

St. Angela Merici – Foundress of the Ursulines



Angela was born to a farming family on the shores of Lake Garda in Italy in 1474. She was encouraged by her parents in a belief of God who loves and calls. While she received no formal education, her father would read daily from the book “The Lives of the Saints” which filled her with inspirations which endured all her life. During her teenage years she suffered the death of both her parents and her sister to whom she was very close. Following this double loss in her young life Angela prayed daily for a sign that her sister was in heaven. Sitting in the fields one day during harvest time Angela experienced a ‘vision’, a powerful experience of God, through which she was convinced of the safety and happiness of her sister and her call to live in the company of consecrated virgins. Her dream was born. She realised God had called her to something new; something special; something full of hope, something that was filled with potential to bring change to the world.

Over many years and many experiences her dream gradually clarified. Despite other plans of her relatives Angela chose to live a life dedicated to God in her home place in Desenzano. Later, leaving behind Lake Garda she moved to the nearby city of Brescia where she became absorbed in the life of the community, supporting, encouraging, becoming known as a woman of God, a woman whose company and wisdom was much sought after. She was a woman respected by all classes of people as someone who listened and advised. She was known for always having an open door and an open heart too. With her Brescian friends she often took up her pilgrim staff and walked many rocky roads in Italy and across continents to visit the Holy Land. She truly was a woman on a journey, seeking and searching God’s will for her.

Angela was a charismatic woman who attracted others to join her. Angela was by this time coming to her late fifties and still had not made a concrete foundation of her dream when she finally settled in a room beside the church of Saint Afra, where she met with, prayed with and discerned with many companions. At this time young women had two choices in life:

marriage (usually arranged by their parents) or to join the convent and live life behind the cloister wall. Angela had a different dream for those she believed God was calling to a new way of living. Finally, on the 25th November 1535 the first 28 young women signed the Book of the Company of Saint Ursula. Religious life for women took on a new dimension. These young women would live at home or at their place of work if they were in service or in twos or threes in small houses, all scattered throughout the city of Brescia. Their life would be defined by prayer, fasting and reaching out to meet the needs of others and most importantly by their commitment to chastity.

The world had received a new and special gift, a gift that would spread over the coming years and centuries...

- From Brescia in Italy across Europe...to France, to Germany, to Ireland, to England...
- From France to the New World of the Americas...
- From Ireland to Kenya where still today Ursulines of the Irish Union continue to be involved in education and training
- From Belgium to India and from Germany to Australia...

So from a dream in a field in the Italian countryside, Ursulines have travelled across the globe spreading the vision of Angela...

A woman who changed the course of history of religious life...

A woman who inspired others to reach for the stars and realise their dream of education and training for girls.

A woman who continues to inspire and challenge us today to be aware of the needs around us and to respond generously in love...following the teachings of the gospel

A woman who lives on in the hearts of thousands of Ursuline sisters, companions and associates throughout the world.

A woman whose message is as relevant today as it was in 1535...when she invited young women to...

Do something

Get moving

Be confident

Risk new things

Stick with it

Then be ready for BIG surprises