

FOUNDATIONS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart



The year is 1866 in Penola, South Australia, and an Australian woman, Mary MacKillop, along with an English Priest, Rev. Julian E. Tenison Woods, establish the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

Often referred to as the *Josephites* or *Brown Joeys*, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart were founded to: *'respond to the misery and wretchedness of the bush children and the afflicted poor. This they did 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.'*

Blessed Foundress, Mary MacKillop: It is the dream of all Mary MacKillop Sisters that Blessed Mary MacKillop will soon be canonised a Saint for the Catholic World Community



Karratha 1972 - 'hard hat Sisters'

Beginnings in Western Australia

Twenty-one years later, Superior General, Mother Bernard Walsh, responds to the request of Perth's Bishop Matthew Gibney and sends four Sisters to Western Australia onboard the *SS Flinders*. After arriving in Perth Sr Ursula Tynan and her three companions travelled by train to Northampton where they took up residence in a small cottage near the Catholic Church. The following year, in August of 1888, the Sisters opened their first WA school with a healthy enrolment of 87 students.



'Flat out' on the road to Karratha - 1978

In 1890, the Sisters were faced with the difficult decision of either remaining with their own Congregation under foundress Mary MacKillop, or becoming part of a diocesan sisterhood founded by Bishop Gibney.

As a result, three of the Sisters returned to Adelaide while Sr Ursula, out of a sense of duty, stayed with the Bishop to train the two postulants who had joined the group. The new group donned a black habit and became known as the *Black Josephites*.

The original Southern Cross Convent, founded in 1906



Melding black and brown

It was not until 1906 that the *Brown Josephites* returned to WA at the request of Abbot Fulgentius Torres of the Abbey Nullius Diocese of New Norcia, who sought a replacement for the Presentation Sisters who were withdrawing from Southern Cross. Two years later, the *Brown Josephites* established St Gertrude's College in New Norcia.

By 1910, there were two groups of Josephites in WA – the *Black Josephites*, who had transferred from Northampton to Boulder and the *Brown Josephites* in Southern Cross and New Norcia. On 1 November 1912 the two groups amalgamated under the central government which characterised the Congregation founded by Mary MacKillop, for which she had fought hard to preserve.

Presence in the Goldfields

The presence of the *Josephites* in Goldfields' education dates from 1897 to present times. Between 1897 and 1992 a total of nine schools were founded and/or administered by the Sisters.

Further expansion

In 1914, St Joseph's Convent building at South Perth was purchased and in time became the Administration Centre for the Western Australian *Josephites*. The following year, the Congregation assumed administration of the South Perth parochial school from the Sisters of Mercy and in 1917 the *West Australian Province of Josephites* was established with Sr Julia Donnelly appointed the first Provincial Superior.

There followed a time of great expansion with the Sisters expanding out from the Goldfields to other parts of Western Australia. Between 1915 and present day, the Sisters founded and/or administered 10 metropolitan schools.

In the country areas of the State, the Sisters' presence started in 1906 at Southern Cross and expanded into other regions, including: New Norcia, Moora, Kellerberrin, Busselton, Manjimup, Jarrahdale, Merredin, Pinjarra, Dalwallinu, Trayning, Nannup, Margaret River and Pemberton.

Kimberley Mission

Almost 80 years after answering the plea from Bishop Gibney, the *Josephite Sisters* once again heeded the call for assistance and established St Joseph's School, Wyndham, which opened in 1964 and with which the Sisters remained until 1996.

Following Wyndham, the Sisters established St Joseph's, Kununurra in 1967. While they no longer administer the schools, the Sisters have remained in both Wyndham and Kununurra in differing roles.

Two Sisters took up residence in a caravan within the Warmun community and commenced the 'two-way' philosophy of education in a bough shed school. Six years later in 1985, the community at Yaruman/Ringer Soak, on the edge of the Sandy Desert, also welcomed two Sisters with whom they established Birlirr Ngawiyiwu Catholic School.

In 1988, under the auspices of the Broome diocese, Mirilingki Spirituality Centre was established to provide a place for Aboriginal

people to develop and share their faith and spirituality. Since that time it has grown into a centre for reconciliation, education and retreat for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

A diverse service

The 'Bushie' or Religious Holiday Schools were run during the school holidays. This creative venture originated from a need for the children of Catholic families living in remote parts of the Wheatbelt and the Southwest to receive a religious education.

The *Josephite's* first Bushie school was facilitated in 1927 at the Manjimup Convent, however, they were slowly phased out during the 1980s when the need for religious education was satisfied in other ways.

Another aspect of the Sisters' service to the community came in the form of the St Joseph's Preventorium that was established in Kellerberrin for the care of young children who suffered from asthma or other respiratory ailments. The Preventorium operated from 1929 to 1976 when many of the health problems were alleviated by advances in medical science.

In 1959, two Sisters established the pioneer Motor Mission in the Tambellup/Ongerup region of the State. From this base the Sisters travelled hundreds of miles taking religious education to children in Government schools and remote farms. Between 1959 and 1984, nine Motor Mission centres were established at various locations.

Nineteen seventy-two saw the start of the Motor/Air Mission in the Pilbara region – the first foundation was in Karratha, followed by Tom Price in 1978 and Newman in 1995. Within each of these towns a Sister continues to minister, responding according to contemporary needs.

Shaping of the new

As more lay teachers have entered the Catholic education system and in turn become the school administrators, the *Josephite Sisters* have joined school staffs in the role of liaison/pastoral/councillor members or in other capacities. Today the Sisters continue to serve in 11 schools across all four dioceses.

In recent years the Sisters have also undertaken specialised roles in areas such as Aboriginal Studies, Religious Education and university lecturing and have authored *The Kimberley Companion* – a supplement to the Religious Education Program for Catholic Schools in the Broome Diocese.

Within the parishes, the Sisters can be found in the ministry of faith education, administrative leadership and the duties of pastoral associate. Within the wider community they minister alongside other professionals to provide services to community groups, welfare organisations and special needs groups.

Since 1981 five Western Australian Sisters have also ministered in the Congregation's missions in Peru. One of the five, Sr Irene McCormack, was killed by armed guerrillas on 21 May 1991 in Huasahuasi. In addition, 10 Irish born sisters who gave many years of service to the education of Western Australians have now returned to Ireland to contribute to the mission of the Irish Church.

'From tin shed to academia' - music students, Southern Cross Convent 1910



St Gertrude's College, New Norcia - founded 1908, pictured in 1927



Convent/caravan and school 1996 - La Djardarr Bay, Kimberley



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



Graduates Lee Bevan, Roslyn and George Ranger and Sherina Bin-Hitam with lecturer Sr Clare Ahern rsj at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome Campus, 1999

The ministry of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Western Australia will continue to meet the needs of contemporary society. Their foundress, Blessed Mary MacKillop, who was beatified in 1995 and declared Australia's people's saint, founded her Congregation to relieve suffering and bring hope. Her motto: 'Never see a need without doing something about it' lives on in the Sisters today. The Sisters' Chapel at South Perth has a shrine where many gather for Mass on the eighth day of each month.