**Full transcription of the audio text of Mary-Cabrini Durkin film clips**

**Clip 1: The Faith-Filled Child**

I am so happy to be able to share some of my joy in our Madre St Angela with you today. I am Mary Cabrini-Durkin, from the United States, a member of the Company of St Ursula.

We will begin our look at St Angela- who was not St Angela-when she was a faith-filled child, in the small town of Desenzano, originally born in the city but the family moved to a farm in the neighbourhood of Le Grezze when she was quite small. A faith filled family produced this faith-filled child. And we can see the influence of a loving and healthy family life that Angela must have experienced there on the farm in Le Grezze with her parents, Caterina Biancosi Merici and her father Giovanni Merici who brought up a family of two girls and three boys on the farm. It was surely a happy family because Angela herself, when she later formed her Company of St Ursula, the beginnings of Ursuline life she started in 1535, she shaped it as a spiritual family, using many of the same understandings of loving and healthy relationship that she must have have experienced as a child.

One of the beautiful features of their family life, was in the evenings after they had had their meal, and before they went to bed, Papa Giovanni read to the family from the Book of Saints, The Golden Legend it was called. Now it is quite striking that this farm family had a book, only 20 years after the publication of the Gutenberg Bible, the first example of moving type print, so this was the new technology of the age and it was dedicated to forming the family in faith. These lives of the Saints gave the young Angela models of heroic courage and adventure, frankly as well as spiritual idealism and these cultivated in her what would eventually become some of the great passions of her life, certainly her dedication to Jesus, as she read, heard I should say, the stories of great Saints who had given their lives as martyrs, as witnesses of faith and she was very, very aware of the power of their witness- the people who, in earliest Church times, had stood up for faith and for their loyalty to Christ- this became a hallmark of her own life.

She became very devoted to these martyrs of the early Church; in fact later on, she would choose one of them, St Ursula, as the patron for the group that she began, The Company of St Ursula, or what we might say were the Companions under the patronage of St Ursula.

So, this also gave her a window unto a wider world, and we know that Angela, although brought up on the farm, could imagine a world beyond the farm, in fact imagination became one of the hallmarks of her life as well. She could imagine what was not - but could be. She was not limited by either time or space and frankly, I think part of that gift that she gives us is the result of her having been formed by the reading of the lives of the saints by her father.

Certainly, it cultivated in her an opportunity to think about, to reflect on and to live the very virtues that the Saints exemplified. And this all flowed into her gift, her bequest to the future in the Company of St Ursula and what later became the Order of St Ursula, the Ursuline Sisters, and in the wonderful projects of education and other services which the Ursuline Sisters have poured forth around the world- all coming from the seeds that were planted in a young girl on a farm in a small village in Northern Italy.

Angela realised very early in her life as a young girl that she had a special calling from God- she didn’t know what it would be, how she would live it out- but she knew that God was calling her to a special intimacy with him.

Into this world of joy and faith came some great sadness. When Angela was just about her early teens, 13-14, her older sister, her only sister, died quite suddenly and Angela experienced deep grief and bereavement- and also, anxiety. She worried that this companion of hers in what was sometimes mischievous activities in the farm area- trespassing on other land, letting the animals get off the path and nibble someone else’s crops- that these difficulties that had caused her father to pay fines to the civic authority, might have even imperilled her sister’s soul.

### But we now know that that that kind of depression and anxiety was a natural outcome of her grief. Then sadly, in a very short period of time after that, both her parents died. Angela orphaned really with her brothers, but what a lonely terrible loss she was experiencing and because she and the younger brother were too young to be on the farm without adult parenting, they were taken to a nearby town of Salò to live with her mother’s brother and sister-in-law, the Biancosi family.

It was a time of great loss for Angela- obviously the loss of her dearest and nearest but also she had lost her home now, she’d gone to a very different world from the life on the farm, she had now gone to live in the city and in a different class of society as well. It was a difficult transition and to make things more complicated, she and her Aunt and Uncle had a certain amount of conflict over her calling. They felt the best thing they could do for her was find her a husband and get her married and settled in life- and they were determined. And she knew that God had called her to another way of being with him – and she was determined. Sometimes I think it’s fair to use the word “stubborn”: she was pretty stubborn.

Her friends, people in Salò, would say; “Oh Angela, you’ve got such beautiful blonde hair, you’re going to get a man easily!” So, what did Angela do? She took ashes out of the fireplace and rubbed it in her hair. She was not going to get a husband; she knew that she had another calling – but it was a very difficult time. Another little titbit out of that era, she was very decisive about certain spiritual practices, penitential practices she was going to do- this was not at all like the way she was brought up or the way she lived her later life. But one day, there was a lovely picnic, social event with beautiful salad and fresh greens and Angela took some sand and tossed it in the salad to show that she was going to live a penitential life. Well, eventually she matured, with the help, I would say of the Franciscan Friars who were the pastors of her Aunt and Uncle’s church.

And Angela eventually found a softer, gentler way which was frankly more true to her own personality and her own family formation. In the meantime however, I said that her little brother was with her there in Salò, and I think this must have been the time when she also began to be so gently loving-she was the little Mama for this younger brother and later on, people would call her Madre, that loving motherly care for others became a hallmark of her own life.

All this period of suffering and bereavement also taught her compassion and later in life people would turn to her because they knew that she understood suffering and that she had the loving gentleness to help them in their times of suffering.

**Clip 2: The Discerning Pilgrim**

God blessed Angela with a great consolation after the death of her sister and this period of worrying, discouragement and anxiety. One day she had a deep spiritual experience, you might call it a vision- she could see her sister, accompanied by angels, assuring Angela that she was happy in heaven. This joyful sense of the glory and the happiness that awaits us, remained a characteristic of Angela throughout her life and she always pointed her daughters in later years toward the joy to be experienced in our heavenly homeland.

Early in her life, Angela had a sense of call, a loving call from God to give herself in love to Him through the person of Jesus Christ. After her period of anxiety, after her period of conflict, after becoming connected with the Franciscans who helped her develop her mature spirituality, Angela returned from her Aunt and Uncle’s home in Salò to the family farm in Le Grezze, now being operated by her brothers, and the wife and family of one of those brothers. Angela was living a call that was deep and yet still reaching forward. Something in her was searching: how am I called to be and to live?

She began to discover that, through the simple activities of daily life, as a worker on the farm, the family farm, and also with a small vineyard that she herself owned, she began to experience how God was with her in these days and places of ordinary life. One day when she, like all the other young farm women, was gathered with others in the olive harvest in a place called Brudazzo, the group had the noon time meal and took a little period of rest.

During that time, something deep and visionary happened in Angela’s soul once again. This time, she saw a ladder stretching between earth and heaven and on that ladder were young women and angels going up and down. This connection between her ordinary life, the place where she was at work and heaven was her connection, her sense that somehow her future, her call would be realised in a way of leading women to heaven.

This was, of course we know, to become the Company of St Ursula and later the Ursuline Order- but Angela didn’t know that - and she spent years seeking, and working, and living deeper and deeper into what that call might be.

Life took her to the big city of Brescia, when she was 40. She was asked to go console, accompany a bereaved woman, Caterina Patengola, who had lost in a very short space of time, her husband and all three of her children. The Franciscan Friars knew Angela well, knew that she was the one with the compassionate heart that could accompany and console Caterina. And Angela answered the call.

When she arrived in Brescia, gradually she came to realise that this was the place where she was going to be able to fulfil her call. She found that she had been living for many years as a single woman and that there were other single women who also felt a call to God who began to come to her and seek to learn the secret of her joy, the secret of her dedication and what love meant in her life.

With that experience, she was getting a little closer to realising the meaning of her vision, but she still didn’t have a full understanding and she herself was a seeker, as were these other women, and she went on the road with her seeking.

We think of her a woman of pilgrimage, in fact, she’s often shown with a pilgrim staff that she used when she walked oftentimes on these long journeys. One of them was to Mantua, to the tomb of Osanna Andreasi.She had of course died, but she had been noted in Mantua as a holy woman who did not belong to a religious life and was a single woman dedicated to God, not in a group but as an individual. Angela had something to learn from her and from the encouragement from the example that this woman’s life gave.

Later, Angela sought further in the Holy Land, following the footsteps of Jesus, along the way of the Cross. Of course, because she had suffered a kind of eye difficulty, we don’t know exactly what it was, on the trip over on the long sea voyage, she had to follow, as her friends would later say, seeing the holy places with the eyes of her heart, because she had a temporary blindness. However, it was there as she fell upon the stones of Calvary, in worship, and weeping and feeling very, very close to the sufferings of Christ.

Upon her return to Brescia, she made another pilgrimage to Rome in the Holy Year of 1525 and there in Rome, she visited the tombs of the martyrs, people who had been her heroic models of fidelity to Christ. And finally, she made two trips, two pilgrimages to the holy mountain, as it’s called of Varallo in Northern Italy. There, various scenes from the life of Christ had been replicated in artistic depictions.

It was on the last of these journeys that Angela must have been gaining a kind of clarity about what her call should bring her to, in the form of the Company of St Ursula, because the pilgrimage she made in 1532 was the last of her pilgrimages and among her companions on that pilgrimage were several of the women who would join with her in beginning the Company of St Ursula.

At last, through the course of just living, finding her God was present to her in the very ordinary circumstances of life and in being sought out by other women seeking to know the same joy that she had found, at last the view of what her call should be took shape in a companionship of single lay women, dedicated to Christ- we call that now, what she called it then – the Company of St Ursula and on November 25th 1535, in the Church of St Afra, the first 28 women and Angela dedicated themselves to Christ in companionship, a company it’s called, a sisterhood of communication and communion with each other and with the Lord- it was the fulfilment at last of what she had always been seeking.

**Clip 3: The Revolutionary Madre**

All Ursulines and all Ursuline groups look back to November 25th, 1535 as our beginnings. It was the day on which Angela Merici & her first companions began the Company of St Ursula, that spiritual companionship of single, lay women that has flourished throughout history since then and also has given birth to the Ursuline Order and to, Ursuline Education so we are all part of this large spiritual family that was begun by our Madre, our mother Angela Merici. And she was indeed a motherly figure.

Early in her life, she experienced a family environment that was nurturing and she was a person who carried that nourishment, that nurturing, that care, that concern, that compassion, that guidance into her relationships in such a way that all of the people of Brescia eventually came to call her Madre- she was Madre, Sr Angela in the way that people thought of her there.

For us, she’s a very particular Madre because out of her life came our life that we experience, in all the centuries of Ursuline experience that have followed.

Sometimes, we may not realise how revolutionary she was. On November 25th, what she gave birth to, was unheard of in her world.

Let’s think about the opportunities for women’s life and flourishing and alternatives in her time and place in Northern Italy in the 16th century. There was a saying that a woman had to have either a man or a monastery – those were the two options of life, marriage or monastic religious life; both wonderful options- but Angela saw a third and embraced it – and that was a way of dedication to God in single, lay life in the world.

And why was that so revolutionary?

Well, it was assumed that women were the weaker sex, of course, and that it would not be possible for them to maintain their lives, their dedication to Christ on their own in the world without the protection of a man or a wall. So, it was very courageous of her, but she had learned through the course of her own living how strong that call of God could be, how God graced her with the capacity to live for Him and to live for others in this singlehood in the world. So, she knew the capacity of women to experience God and to remain faithful to their commitments in their single lay life.

This trust in women’s capacity is something that was quite unusual in her day. There were no men involved in the organisation of the hierarchy of the governance of the company; all of the women were elected to govern the company from among the members, or from among women who were supporters, to the matrons, the widowed matrons who were friends of Angela and who helped with what we today would call trusteeship or administration.

It was a women’s group run for and by women- and for the world. Angela was a Madre to men and women in her wider society and so are her daughters and followers today: women and men for other people in our world – in service.

I would like to say something else, something Angela had discovered through her life experience and which she has shared with all of us, and that another revolutionary aspect of her foundation of the company was that she found out, she discovered, she lived the fact that God was present in all the ordinary circumstances of life; that she could experience God, that she could find God’s presence, that she could be present to God in these ordinary ways of life.

And isn’t that the call that we all have? To live our way of life, wherever God has put us, to listen for our special call to whatever vocation it may lead, and to make our lives, lives like hers- full of joy and love.

So how did we come to the great experience which has filled the world with what we call today Ursuline Education, certainly true to the spirit of the Madre who was herself very much a teacher and guide in the spiritual life for those around her.

But she didn’t have schools, she didn’t have anything like formal instructions – so how did that come about?

Angela died in 1540 in Brescia. About 20 years later, the company had spread throughout much of Northern Italy. There were many companies in different cities. Soon there were companies in Sothern France, and it was in France that what we know today as the Ursuline Order began, with its wonderful mission of education.

What happened was this:

Ursuline typically lived in their own homes or the places where they worked as live-in servants usually. However, a few of one of the groups in France began to live together, for convenience, perhaps they didn’t have family homes to live in, and pretty soon, some of the authorities got worried.

Oh, they noticed these women who were living on their own in the world! Oh my goodness, women can’t live on their own in the world and pretty soon the heavy hand perhaps of both Church and society gave the an ultimatum: either be dispersed or if you are going to live together and be in a consecrated life, you must go into a monastery. They didn’t want to be dispersed and so they accepted monastic life.

And thus, the Ursuline Order was born in the early 1600s in France and spread from France.

But before it did, these women were very strategic. They negotiated the capacity to bring schools for girls into the monastery. This was the beginning of education for women in any kind of formalised or systemic way.

No, they could no longer go out, they could no longer be involved in their accustomed role nurturing girls in the world, but they could now bring the girls into the monastery in two forms: boarding schools and day schools for the poorer girls in the neighbourhood.

So, both forms of Ursuline Education emerged from the strategic dedication of those women in France who though they accepted monastic life, accepted it with an apostolic vision – and that is the mission of Ursuline Education.