

## **Ritual of Thanksgiving and Taking Up of Office - Congregational Leadership**

*Address by Congregational Leader Sr Monica Cavanagh rsj*  
1 February 2020

Buenos Dias, Kia-Ora, Greetings. It is good to be here among you all.

Today is a day of endings and new beginnings – a time for passing over. It is both a humbling and joyful experience to come among you as the re-elected Josephite Congregational Leader for the next six years. As I do, I stand on the shoulders of the women who have responded to this call with its gifts and its burdens – from Mary MacKillop to today. I would particularly like to acknowledge the gifts of Catherine, Marion, Louise and Maryellen who have served in Congregational Leadership over these past six years. They were an incredibly gifted group of women who gave wholeheartedly to this ministry. Over these past few weeks we have been reflecting upon the events and experiences that have shaped our six years of Leadership. One significant event was the celebration of the Sesquicentenary of Congregation. It was a time to celebrate and rejoice in the many gifts that have been bestowed on us over these 150 years.

This ministry of leadership and service is to be lived with courage, joy, trust and humility sourced from living in the heart of God. It no doubt will bring both its blessings and its challenges, and I am sure it will be a transforming experience for us all as we live into the call of the 27<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. We join with Sisters around the Congregation through video as we celebrate this significant moment of transition. We are grateful to our family and friends who are with us today.

The call of our recent Chapter is to be audacious Josephite women bringing to the table of life all our gifts, wisdom and experiences as each one 'brings what they have'. I have learnt over the years that our Josephite tradition is one of living in and among the people – close to the people with our feet on the ground and our sleeves rolled up in outback towns and in city streets, in mountainous terrain and on rolling plains and in bushfire ravished communities and drought stricken communities in rural Australia and across the countries where we live and minister – Peru, Brazil, Ireland, Timor Leste, Aotearoa New Zealand and all parts of Australia. Our earthiness calls us to a new tenderness and neighbourliness which reflects the human face of God. It challenges us to be people who will care for Earth – In this our common home Earth we live and believe that everything is interrelated and interdependent and that we are all participants in the sustaining the community of life on Earth. It is here in the midst of daily life as well as in the global issues that face our church and our world that we encounter the living God. Even with our decreasing numbers, we remain open to the new possibilities that come from knowing the surprise of the loaves and fishes being enough. It only took the courage of one person to share what he had that enabled others to do likewise. It only took the courage of Julian Tenison Woods to speak of his concern for the children of the Penola parish to bring forth the passion and action of Mary MacKillop in a way that would impact the lives of thousands of children across this land. It only takes – a word of hope, a listening heart, a compassionate presence, a healing glance to change a person's life. Ever before us are new ways of participating in God's mission, the potential for new partnerships with those who share our values, new ways of collaborating to save our planet and new ways for people to live fully the joy of the Gospel.

I move forward into this ministry of service with my new Leadership Team of Josephine, Mary Ellen, Clare and Louise, knowing that we are embraced by a circle of love, prayer and support from you our Sisters, our families and friends who are here today or with us in spirit. I would like to acknowledge especially the effort made by my siblings travelling down from Qld to be here today. I also want to acknowledge those who have companioned us along the journey, our partners in mission and all those who choose to live the gospel in the Josephite spirit as we engage with our neighbours in new expanding and inclusive ways.



**Sisters of Saint Joseph**  
*of the Sacred Heart*

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Let us go forth with the faith and passion of Mary MacKillop and Julian Woods into this new moment inspired by Joseph our patron the humble and just one whose attentive listening and daring risk-taking enabled Jesus the Word to live among us.

Sr Monica Cavanagh