

**REGIONAL FORMATION: SUMMER STUDY ON FRANCISCAN  
SAINTS**

**ST. ANGELA MERICI**



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## **St. Angela Merici**

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Greetings to all my Franciscan Brothers and Sisters! It is an honor to reach out to you with this Summer Saints Study! I have always loved reading about the saints. There is so much to learn about how human and yet how holy they were. Often times it is their persistence and determination that inspires me the most. Through their intercession, I have hope that God will use me in ways beyond my own capacity. As I was approaching profession in 2010, I was looking for a female secular saint as my personal Franciscan patron. I chose St. Angela Merici, an Italian religious educator and founder of the Ursulines whose deep prayer life and relationship with the Lord bore the fruit of mystical encounters with God.

Angela was born on March 21, 1474 in Desenzano, a small town on the shore of Lake Garda in Lombardy. At just 10-years-old, Angela and her older sister became orphans and went to live with their uncle in Salo. There they led a quiet and devout Catholic Christian life. After the untimely death of her sister, Angela was saddened because she had not had the opportunity to receive her last Sacraments. Filled with grief, she prayed for God to reveal the condition of her deceased sister's soul. In a vision, she learned her sister was in Heaven with the company of saints. Angela became increasingly more devout and joined the Third Order of St. Francis where she also pledged to remain a consecrated virgin. When Angela was 20-years-old, her uncle died and she returned to her home town. She found that there were many young girls who had no education and no hope. Her heart was moved. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, she opened her own home to them and began to teach them herself. She devotedly taught them the Catholic Christian faith filled with the gift of grace, and how to pray & participate in the sacramental life. The Lord then revealed to Angela that she was to found an institution with other consecrated virgins to further devote their lives toward the religious training of young girls. These women had little money and no power, but were bound together by their dedication to education and commitment to Jesus Christ and service to His Church.

Living in their own homes, the girls met for prayer and classes. Her teaching model was so successful that she accepted an invitation from the neighboring town, Brescia, to establish a similar school there. During the Jubilee year in 1525, Angela traveled to Rome to gain the special grace of the plenary indulgence offered to all Christian pilgrims. Pope Clement VII had heard of Angela and her great holiness. He noted her wonderful success as a religious teacher for young girls and invited her to stay in Rome. Angela was humble, disliked publicity and kindly declined the generous offer. Though she turned him down, perhaps the pope's request gave her the inspiration or the push to make her little group more formal. Although it was never recognized formally as a religious order in her lifetime, Angela's Company of Saint Ursula, or the Ursulines, was the first group of women religious to work outside of the cloister and became the first teaching order of women in the Catholic Church. On November 25, 1535, Angela gathered together 12 young virgins and laid down the foundation for the Order of the Ursulines. Angela's goal was to elevate family life through Christian education for women. The community she founded was different than many of the religious orders of women which existed in her day. She believed it was important to teach the girls in their own homes with their own families. One of her favorite sayings was, "Disorder in society is the result of disorder in the family."

Angela's life is filled with many virtues. Humbly she refused the Pope's request to remain in Rome. Faithfully she listens to God's call and eagerly acted upon it even when it differed from religious women of her day. She was determined to better the lives of women and persistent in doing so. Angela trusted that inner voice of the Holy Spirit.

I believe we all have our God moments. I believe in quiet times of prayer we can hear the voice of God instructing and inspiring us. Being a Secular Franciscan has given me many opportunities to see first hand my brothers and sisters put their spiritual gifts to work for the betterment of the Church and society as a whole. We truly are one body with many working parts! Praise God!