

## **'The Sisters of St Joseph: Educational Endeavours at Mount Street, North Sydney'**

Exhibition launch by Sr Monica Cavanagh rsj  
Sisters of St Joseph Congregational Leader

Mary MacKillop Place Museum  
Thursday 31 March 2016

I am delighted to be launching this special exhibition '**The Sisters of St Joseph: Educational endeavours of Mount Street, North Sydney**' in the Sesquicentenary year of the Congregation. One hundred and fifty years ago Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods established the first St Joseph's school in Penola South Australia. This foundational school held a vision that Catholic education be provided for the children of the working class poor and the children of families in isolated and rural communities. It was to form the basis out of which has grown the system of Catholic Education that we know today.

The theme we have chosen for this special year of celebration is '**listening to the heartbeat of the world**'.

Mary and Julian listened to the heartbeat of the world of their time. ***They saw a need and in the words of the Constitutions 'were led by God to respond to the 'misery and wretchedness' of the 'bush children' and the 'afflicted poor'. They did this by making the Catholic education of poor children the Sisters' prime task and by undertaking urgently needed works of charity for which no other religious were available.***

Together they contemplated the mystery that was unfolding – a mystery which would lead to the empowerment of thousands of children through the ministry of education. The education they offered was holistic and practical engaging students in the basics of maths, reading and writing and social studies along with **cultural and religious activities**. For Mary and Julian education was a life-long process and thus the importance and significance that Mary MacKillop placed on the on-going education of her Sisters.

Tonight we gather to discover one of the many ways in which this dream of education for all was enhanced on this site. Tonight's exhibition is the first of three that will be launched here at Mary MacKillop Place in this Sesquicentenary year. It provides a means of honouring the gift of education provided by the Sisters over the past 150 years. Tonight's exhibition tells the story and development of Mount Street North Sydney as an educational site.

When Mary MacKillop arrived here in 1883 she brought the novices with her. Right from the beginning Mary MacKillop believed '*that the Sisters must be trained spiritually and in the worldly knowledge necessary to enable them to take the stand the Church in Australia requires of them*' She wrote this in a letter to Monsignor Kirby in 1874.

Establishing the Teacher's Training College here in North Sydney is part of fulfilling this commitment. Mary herself was a dedicated teacher and it was important for her that the Sisters were well prepared for this important work in the best possible way. Tonight as you move through this exhibition I hope that you experience something of **Mary MacKillop's passion for education** and how this dream has been passed on down through the years as you meet some of the women who shaped the development of the Teacher's Training College here at Mount Street. These were women who were filled with the same passion for

education where the Sisters were urged to have 'a great love for the children under their care and never forget that they are all children of God.' Each one brought their own wisdom and on-going educational formation into the experience of the Teacher's College.

- As you walk through the many Milestones in the Development of the Teacher Training at Mount Street North Sydney you will meet people like **Mother Laurence O'Brien** under whose direction the level two to the old school house as a demonstration school for infants and primary was added;
- **Mother Leonie Ryan** who trained thousands of teachers in infant methods and who herself undertook training in the **Montessori method** in 1921 at Blackfriars School Sydney. She was also responsible for opening the College up firstly to Religious of other Congregations especially those of smaller and missionary groups and then to lay women.
- You will meet **Sr Agnes Cecilia Boyle** a student at the Demonstration school in 1907 and other young women who carried on the dream begun in Penola all those years ago.

Perhaps here tonight you may even meet some of women in person who's training as teachers and in all matters educational took place here at Mount Street North Sydney.

I myself am a product of this Catholic Teacher's College and was here at a historic time when the first lay principal Mr McGrath took on the leadership of the college and the Catholic Teacher's College was recognised as a College of Advanced Education and received Federal Government funding. – 1973-1974

I am forever grateful for the effective teaching methods that I learnt here and for the wisdom I gained from so many wonderful lecturers – *wisdom such as reading a story as the last thing to do each day*. It was training that encouraged a love of learning that would stay with the students throughout life. My teacher's training has been the backbone of all the ministries I have undertaken over the years. Like Mary MacKillop and those earlier women in our story, I have learnt what these words of Nelson Mandela capture **Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.**

As you engage in the story of tonight's exhibition may you experience that wisdom given to us many years ago by Mary MacKillop – a wisdom that speaks of '**God wanting us to use every means at our disposal to lead others to life**'. The educational endeavours at Mount Street, North Sydney have indeed been a means of leading others to life. May this exhibition which I now launch speak to your heart of the many ways in which education has gifted you in life.

May it connect you to your own educational endeavours and raise within you a gratitude for the ways our forebears treasured this gift of education.

They worked with such dedication to adapt to changing circumstances as they '**listened to the heartbeat within the educational world of their time**'.

May this exhibition invite you into reflecting on the important role that teachers continue to play in our society today as they encourage a love of learning that stays throughout life.