to bring to fruition the vision she had for her Congregation. She heartily endorsed the plan to send sisters to America and personally blessed the five pioneers as they left in 1874.

Today the Sisters are engaged in education, health care, social service and pastoral services in parishes in Poland, Kenya, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Ukraine and the United States. The Felician Sisters have sponsored St. Ignatius Nursing Home and 111 units of low income housing in West Philadelphia since 1986 and have served at St. Laurentius Parish in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia since 1890.

Mother Mary Angela died on October 10, 1899. For today's world, Blessed Mary Angela remains an example of true femininity, a woman of conviction; a woman who has dared to be prophetic; a religious who has inspired and challenged many to both contemplation and action. Blessed Mary Angela was beatified April 18, 1988 by Pope John Paul II.

Blessed Frances Siedliska, Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth

Frances Siedliska was born on November 12, 1842, at Roszkowa Wola in Poland when it was under Russian domination. Her father, Adolph, was from Lemberg and her mother, Cecilia, was descended from a prominent and wealthy family from whom she had inherited a fortune in money and property. The estate of Adolph and Cecilia was planned to be a dowry for Frances.



Frances grew up amid her family's ancestral wealth and in a highly secular atmosphere in Warsaw society. Although her parents were Christians in name, they did not raise their daughter as a devout Catholic. Frances, however, was inclined to doing good, and after receiving the Eucharist and Confirmation, became aware of the call to religious life. Despite her father's opposition, she pursued her calling.

In 1873, Frances traveled to Rome where she received permission from Pope Pius IX to establish a new congregation of religious sisters, which became initially recognized in 1875. The source of inspiration for Frances and her congregation was the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth, from whom they derived their name. In 1884, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth became recognized as a religious institute and were given permission to pronounce their vows officially. On that occasion, Frances assumed the religious name Mary of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

With their central source of vocations in Krakow, the congregation was invited in 1885 to direct their apostolate to the United States. Within seventeen years, Mother Mary established twenty nine European and American houses, including schools, hospitals and centers of assistance. The congregation's presence eventually spread to Australia, the Philippines and Iraq.

Mother Mary was convinced that if the love of God reigned in the hearts of people, neither language, nor nationality, nor age, nor position or status in the world could be a barrier to unity of minds and hearts. She insisted at many conferences and meetings with her congregation that love be the characteristic virtue of her sisters, since out of the first Nazareth came love incarnate, Jesus Christ, and from there love spread throughout the world.

Mother Mary died on November 21, 1902, in Rome. The process of beatification was initiated soon after her death. On April 23, 1989, in a ceremony at St. Peter's Basilica, Pope John Paul II beatified Frances Siedliska, Mary of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

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