

ST MARY MACKILLOP SCHOOL WALLAROO S.A.

AUSTRALIA'S LONGEST CONTINUING JOSEPHITE SCHOOL 1869-2019

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to say a few words on this special occasion, your sesquicentenary. Wallaroo was very familiar to Mary MacKillop, her footprints would be all over this town that she visited often, trudging up from the wharf and later from the railway station to visit her Sisters and their students.

From about 1865 until the arrival of the first resident Parish Priest, Father William Kennedy in 1867, a small Catholic School operated in this town. Father Kennedy immediately closed this school and refused to reopen it until he had the newly formed Sisters of St. Joseph in his parish.

Father Julian Woods and Mary MacKillop established the Sisters of St Joseph for the catholic education of children from poor families in response to Bishop Geoghegan's strong request that every parish have a catholic school. He wrote:

Pastors! Parents! Catholics! ... What can we do? ... Remember that the work [of Catholic education] is God's ... and that it will bear delay no longer. Let us begin for God's sake. Wherever there is a Pastor and a Flock we implore you to make a commencement of a Catholic school. Let each do what he can.(1860)

Initially, Mary and Julian worked together to establish the "Sisters of St Joseph for the Catholic Education of children from poor families"¹ but they soon realised that poor families had many other needs besides education for their children. Therefore, in the Sisters' new Rule of Life he wrote:

Their duty is to do all the good they can and never to see and evil (need) without seeing how they might remedy it, and thus to take a most lively interest in every external work of charity in the gaols, poor houses and hospitals, so as to leave nothing untried, no matter how difficult, provided it might advance the glory of God, the good of souls and the prevention of sin in the world. This is their mission ...and the religious must do any good they can and make their charity all-embracing.²

Even though the Sisters were involved in so much charitable work, teaching was always their main work. Mary wrote:

¹ That was the title of the Rule of Life he wrote for them in 1867

²: *Rule*, Article 13

*The Sisters have to teach the children of the poor. These poor are for the most part emigrants from the British Isles, or other parts of Europe, or the children of such who have settled in scattered bands all over the colonies.*³

So it was that in 1869, Sisters Catherine O'Brien, aged 23 years, and Margaret O'Loughlin, aged 18 years, set off by steamer for the Port of Wallaroo.

Whenever I think of Wallaroo, I have an image of a resilient community with, a resilience that has sustained all involved in this school over the past 150 years. There was certainly little else in this poor mining town on which to draw resources, or inspiration.

Continue reading from Sisters of Saint Joseph website below:

When I arrived here in 1988, the age of computers had arrived and they were being introduced into schools, except for here in Wallaroo, where there was no proper school building as such. The interior of the former Methodist Church across the road from the present school had been repurposed in 1885 and for 103 years had provided two classrooms. The former convent, which had opened in 1903, was being used for the junior primary classes, and a lone transportable library, completed our school! This school had operated for 119 years without a purpose-built facility! That's resilience! However, it was a very much-loved place, that generations of families had attended. Over all those years it had flourished, educating in the Josephite Tradition, carried along on the hopes and dreams of the pioneering families and their descendants.

Today this modern school, which stands on the site of that old Convent, proudly displays the school emblem above the entrance, indicating a school that educates in the Josephite Tradition. The emblem bears the words "*In Omnibus Caritas – In all things Love*"

What is this Josephite Tradition in which Mary MacKillop School students of today are educated?

Stepping into this delightful, open and light-filled school today you can see and sense the words on the emblem in action.

In all things Love.

The place is alive with learning in the context of love and compassion. There is a deep atmosphere of peace and satisfaction expressed in the confidence of

³ Mary MacKillop from London, 1873.

the students. There is pride and respect for the learning environment, where the students are successfully engaged in the task at hand. There is a wonderful sense of community and belonging, aided by the genius configuration of the contemporary buildings, all under one roof. The transparency between each classroom (with sliding glass doors instead of walls) speaks of familiarity and inclusion – as though children are gathered to learn around the kitchen table, always feeling connected. The inclusive and sensitive way in which different learning abilities are catered for and the way staff encourage and challenge their students, acknowledges the dignity and respect of the individual.

In all things Love

Here in this community one can sense a real belonging and ownership by the students. With small numbers, students have opportunities to shine, as teachers are able to foster the uniqueness, dignity and integrity of each person. This size school would resonate with Mary MacKillop.

In 1873 she wrote:

There are always found persons, more or less ready to open schools in large towns but no so in small towns in remote areas in the bush seldom visited by a Priest.⁴

Mary's vision is still expressed in the everyday life of this school. Under the good leadership of Mr. James Quigley and staff it continues to care for those on the margins because of their geographical, economic or social circumstances, walking with those who have lost hope, challenging injustice, and embracing the protection and care of our common home Earth.

In all things Love.

Mr. Quigley, you and your staff, are to be congratulated on the way in which the vocation of teacher is lived out here in Wallaroo, as together you fulfill God's mission among the students and their families.

In all things love

I was delighted to see in the Reception area a statue of St Joseph. And I was even more impressed to see it placed on the floor instead of on a pedestal, in a very child-friendly setting, where the statue is at eye level, well, for Reception students at least. That humble man Joseph would indeed approve.

⁴ Mary MacKillop from London, 1873

In all things Love.

Mary MacKillop had great devotion to St. Joseph, that quiet, caring and protective man under whose patronage she placed all her schools and Convents. She wrote,

“In St Joseph’s care I leave you.”

Mary would be thrilled to see that statue in the front office, as she herself had a statue in every school she opened. We still have a letter Mary wrote in May 1871 describing the things she had acquired from the Sisters in Port Adelaide for the new school she was about to open in Port Augusta. She wrote during the voyage up the gulf to Port Augusta, (after they had stopped off to visit the Sisters in Wallaroo)

...and at Wallaroo we begged a statue of St. Joseph...which we put in the corner which seemed to be made for that purpose.⁵

I wonder if any of our schools educating in the Josephite tradition, still have their original statue.

I want to finish by congratulating you, the community of families, staff, and students, parents, Board members and parishioners for celebrating this milestone and continuing the tradition of the Josephite story and Catholic Education in Wallaroo and the Copper Coast. As Josephites we are proud that this unique school community continues to live the spirit and compassion of Mary MacKillop today as it continues to carry out God’s mission.

In all things Love.

Helen Duke rsj

⁵ Mary Mackillop, on board steamer, May 1871