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Mr Speaker I move that this House:

- 1. Celebrates the sesquicentenary of the Sisters of St Joseph and acknowledges the inspiration of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop;**
- 2. Acknowledges the great works that the Sisters of St Joseph do all over the country in aged care, education, the supporting of women and families and in partnering with Indigenous Australians to achieve outcomes;**
- 3. Recognises that regional communities are a special part - focus of work for the order, since it was founded in Penola in South Australia in 1866; and**
- 4. Congratulates the Sisters of St Joseph for the wonderful work that they have done over the past 150 years and looks forward to their continuing works into the future.**

I am delighted to move that this House celebrate the sesquicentenary of the Sisters of St Joseph, as it is important that this parliament joins with so many Australians to reflect on their extraordinary contribution to our nation.

At the heart of the story of the sisters is, of course, Australia's first Catholic saint, Mary of the Cross MacKillop. As she did 150 years ago, Saint Mary continues to serve as a source of inspiration for so many people, whether of the Catholic faith or otherwise. Her selfless life of service to the spiritual and temporal needs of her fellow citizens remains a beacon of hope and example from which we can all learn.

Indeed, the story of Mary MacKillop is, by any measure, the story of Australia's own progress and development as a nation. She has come to embody all those virtues that we like to think are at the heart of our national character.

Saint Mary and the sisters have had an impact on Australians from all walks of life. Perhaps most notably, Mary MacKillop and the sisters played a vital role in establishing our understanding that universal education, no matter a person's means or circumstances, is the foundation for our success as individuals and as a society.

Their work with Indigenous Australians, commencing at a time when few thought that Indigenous Australians should be afforded the dignity and rights of their fellow citizens, was groundbreaking.

Like many Australians, Mary MacKillop's story begins with a family who migrated from the old world in search of a better life. That was not easily realised, and the family that Mary MacKillop's parents raised in suburban Melbourne experienced considerable hardship. As the eldest child, responsibility often fell to her to support her family. At just 18, she undertook the journey to Penola, a small regional town in South Australia, to become governess to her aunt and uncle's children.

Saint Mary's experience in Penola had a profound impact on her future, both through her own personal experiences and because it brought her into contact with the local parish priest, Father Julian Woods. Father Woods became a major influence in her spiritual life, and the foundation of the sisters was very much a collaborative undertaking by them both.

Education in colonial Australia was sparse and mostly in the hands of families of means. Schools and good teachers were well out of the reach of many rural and working class families, and certainly of most Aboriginal Australians. For girls and young women, the situation was particularly dire. This became the first and enduring mission of Saint Mary and the sisters she founded in a Penola barn in 1866.

Within just three years, they had established 21 schools in Adelaide and the surrounding countryside. The order, as it grew in membership and success, sent hundreds of young women across colonial Australia to educate the impoverished. But its success was not without its difficulties; Mary MacKillop faced challenges from both within and without the Church. What today is taken for granted, was considered nothing short of revolutionary 150 years ago.

Sir Henry Parkes perhaps summed up some of the best sentiments regarding the sisters when he said: 'The Sisters of St Joseph are like white ants; when once they enter a locality, you cannot even starve them out!'

But it was the maxim 'Who will speak if you don't' and their deep faith and determination that saw Saint Mary and the sisters overcome the obstacles that were so frequently placed in their way. The order, forever growing in numbers and outreach, transferred its headquarters to North Sydney, in my electorate, in 1888.

In 1909 more than 600 Josephites mourned Saint Mary's death. She left behind an educational system across Australia that provided schooling for tens of thousands of children. Mary's legacy has lived on through the Sisters of St Joseph. Today the sisters' work extends across Australia and beyond our shores to New Zealand, Peru, Brazil and East Timor.

Although they no longer run parish schools, education remains a core mission, and they continue to provide services and dignity to many Australians, no matter what their creed, colour or faith. They continue to be a hand of compassion for people longing for a decent life—women of the church living their faith through devotion to social justice and equality.

Their example encourages us all to see the best in each other and to recognise that all Australians deserve the dignity and opportunities that we now regard as an innate right. In this, their sesquicentenary, we thank and congratulate the Sisters of St Joseph for their role in shaping our country and our culture and for the incredible work they do around Australia and the world today.

I commend the motion to the House.