

OUR STORY

Once upon a time.....
A young, faith-filled woman – Mary – longed to provide an education to those living in far flung areas of our sunburnt country.

Once upon a time.....
A young man – a priest named Julian – saw the need for a Religious Congregation like no other, who would be able to respond to the widespread needs of his parish in South Australia.

Mary met Julian while she was living in Penola working as a governess. One can only imagine the lengthy, animated and hope-filled conversations that these two very different yet equally passionate people engaged in.

The well-used idiom could come into play here: “And the rest, as they say, is history” but that would diminish the story which continues to bear witness to Mary’s words penned in 1891:

Little did either of us then dream of what was to spring from so small a beginning.

The story of the Australian and New Zealand Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph draws on the experience of Father Julian Tenison Woods who visited the congregation of Sisters of Saint Joseph in Le Puy, France and was inspired by their simplicity and practicality as they lived amongst those on the margins.

The story draws on the deep faith and trust in God’s providence of Mary MacKillop who longed to enter religious life and who was passionate about responding to the needs of those living in outback Australia.

Their dreams melded and on March 19, 1866 – the feast day of Saint Joseph – the first Josephite school was opened in a disused stable in Penola, South Australia. Mary MacKillop took her first vows in 1867 and became Sr Mary. A new and different religious order was born – the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

By 1871 the Congregation had grown to 120 Sisters who were ministering in schools, orphanages, refuges for women and visiting prisoners and the sick.

In July 1872, the first foundation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in New South Wales was made at Perthville near Bathurst. A dispute over central governance resulted in all but one of the sisters returning to Adelaide. Sister Hyacinth Quinlan remained to train as Sisters of Saint Joseph, a group of young Irish women the bishop had brought into the diocese. These sisters later established congregations in Whanganui, Goulburn, Lochinvar and Tasmania.

The canonisation of Mary MacKillop on October 17, 2010 was an occasion of great acclaim. It was a time of unification and celebration of our rich, shared story.

In recent years, after a long time of engaging in shared endeavours, the Tasmanian, Goulburn, Whanganui and Perthville Congregations fused with the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

Today, our story continues to live on in various ministerial capacities, including our SOSJ Works. Through the inspiration of Mary and Julian we are reminded of our responsibility to live with mutual respect, creative courage, intentional inclusivity and conscious compassion as we respond to the needs of our time.



FRAMEWORK FOR REFLECTION

Take a moment in quiet contemplation to engage with the reflection questions below. You are then invited to pray the blessing.

Individual Reflection

- What is it that you resonate with in Mary and Julian?
- How does their part in the story inspire you?

Group Reflection

- What aspect of the Josephite Story do you see as essential to living into this legacy today?
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Blessing

*Provident God,
You inspired Mary and Julian
in their commitment to humble
and hospitable service.*

*May the blessings of their lives influence us
as we seek to uphold the Josephite Story
in our own context, responding to the pressing
needs of our times.*

Amen

