

In the Footsteps of Mary MacKillop

From the end of October until the beginning of November 2018, I was fortunate to attend the Mary MacKillop National Pilgrimage. Written below, is a summary of my experience...

On the first official day of the pilgrimage, the pilgrims were officially welcomed on the pilgrimage at the Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre in East Melbourne. At the centre, the pilgrims participated in a gathering liturgy where the pilgrims introduced themselves, reflected, wrote prayers to place in the 'prayer companions box' and received pilgrimage cross necklaces to wear throughout the pilgrimage. On the same day, the pilgrims went to St Francis' Church in the Melbourne city. St Francis' is a significant church in Mary's life as this church was where her parents were married, she was baptised, confirmed and had her First Holy Communion. The pilgrims also visited Point Ormond (where Mary's mother Flora and Flora's mother and siblings arrived to from Scotland) and St Kilda cemetery (the location of the grave site of Mary's sister Annie, uncle Peter, brother Peter and aunties Julia and Jane).

The next day in Melbourne, the pilgrims learnt more about Mary's connection to Melbourne and Victoria (VIC). The pilgrims also visited the birth place of Mary in Brunswick St, Fitzroy, saw a statue of an 18 year-old Mary at St Mary of the Cross Square at the Australian Catholic University Melbourne Campus and saw a statue of Mary at St Patrick's Cathedral. Most of the day was spent at the Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre where the pilgrims had a tour of the museum, learnt more about Mary's family through a presentation by Sr Judith Geddes (author of book 'A Faith-filled Family') and learnt about a place in the Melbourne city where Mary cared for the poor called 'Little Lon'.

On the third day, the pilgrims spent considerable time of this day travelling on the road towards the next destination Portland, VIC. On the coach, the facilitators spoke more about Mary's family and Sr Annie Bond led the group in prayer and reflection. On the way, the group stopped at St Mary's Parish, Hamilton VIC where they stopped for lunch and collectively participated in further prayer and reflection. At St Mary's, the pilgrims saw a chapel dedicated to Mary MacKillop where there was a beautiful stained glass window of Mary and Caroline Chisolm. Additionally, the pilgrims learnt a lot more about Mary's father Alexander MacKillop and they visited his grave at Hamilton Cemetery.

At the beginning on the following day, the pilgrims gathered to say a prayer at the well in Portland, VIC. The well served the dwelling occupied by Mary's mother Flora and younger siblings after Mary departed Portland. Subsequently, the pilgrims arrived to Bayview House (now Bayview College) where Mary lived. This is where Mary successfully applied for her first formal teaching position at Portland's Catholic Denominational School. Also in Portland, the pilgrims visited All Saints Catholic Church where Mary was a sacristan - this church now features a beautiful stained glass window of her. In the afternoon as the coach was approaching Penola, South Australia, after crossing the border, the pilgrims stopped at Port MacDonnell where in January 1866, Mary left for Penola.

(Continue reading from website below)

On the fifth day in Penola, the pilgrims started the day attending mass at St Joseph's Catholic Church. After mass, the pilgrims went to the schoolhouse where Mary had taught the children. Following on, the pilgrims were free to roam around the Mary MacKillop Interpretive Centre at Penola viewing the museum, the old convent and her Uncle Alexander Cameron's old house. Later in the afternoon, the pilgrims were driven to the Stable Park (this was the site where Mary and her friend Fr Julian started their first school on 19 March 1866 - St Joseph's Feast Day). The pilgrims were then driven to Fr Julian Tenison Woods Park to see the carved wood sculptures and the Fr Julian tree across the road.

The next day, a considerable amount of time was spent travelling from Penola to Adelaide. On the way to Adelaide, the pilgrims made a stop at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Robe (this church was commissioned by Fr Julian in 1858).

On seventh day, in the morning, the pilgrims firstly went to Port Adelaide and saw the port where Mary would have arrived to from Port MacDonnell. Additionally in Port Adelaide, the pilgrims visited St Mary's Church where Mary, Fr Julian and the sisters worked and worshipped. Following on, the pilgrims went to the Franklin St convent and Chapel - this is the place where Mary was excommunicated. Later in the afternoon, the pilgrims arrived at Mary MacKillop Precinct where they learnt more about the story in South Australia and about the 'crosses' Mary had in her life - the pilgrims also strolled around the beautiful garden. Lastly, the pilgrims visited St Francis Xavier Cathedral where there is a statue of Mary with two children. At the statue, the group collectively said the prayer 'Remembering Mary MacKillop'.

On the final day in Adelaide, the pilgrims started the day visiting St Ignatius' Church Norwood where Mary had received shelter and support from members of the Society of Jesus after her excommunication. Mary and her ten sisters were readmitted to the habit of the institute in this church on 19 March 1872. Following on, the pilgrims went back to Mary MacKillop Precinct where they participated in mass in St Joseph's Chapel - this building erected in 1876, was the only building on the property at Mary MacKillop Precinct that Mary ever occupied. In the afternoon, the pilgrims left South Australia and were embarking on the final chapter of Mary's story in Sydney and Mary MacKillop Place.

In the morning of the ninth day in Sydney, the pilgrims were driven through significant places in The Rocks where the Sisters of Saint Joseph had houses of providence. Following on, the pilgrims went to the grave of Fr Julian at Waverley Cemetery where they reflected on his life through the words of Mary MacKillop and said a prayer. On the way to the next cemetery at Gore Hill, the pilgrims drove past St Mary's Catholic Church, North Sydney where Mary MacKillop's funeral was held in 1909. At Gore Hill Cemetery, the pilgrims prayed and reflected around the original burial place of Mary MacKillop and where many of the Sisters of Saint Joseph are buried. The pilgrims also learnt more about the pioneer

sisters, then sung a hymn commemorating All Saints Day. The day was completed with all the pilgrims surrounding the tomb reflecting on the day, Mary MacKillop, Fr Julian and all the pioneering sisters.

The last day of the pilgrimage was spent at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The pilgrims were firstly given a tour of the museum and then attended a Mass for All Souls Day in the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel. Next, the group gathered together for reflection and prayer in a conference room that called the Tenison Woods Room. When gathered, the pilgrims reflected on the different places they stopped at during the journey, then they were invited to choose a quote card and think about what the quote means to them. The day closed with a water blessing and a gathering around Mary's tomb where the pilgrims were invited to pray for loved ones, especially those who are deceased. The pilgrims finished their last session together saying their farewells and thanks to each other.

At the beginning of the pilgrimage, it was emphasised that the pilgrimage was not a tour, but it was about putting aside time for God – about the sacred time of encountering and meeting God with each other. I am ever grateful to have had the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of Mary MacKillop: a woman of vision, love, compassion and a true face of God. This pilgrimage has helped me to grow spiritually, professionally and personally.

I am very appreciative to the sisters for enabling me to have the time off from work to embark on the pilgrimage.

Throughout the pilgrimage, I completed a daily recount on the Saint Mary MacKillop Facebook page, sharing a diary account of each day. Click on the link below to view the entries on the Saint Mary MacKillop Facebook page...

<https://www.facebook.com/SaintMaryMacKillopOfficial/>

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