



Reflection at Opening of Mary MacKillop Sculpture in the Interfaith Peace Garden (Great Stupa)

14 March 2025

It is a delight to be with you here today. It is a privilege and honour to have Mary MacKillop recognised in this Interfaith Peace Garden.

Mary MacKillop was born in Fitzroy, Melbourne on 15 January 1842. She was the eldest of eight children and felt a deep responsibility for her family. She was educated by her parents, especially her father Alexander, and occasionally attended school when it was possible. At 14 years of age, she began work at Sands and Kenny to earn an income for the family. When she was 18 years old, she went to Penola as governess for her uncle's family. Here she met Fr Julian Tension Woods. She returned to Portland to be with the family and here she was formally registered as a teacher. In 1866, she co-founded the Sisters of Saint Joseph with Fr Julian Tension Woods.

In 2008 when Pope Benedict visited Australia for World Youth Day, he spoke of these three qualities of Mary MacKillop:

- Perseverance in the face of adversity
- Practical Holiness
- Pleas for justice for those unfairly treated.

Mary had a powerful presence centred in the Heart of God.

She is known as a pioneering Australian woman.

She was a friend and support to many.

She was a woman of hospitality remaining open to every encounter.

Mary MacKillop would feel at home in this Interfaith Peace Park which seeks to be a place of universal compassion. Mary was known for her kind and compassionate approach. Among her friends and supporters were members of other faith traditions – Johanna and Robert Barr-Smith (Presbyterian) remained faithful friends and Emmanuel Solomon (Jewish) offered the Sisters a place of accommodation when Mary was excommunicated.

Mary was courageous, and compassionate, stepping out and taking risks – beyond the familiar into the unknown.

She was fully human attentive to many emotions she embraced. She shed tears, had a sense of humour, was known for her kindness, was resilient and strong, stood terrified in a court room to defend her Sisters and at times she felt like giving it all up.

Mary is one of us with her feet on the ground, sleeves rolled up, experiencing the fulness of her humanity, always remaining 'calm and full of hope'.

May all who visit this Peace Garden be filled with a double portion of her spirit.

Sr Monica Cavanagh
Congregational Leader