

The Catholic Church has canonised Australia's Mary MacKillop, officially recognising her as a saint. What does this historic event mean to Tasmanians today?

Australia's first saint



As we witness the canonisation of Mother Mary MacKillop in Rome, it also becomes a time to reflect upon the relevance of our first saint to all Australians regardless of belief or faith. Coming from a poor family of Scottish origins, Mary grew up with the adage that God will always provide and she applied this throughout her life. Through founding the first school in 1866, she came into contact with a young priest, Julian Tenison Woods. As a missionary and scientist, Woods became one of Tasmania's initial environmentalists, recognising the importance of the wilderness of this state.

As Australia grew, it was identified that there was a lack of schools in rural areas. Father Woods was keen to support the educational and spiritual needs of children growing up in these rural communities. Mary established that first school in a disused stable in Penola, South Australia, before becoming the first sister and Mother Superior of the newly-formed order of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in 1867.

The Sisters of St Joseph moved into many rural areas to establish schools for the children of poor families. Today across Tasmania are a number of schools and colleges established under the Sisters of St Joseph - the first was established at Westbury in 1888. But establishing the order wasn't without its challenges, with many within the Church trying to prevent the order from growing. Mary was excommunicated but later accepted back - this action causing her to travel to Rome to seek the official sanction of Pope Pius IX in supporting the Sisters as an order. Mary was also politically astute and after the 1902 changes to electoral laws allowing women the right to enrol to vote and stand as political candidates, she wrote to all Sisters in the order, encouraging them to apply to be on their respective electoral rolls. She fought long and hard to assist those less fortunate and at the time of her death in 1909, Mother Mary MacKillop had overseen the establishment of 117 schools. The legacy of Mary MacKillop continues today and her work and that of the Sisters in Tasmania is on display at the Josephite Mission and History Centre in New Town. Many of our schools, such as Sacred Heart College (New Town), Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School (Geeveston and Ulverstone), St Peter Chanel Catholic School (Smithton), St Thomas More's Catholic School (Newstead), St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Rosebery), St James Catholic College (Cygnet) and MacKillop Catholic College (Morrington)

are amongst over a dozen schools which have enduring links with the Sisters of St Joseph.

Mary MacKillop even has a South Australian electorate named for her - a rare honour for someone from a non-political background. She also has a rose named after her, as well as a bridge and a native shrub. Her face also appears on commemorative coins and postage stamps as an inspirational Australian.

Mary MacKillop's story does not just belong to the Catholic Church. She belongs to all as a remarkable Australian. Her endurance, combined with compassion and leadership, are characteristics reflective of many iconic Australians.

She bought a message of human dignity to all she encountered - whether it was a convicted murderer who prayed with her, comforting a dying orphan boy, sitting in the gutter with an ill woman or sharing her lunch with a homeless man.

Certainly Mary MacKillop touched the lives of many people and left a legacy which still benefits many Australians over a century later.

Adrian Doyle Archbishop of Hobart

which we can rededicate ourselves to God and to the vision bequeathed to us by Mary.

Her name in religion was Mary of the Cross. She was a woman of courage and hope in difficult times, refusing to allow herself to become a victim of the trials she experienced.

She showed enormous perseverance in the face of difficulty. In spite of adversity, she trusted in God's compassionate love. She had many reasons to become bitter at the wrongs done her, but she refused to be embittered.

Instead she forgave those who had wronged her. Her generosity of spirit and capacity to forgive are qualities much needed in our world today.

She loved and was committed to those who struggled, particularly the poor and those on the margins of society and Church in her time.

She made a difference in their lives bringing them a message of hope. She respected the dignity of each. Hers was always a courageous response to the misery and wretchedness of the neglected ones of society.

Mary's spirit knew no boundaries of race, religion or life circumstances.

I believe that her canonisation affirms the way of life that Mary began and which we Sisters live today. Although circumstances of life in the 21st century call for different responses to the many and different needs of our world, we must still strive to live according to the principles that guided Mary's life.

I am reminded of the words of Pope John Paul II at her beatification in Sydney in 1995: "Think of Blessed Mary MacKillop and learn from her to be a gift of love and compassion for one another, for all Australia and for the whole world."

Sister Jill Dance Congregational Leader, Sisters of St Joseph Tasmania



Sister Jill Dance of Hobart, left, Sister Helen Hickey, and MacKillop College teacher Catherine Sandrick attended the canonisation in Rome

Mary's Tasmanian sisters

The Sisters of St Joseph are rejoicing that at last Mary MacKillop, our co-founder, is to be recognised as a saint.

The canonisation confirms her holiness, something that we have long known. By conferring on her the status of saint, the Church holds her up as someone to be imitated and someone to whom we can turn to intercede with God on our behalf.

For us, the canonisation is not merely a celebration of an extraordinary life lived in the 19th and early 20th centuries. I believe that more than anything, the canonisation calls us, her Sisters, to keep all that she stood for alive in our day. It is an occasion on

today. Although circumstances of life in the 21st century call for different responses to the many and different needs of our world, we must still strive to live according to the principles that guided Mary's life. I am reminded of the words of Pope John Paul II at her beatification in Sydney in 1995: "Think of Blessed Mary MacKillop and learn from her to be a gift of love and compassion for one another, for all Australia and for the whole world."

Sister Jill Dance Congregational Leader, Sisters of St Joseph Tasmania



Timeline of Mary MacKillop's journey to sainthood

1842

Born in Fitzroy, Victoria, on January 15.

1866

Sets up the first St Joseph's School in a disused stable in Penola, South Australia. Also establishes the Sisters of St Joseph and spends her life opening orphanages and refuges for the needy.

1909

Dies in convent in Sydney, on August 8, aged 67.

1926

Process for her canonisation begins within the Catholic Church, before being suspended in 1931 and continued in 1951.

1995

Beatified by Pope John Paul II in Sydney on January 19, after the Vatican accepts she was responsible for the cure of a woman with terminal leukaemia in 1961.



Pope John Paul II

2006

Family of Sophie Delezio, who recovered from two horrific car accidents, credits her recovery to prayers to Mary MacKillop.

2008

In April, documents about Mary's cure of a woman with inoperable cancer in the mid-1990s are given to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.



Sophie Delezio

which oversees the canonisation process, for consideration as her second miracle.

In July, Pope Benedict XVI visits Mary's shrine and says she will be canonised as soon as a second miracle is proved.

2009

In March, Irishman David Keohane, who was beaten in a Sydney brawl, wakes from an eight-month coma on St Patrick's Day. His family attributes his recovery to months of prayer to Mother Mary.

In July, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd visits Pope Benedict XVI and the pair discuss Mother Mary.

In December, Pope Benedict XVI approves her second miracle.

2010

February 19 Pope Benedict XVI announces Mother Mary will become Australia's first Roman Catholic saint; formal canonisation to take place in Rome on October 17.

October 6

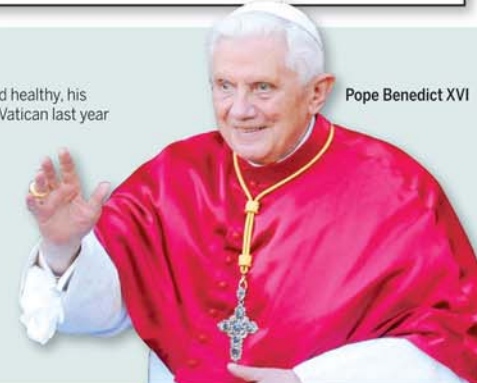
A third "reserve" miracle is revealed. In 1999, Jack Simpson, then eight, lost much of his neurological functions. He became paralysed and was eventually diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

cancer and epilepsy. Now 19 and healthy, his case was also presented to the Vatican last year but was not required.

October 17

Mother Mary MacKillop to be recognised as a saint by Pope Benedict at a ceremony at St Paul's Basilica, in Rome. Five other saints are recognised on the day.

Source: AAP and www.sydney.catholic.org.au and www.sosj.org.au



Pope Benedict XVI

VOX POP

"As a student of MacKillop College, what does the canonisation of Mary MacKillop, Australia's first saint, mean to you?"



Claudia Conley
Our school bears her name and it's awesome to be a part of this community.



Caitlin O'Keefe
It teaches society of the extraordinary work that Mary persevered with, which made her story inspirational.



Georga Cuthbert
Mary MacKillop dedicated her life to the disadvantaged children. As a student of a college that follows in her footsteps, I believe that the canonisation honours her for such a selfless and giving life.



Logan Bridge
Mary MacKillop was inspirational because she set up schools for the poor.



Miah Sonner
She inspires me because she treated all of her students the same and she was always fair and never rejected anyone.



Sam Grice
I think it is great that she has finally been recognised for all her hard work in educating children and helping ordinary Australians have a better life.



Marcus Knott
It is great that she has been recognised for all she has done, in particular her sense of fairness. She encourages us all to give everyone a fair go.



Chloe Oppitz
I think Mary MacKillop teaches young people to be an inspirational individual, to follow your dreams and always help others.



James Kelly
She inspires me because she gave a good education to the poor.