

Mother Cabrini and Me  
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, 1850 – 1917

My relationship with Mother Cabrini really began in September, 1998 when I was assigned to what were, then, the two parishes of St. Mary and St. Frances Cabrini here in Conneaut.

My relationship with St. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had been established long ago as a child and a seminary student to be further developed in my years as a priest.

But my relationship to Mother Cabrini was new.

I was aware that she was the first American, that is, US citizen to be canonized a saint; that she had become a naturalized citizen; and that I shared an Italian heritage with her.

That was more than enough reason to foster a devotion to her besides being named pastor of a parish under her patronage.

My connection with Mother Cabrini came more into focus when we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Frances Cabrini Parish in 2006.

In the spring or early summer we took a bus pilgrimage to her houses and community in New York City along with visiting other shrines

as well as Ground Zero where the former Twin Towers once stood.

Meeting her religious community and places where she served put more flesh and blood into the life of this saint.

In the fall of 2006 a small contingent of us from our two parishes made another pilgrimage in honor of Mother Cabrini to her place of birth and the place where she first established her community.

We flew into Milan and traveled by tour bus to the place of her birth, Sant' Angelo Lodigiano.

We had an opportunity to visit her home, see artifacts from her family and read in more detail about her early life.

At an early age Maria Francesca Cabrini was determined to be a schoolteacher but when orphaned at 18 she decided to follow a religious life.

However, she was refused admission to two religious communities, one of which had educated her to be a teacher.

She left Sant' Angelo Lodigiano and went to Codogno, Italy where she eventually founded her community, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

Codogno was a time of some upheaval for young Maria Francesca Cabrini.

In 1874, she was invited by Msgr. Serrati to take over a badly managed orphanage, the House of Providence Orphanage in Cadogno.

In September 1877, she made her vows there and took the religious habit.

The bishop of Todi ran into continuous opposition with the foundress of the orphanage, Anonia Tondini, so much that he closed it in 1880 and then invited Frances to found an institution.

He named Frances prioress of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. With seven young women from the orphanage, she moved into an abandoned Franciscan friary at Codogno and devoted their efforts to the education of girls.

It was here to Codogno that our small pilgrimage group traveled to see and hear more details of the life of the patroness of one of our parishes.

The institute that Mother Cabrini founded soon spread to the cities of Grumello, Milan, and Rome.

Frances had wanted to be a missionary in China but, at the urging of Pope Leo XIII, in 1889 she traveled with six sisters to New York City at the invitation of Archbishop Corrigan to work with the thousands of Italian immigrants living there.

During the next 27 years, in the face of great obstacles, she traveled extensively

and the congregation spread all over the United States, South and Central America and England.

The constitutions for her congregation received final approval from the Holy See in 1907.

In 1909 she became an American citizen. She died of malaria in her own Columbus Hospital in Chicago in 1917.

When I think of the ministry Mother Cabrini performed in her lifetime, I believe her to be a woman for today.

From her work with immigrants, to caring for children, to founding hospitals and giving health care to those with no health care, the education of young girls and keeping them safe from abusive relationships, organizing schools for children and adults to address issues of faith, to her dedication to caring for the poor, the abandoned, the uneducated and the sick, all make her a saint for today.

As one of the patroness for our parish, we can ask her intercession on behalf of our own care for the poor among us, the children in our own community that have limited resources and such harsh family conditions living in poverty.

I believe it is important for us to remember over half of our school children receive free lunches.

We need to ask her intercession in helping us

to addresses issues of faith for our own children and their families.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini may be one of the more recent saints in my life, but she is most certainly a timely woman and saint for our day.