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Mothers Cabrini and Seton Come to Life in Two New Documentaries

~ by Stephen G. Adubato, AMERICA

Classic films about saints, like “The Song of Bernadette” and “A Man for All Seasons” and more recent releases like Abel Ferrara’s “Padre Pio” and Alejandro Monteverde’s “Cabrini,” take their cues from traditional hagiographies, bringing grandiose renderings of the lives of these holy men and women to the screen.

“Cabrini,” for instance, produced by Angel Studios follows the traditional model of hagiography, placing Francesca Cabrini’s heroic feats front and center in order to inspire viewers to emulate her laudable example. John Anderson’s glowing [review of the film](#)

[for America](#) described Cabrini, “Portrayed by a gauntly radiant Cristiana Dell’Anna,” as one practiced in “speaking truth to power and doing so relentlessly.” The religious sister journeys to New York at the time of “an explosion circa 1887 of Italian immigration, prejudice and poverty [that] was creating a particular kind of hell for their exported countrymen.”

Against immense challenges, Cabrini and her order, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, go on to found missions, orphanages, and



Composite image: A promotional image for the film "Cabrini" shows St. Frances Cabrini, the Italian-born religious sister who became an immigrant and U.S. citizen in the 19th century. She was canonized as America's first U.S. citizen saint in 1946. (CNS photo/DeFazio Communications via CatholicPhilly.com) / A youthful St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first *native-born* American to be canonized, is portrayed in this painting by Joseph Dawley. A widowed mother of five, she founded the Sisters of Charity.

hospitals in New York, and as the film's coda tells us, around the country and eventually around the world.

Yet new trends among more recent accounts of the saints have been changing the narrative, focusing on oft-ignored and more mundane aspects of their personal lives. Two new films on the lives of Mother Seton and Mother Cabrini, produced by the New Jersey based couple MaryLou and Jerome Bongiorno and released on PBS over the past week and a half, are placing the spotlight on lesser-emphasized aspects of these holy women's lives.

Known best for their documentaries on matters of socioeconomic and racial justice and Catholic education in Newark, NJ, the Bongiornos decided to venture into telling the stories of these two women who, they state, have deeply inspired them spiritually and professionally.

Narrated in the first-person and weaving together a creative mix of photos, painting and drawings, the documentaries' scripts draw upon writings by and about the two saints, as well as other historical documents. The films provide a comprehensive view of their lives, including details about their childhoods, their entry into religious life, the founding of their respective missions and the conflicts they confronted, and – perhaps what is most compelling – bits of streams of consciousness style, introspective reflections on their work and their relationship with God. The Bongiornos combine their extensive research with their artistic and spiritual creativity in these moments, reflecting the ways that these saints spoke to them and may also speak to us.



Such accounts of the lives of the saints remind me that even people like me – can become saints. We often forget that the measure of sanctity does not lie in our capacity for perfection or moral coherence. Rather, it resides in the sincerity with which we offer our full selves – including our strengths and weaknesses, our likes and dislikes – to God for him to use for his glory.

To read the full account, please click [here](#)

From the Guadalupe Province Vocation Team... Vocation Ministers Gather in Codogno



Set amidst the backdrop of the MSC Spirituality Center in Codogno, Italy, where Mother Cabrini first opened her Institute, the vocation directors and vocation promotion team members from across the worldwide MSC Institute gathered last week with General Superior Sr. Maria Eliane Azevedo da Silva, MSC and General Councilors, Sr. Stella Maris Elena, MSC, Sr. Gilda Mendoza Argueta, MSC and Sr. Patricia Godoy, MSC to engage in discussion and planning for the vocation promotion initiatives throughout the Institute. They were assisted in the planning for the conference by Sr. Therese Merandi, MSC and Tatiana Ms. Paridiso of the Generalate.

With facilitators Fr. Fernando Falco, MSpS and Fr. Pablo Meza Pernas, MSpS, priests from the Misioneros de Espiritu Santo in Mexico, who are from an organization known as Cruces, the purpose of the gathering was “to offer planning methods and strategic thinking that would allow the participants responsible for vocations to acquire tools/elements to carry out their ministry in a more discerning manner and with better prospects of success.”



Participants at the vocations conference celebrated Mass in the beautiful church at the MSC Spirituality Center in Codogno, Italy.

As an integral part of the process, participants considered the socio-cultural aspects currently impacting the ministry of vocation promotion. It was a most fruitful time of discussion, planning, prayer, and friendship steeped in the Cabrinian charism.



Photo above: Missionary Sisters prepare to enter Mother Cabrini’s family home in Sant’ Angelo Lodigiano. Note the image of the doves under the eaves representative of the doves that circled the house on the day Mother Cabrini was born, July 15, 1850.

Photo right: This is the sanctuary of the church in Sant’ Angelo Lodigiano. The mural depicts Mother Cabrini and the Sacred Heart of Jesus in a celestial scene. The baptismal font where Mother Cabrini was baptized is located in this church. Surrounding the church are stained glass windows detailing moments in Mother’s life. The church is truly breathtaking.

There was time for touring, too. On the last day of the conference, the group traveled to Sant’ Angelo Lodigiano, Mother Cabrini’s village, to tour her home, her school, and to attend Mass in the magnificent cathedral built in her honor. It was a meaningful culmination to the days spent together.

~ submitted by Nancy Costello, Gnadalupe Province Vocation Team



New Executive Director Appointed



The National Shrine of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Board of Directors is delighted to announce the appointment of **Laurie A. Halaska** as Executive Director. Halaska brings extensive leadership and administrative experience, having been an executive director and CEO. “Mother Cabrini has always been a part of my life,” said Halaska. “For my own mom, Mother Cabrini was HER saint, and she prayed to her daily. I have continued that practice and when I saw the position announcement for the Shrine it seemed meant to be.”

Congratulations and best wishes, Laurie!



Cabrini University Goes to the Movies



On Saturday, April 6th, Cabrini University alumni, faculty, staff, and friends gathered at the Regal Theatre in King of Prussia, PA, for a special showing of the CABRINI film. Hollie Havens, Cabrini College, Class of 1998, was the creative force spearheading the event.

Many, many members of the Cabrini University community, whose lives have been indelibly touched by Mother Cabrini and her “education of the heart” attended the film event, proudly wearing their Cabrini gear to celebrate our Patroness and inspiration.

With the closure of Cabrini University this spring, opportunities to come together as one to celebrate our heritage and our friendships are precious. We will continue to look to Mother Cabrini to keep us united and our bonds, strong in the future.



Sr. Christine Marie Baltas, MSC, '66, was there to greet the movie goers.



Photo left: Hollie Havens '98 (3rd l.) was the guiding force behind the film event which brought together from a cross section of years.

Photo below: Cabrini alumni, faculty, staff and friends turned out in force to gather for the special showing of the CABRINI film.



Nutrition Program Advances Healthy Eating



Justifiably proud of their accomplishments, the graduates of the nutrition program held at CIS-NYC display their certificates.

On Thursday April 4th a group of 14 CIS-NYC community members graduated from our nutrition program, which was held in February and March. Participants were from many different countries, including Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia,

Honduras, and Mexico, and they each completed nine nutrition workshops provided in partnership with the Cornell University Cooperative Extension.

Participants learned to read nutrition labels, how to teach their children to eat healthier, and how to be careful when washing fruits or vegetables, among many other valuable new skills. Each participant received a diploma, a MetroCard, and a gift from Cabrini and Cornell in gratitude for their participation and perseverance in the group.



A festive celebration awaited the nutrition program graduates!

All participants shared a pleasant moment at their graduation and prepared a healthy salad recipe.

~ submitted by Ella Nimmo on behalf of CIS Social Services Volunteer, Andrea



Creative STARS at Cabrini Immigrant Services



well as building confidence in their verbal and artistic expression.

This program was extra special because the storyteller was one of our students who was trained in our Storyteller Training program. Thank you to the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation grant, which allows us to train college students to become storytellers. Today was Rocio Soria Morales' first Storytelling Program!



Rocio Soria Morales made her storytelling debut.



The book that was used was, *The Most Magnificent Thing*, by Ashley Spires. After telling the story and having a discussion about the book, the

students worked together to invent something out of simple materials. They used cardboard, pom-poms, popsicle sticks, etc. to make something new. After collaborating, the students presented what they created together. Some of the items made were a special car that flew, a catapult and a maze that used pom-poms to get to the holder on the bottom. The children were so proud of their creations. The students enjoyed a fun time together. In addition to the project they created, they were so grateful to receive a copy of the book.



Photos above and left: With paper, scissors, pom-poms, and glue – creativity knows no bounds for these youngsters!

~ submitted by Lorraine Campanelli, Director, CIS – Dobbs Ferry, NY

Prayer Requests

Prayers for Special Intentions

Since the release of the Cabrini film, the Communications Office has received many requests for prayer from so many individuals who have been deeply touched by the life story of Mother Cabrini and who are now seeking her intercession. Let us unite in prayer for their collective petitions.

With Grateful Hearts

From the Johnson/Seaman Families...

We are so grateful for all of the love, prayers, and concern for our sweet Juliette Rose this week. She is out of the hospital, and your continued prayers for her healing are greatly appreciated.



In Loving Memory

Sr. Isidora Forte, MSC

On Monday, April 1, 2024, our **Sister Isidora Forte, MSC**, 89 years-old, of the Sacred Heart Community in Codogno, returned to the Father's House. Let us pray for the soul of our beloved, Sr. Isidora, that the Lord may welcome her into His Kingdom of Light and Peace.