

the proper burial place, but Merici had foreseen this problem and received special dispensation from the pope allowing her to plan her own funeral. She was buried at St. Afra. Merici was beatified by Pope Clement XIII in 1768 and canonized on January 24, 1807.

The Ursuline Order

Angela devoted her life to educating women at a time when girls were not considered worthy of education. She was fond of saying "disorder in society is the result of disorder in the family." She believed that by educating girls in a family setting that society would be improved and Christianity strengthened.

She encouraged those who followed her to understand the needs of their time and make changes accordingly. Her order set down no formal vows, but taught virginity, obedience and poverty as a way of life. Contrary to all religious teachings and orders of the day, this small group of women at first did not take vows or wear habits and continued to live with their families.

The Ursuline Order would become the oldest teaching order of religious women in the Catholic Church. Although originally its members led a non-cloistered life, the Ursuline Order underwent change as it grew and spread throughout the world. In 1572 the nuns began to live in secluded communities in Milan and in 1596 in Avignon. In 1585 Pope Paul V issued a papal bull formalizing the Ursulines into a religious order of cloistered nuns taking formal vows.

By 1612 the Ursulines of Paris began taking solemn vows and soon similar convents were established elsewhere. By the 17th century, Merici's group was based primarily in France, forming the basis for orders founded in Quebec in 1639 and New Orleans in 1727. The order in New Orleans founded one of the first institutions of learning for women in America. After the War of 1812, the New Orleans school was converted to a hospital that nursed both American and British soldiers. Among the institutions of higher learning founded by the Ursulines in the United States are the College of New Rochelle in New York in 1898 and Ursuline College in Cleveland in 1871. In 1900 a congress of Ursulines met in Rome and established a single union of many congregations.

Feast Day

Saint Angela Merici was not included in the 1570 Tridentine Calendar of Pope Pius V, because she was not canonized until 1807. In 1861 her feast day was inserted in the Roman Calendar, but not on the day of her death, 27 January, since this date was occupied by the feast day of Saint John Crysostom, but instead on 31 May. In 1955 Pope Pius XII assigned this date to the new feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen, and moved the feast of Saint Angela to 1 June. The celebration was ranked as a Double until 1960, when Pope John XXIII gave it the equivalent rank of Third-Class Feast. Finally, in 1969, Pope Paul VI moved the celebration, ranked as a Memorial, to the saint's day of death, 27 January.

*(excerpted from: www.answers.com)

Saint Angela Merici

Commemoration: June 1st

Feast Day: January 27th

Patronage: sickness, handicapped people, and loss of parents.



Saint Angela Merici as a teacher.

19th century devotional painting,
by P. Calzavacca

Angela Merici

*Angela Merici (1474-1540), foundress of the Ursuline nuns. Born at Desenzano (near Lake Garda), she was orphaned in early life, but became a Franciscan tertiary and devoted herself with several companions to the education of poor girls. In 1535 they dedicated themselves to this work under the patronage of Ursula, but they took no vow and wore lay clothes. The formal organization of this sisterhood into a Congregation came only in 1565, as the Church authorities were not prepared to approve, until then, Angela's novel concept of unenclosed and mobile religious sisters. Her Congregation flourishes today; it has been well described as 'the oldest and most considerable teaching order of women in the Roman Catholic Church'. Angela was canonized in 1807.

Based on an engraving on the statue at Desenzano, Italy, Angela Merici's birth is set at March 21, 1474 in the province of Venice. Most biographers believe she was born on a farm two miles outside of Desenzano. The size, condition, and location of the farm, called Grezze, indicate that Merici came from moderate wealth, not from a peasant family as was traditionally believed. In addition, she was said to have a command of language characteristic of good breeding. In fact, Angela's mother came from a successful merchant family in Salo. Her family was pious and she was educated in religion. Her father read to her daily about the lives of the saints. It is believed that this is how she first learned about St. Ursula.

She spent the first ten years of her life in Desenzano, a town located on the western shore of Lake Garda in the Lombardy region. When she was young, Merici's beloved older sister died a few months after their father. Her sister's tragic death left Angela disconsolate because it occurred before her sister could receive the last sacraments of the Catholic Church.

For a period Angela remained alone with her mother at Grezze. She was still a child when her mother died, leaving her orphaned. She was sent to the town of Salo to live with her maternal uncle. The devout Angela eventually joined the third order of St. Francis and increased her daily devotions and prayer, asking God to give her a sign about the condition of her sister's soul. Eventually she had a vision that satisfied her that her sister was in heaven.

In 1794, when she was 20, Merici's uncle died and she returned to Desenzano. During this time she became concerned about the lack of religious training for young girls and the condition of the family and society in general. She converted her home into a school. There she gathered the young girls of the town and taught them the rudiments of Christianity, directing them to take her lessons back into their homes to share with their families.

A Vision

In 1506, while praying, Angela Merici was said to have had a grand vision in which angels and maidens descended from heaven and a voice instructed her to found an association of virgins under the guidance of St. Ursula. Ursula was a fourth-century virgin and martyr venerated as a protector of women. The order Angela was inspired to start would devote itself to both bodily and spiritual works of mercy, with an emphasis on the education of young women.

Angela remained in Desenzano for the next ten years, establishing her community for religious training. In 1516, she was invited to the neighboring town of Brescia to start a similar school. To fulfill her earlier vision, Angela gathered together a group of young women. A house was put at their disposal to allow them to continue their work. The citizens of Brescia began to consider her a prophet, frequently referring to her as Angela of Brescia.

The Miracle of a Pilgrimage

In 1524, Angela began a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, seeking to do penance and understand the will of God. While on the island of Crete or at some point between Crete and Corfu, she was suddenly and inexplicably struck blind. Angela's devotion to her religion and her intense desire to visit the Holy Land made her determined to continue her journey. During her entire journey she remained blind and saw nothing of the Holy Land. However, she wrote that she "saw these places with the eyes of her soul as if she had seen them with her bodily eyes."

After she left the Holy Land, her eyesight suddenly returned. According to some accounts, it was restored while she prayed before the crucifix at the same old Venetian church on Crete where she had been struck blind. Returning to Italy, she went to Venice. There, local civic leaders, members of the Doge's Council, who had heard of her work in Brescia and Desenzano, asked her to take charge of the Hospital of Incurables. She refused, preferring to return to her work in Brescia.

In the following years she received invitations from the Council of Venice and the pope to work in Castiglione, Venice and Rome. On each occasion she refused, remaining in Brescia to complete her work. Merici made many pilgrimages throughout Italy during her life but none had the impact on her of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The Founding of an Order

On November 25, 1535, in the company of her followers, Angela Merici formally founded the Order of St. Ursula in a small house near the Church of St. Afra in Brescia. In 1536, Merici laid down the rules of the Ursuline Order, clarifying her plan to restore the family and the supremacy of Christianity through the education of girls. In 1537 she was elected superior of the company by unanimous vote.

After founding the order she wrote *Testament and Souvenirs*, in which she directed her nuns to emphasize gentleness, the significance of the individual, and the consequence of using persuasion over force. Merici became ill toward the end of 1539, but even while sick she continued to receive visitors and hold religious discourse with them.

She died in Brescia, Italy on January 27, 1540. On January 29 her body was placed on a bier in the church of St. Afra and a continuous procession of villagers passed by to pay their respects. A dispute ensued over