



Greetings to all – as you gather to celebrate with the Sisters of St Joseph their Sesquicentenary.

Let us rejoice and be glad on this day as we the Sisters of St Joseph celebrate 150 years of dedicated service in the church and the world. On 19 March 1866 Fr Julian Tenison Woods and Mary MacKillop birthed a dream in Penola – the place where it all began. Like Joseph in today's gospel they listened to the dream that was stirring deep within and they did something about it. This day 150 years ago Mary donned a simple black dress as a symbol of her desire to commit her life fully to God and went to school where she and the children celebrated Mass and Holy Communion with Father Woods. This was followed by a day of feasting and celebrating to mark this special occasion – for it was on this day that Mary MacKillop wrote *'Our Glorious Patron St Joseph was first honoured as Patron of little children, and our work was committed to his care'*. St Joseph has always and continues today to hold a special place in the lives of the Sisters and in those schools and ministries founded in the Josephite tradition.

As I awoke this morning, I pictured Mary getting up that morning putting on her black dress and with a lightness of heart heading to school. Imagine the delight in her heart as she stepped out into the briskness of the morning – into a new moment of her life ready like St Joseph to heed the call as he did. At the church was Fr Julian Tenison Woods holding within a vision that would translate into empowerment for thousands of children here in Australia and beyond through the ministry of education. Their hearts as Mary recalled were filled with joy. They had no idea of what might become of so small a beginning. Their hearts simply trusted in our Provident God. God who had begun this work would see it to its completion.

One hundred and fifty years ago Mary and Julian listened to the heartbeat of the world of their time. They saw a need and in the words of the Constitutions 'were led by God to respond to the 'misery and wretchedness' of the 'bush children' and the 'afflicted poor' and to undertake urgently needed works of charity for which no other religious were available. Together they contemplated the mystery that was unfolding – a mystery in which the divine spark of God's passionate love enabled Mary and Julian to imagine new possibilities for living the Gospel with a Josephite heart – that initial spark still energises and guides us today.

Today the Sisters of St Joseph continue to listen to the heartbeat of the world as they respond to the urgent needs of this time by:-



Sisters of Saint Joseph *of the Sacred Heart*

- *responding to the pleas of children in detention centres and refugee camps,*
- *endeavouring to address the health and educational needs of our indigenous brothers and sisters,*
- *providing educational opportunities in Timor Leste and Peru,*
- *attending to the experience of grief and loss amongst children*
- *standing alongside people in rural communities as they struggle with drought, flood and fire and down turn in markets*
- *and being the face of church – the face of compassion in places where people yearn to be treated with dignity*
- *often simply being a listening ear as people share their ‘wonders and heartaches’ of in the midst of daily life*

Josephites from all walks of life continue to be a hand of hope in so many situations today. Will you in this Sesquicentenary year heed the call to make a difference to someone's life and be a means of enabling the life-sustaining heartbeat of God's love to flow freely through the world? Compassionate God may it be so.

As *‘we look back and see what our good God has done for us’* through the lives and ministry of the Sisters of St Joseph over 150 years, let us give thanks.

May our hearts be filled with joy as we celebrate this gift to our church and to our world.

Happy St Joseph's day to all.

Sr Monica Cavanagh
Congregational Leader