Reflecting with Mary MacKillop in Advent 2012
The Advent Season invites us to pause awhile and nurture the life within and to stand in wonder at the God who is one of us.

Advent is a time for looking forward with new hope – to prepare our hearts to hear God’s invitation to come into the light. St Mary MacKillop stands as a source of hope and love in our world – a light that shines out in the darkness.

These reflections are based on Year C readings for Advent

The following prayer service for the lighting of the candles of the Advent wreath has been prepared for use by families, communities, groups or individuals. It endeavours to present the message of Advent through the Gospel and the life of Mary MacKillop with its application for today.

This resource may be used in a variety of ways:

† Those meeting in a group may wish to read the whole Gospel story and use all the reflection experiences.

† Those lighting the candles of the Advent wreath may wish to use a shorter version – the Gospel extract as printed, the section connecting with Mary MacKillop and the final prayer.

A group that does not have access to an Advent wreath, might simply light a candle.

Light an Advent candle each day. As the flame is extinguished, send it to a place in human life where darkness seems to prevail at this time.

(Joan Chittister - In a Spiritual High Season)

The following Advent Prayer may be used to begin each week’s reflection

Advent Prayer

Come, Emmanuel - God with us!
You called Mary MacKillop to be a light in the darkness of the world of her time.
Be with us during this Advent Season.
Awaken us to hear the cries of those who are disadvantaged, isolated and marginalised.
Help us to respond with generosity to the needs of our time.
May we, like Mary MacKillop, draw strength from the God who became one of us.
Maranatha – Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

This text has been prepared by Monica Cavanagh rsj.
First Sunday Of Advent
A time to place one’s trust in God

Gathering moment
Welcome all. (Play an appropriate Advent hymn or pray the Advent prayer)

‘Be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighted down by the worries of this life. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man’.

What word is touching your heart?

Connecting with the life of Mary MacKillop
Mary MacKillop’s life was filled with tribulations of all kinds – personal illness and the tragic loss of family members, difficulties and even excommunication from those who held authority in the church she loved. At times she had to face difficult decisions which held the capacity to weigh her down. Her prayer and trust in God sustained her in all these circumstances. She encouraged the Sisters ‘Do not let your troubles disturb your trust in God.’ (1885)

Everyone’s life has moments when the worries of this life weigh one down. Mary MacKillop experienced this at the time of her mother’s tragic death. She wrote to Annie her sister:

My dearest Annie, God help us all. The hand of God is heavy upon us, but God’s Holy Will must be done. Oh Annie, I had so yearned to see her again ...

Personal Response
† Name some things that cause you to worry and feel ‘weighed down.’
† Recall a particular experience when you were burdened by the events of life.
What brought you light and help at this time?

Prayer for Lighting the first candle of the Advent Wreath
As you light the Advent candle, name some places where people are weighed down by the experiences of life.

God the source of life, You sent your Son among us as a sign of hope in times of darkness. You have given Mary MacKillop to us as a sign of a Christian who placed her trust in You, in the good times and the difficult moments. Be with us as we open our hearts to You in this Advent Season. Come Lord Jesus, come to us in our moments of doubt and worry and fill us with trust.
Second Sunday Of Advent
A time to prepare the way

Gathering moment
Welcome all. (Play an appropriate Advent hymn or pray the Advent prayer)

Read the Gospel - Luke 3: 3-4
“The Word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the regions of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

What word is touching your heart?

Connecting with the life of Mary MacKillop
Mary MacKillop’s attentiveness to God’s call in her life led her like John the Baptist, to become a ‘voice crying out in the wilderness.’ Like John, she was aware of the society in which she lived. Mary set about ‘straightening the winding roads and smoothing the rough ways.’ She first opened a school in Penola, and then in other places in response to the needs she perceived. She provided a practical education for all who attended St Joseph’s schools. She offered hope to those most disadvantaged in the society of her time, providing shelter and clothing as she saw necessary. Scotch Bella was a convicted murderer whom Mary MacKillop took in at the Refuge in South Australia and while there she was baptised. Scotch was assisted in ways that helped her to live a fruitful life. She attended to her alcoholic addiction by joining the Guild Temperance. She married, and died a very happy death.

Personal Response
There are many challenges confronting our society today. There are many places that wait to experience the ‘Good News.’
† Name some of the challenges or places that need to experience God’s love through the actions of others.
† Recall a time when you were called to ‘smooth the rough ways’ and ‘prepare the way of the Lord’ in your situation. What did the experience call forth in you?

Prayer for Lighting the second candle of the Advent Wreath
As you light the Advent candle, name some situations which need a voice of hope.
God of the journey, You call us to be attentive to Your call in our lives. Like John the Baptist and Mary MacKillop, may we be a voice of hope in our world. May we, like them, speak our truth and be a voice for those disadvantaged in our world. Come Lord Jesus, come and prepare our hearts to be open to Your call in our lives.
Gathering moment
Welcome all. (Play an appropriate Advent hymn or pray the Advent prayer)

Read the Gospel - Luke 3:10-12, 16
And the crowds asked John the Baptist, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food must do likewise.’ … Some questioned, ‘Was he the Messiah?’ John answered, ‘I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.’

What word is touching your heart?

Connecting with the life of Mary MacKillop
John the Baptist’s preaching made a deep impression on many people urging them to be generous with their possessions. Mary MacKillop was ever generous to those with whom she came in contact. A man who became a benefactor recalled that Mary MacKillop was very kind to him when he was down and out. ‘She saved my wife and me from starvation. She came to us in our direst need and brought us food and clothing.’ On another occasion she gave away her midday meal which had been prepared by one of the Sisters to a poor homeless man who came begging. Like John the Baptist she was ever mindful of whose work it was that she was doing. She wrote, ‘God’s work does not depend on any of us.’ (1895)

Personal Response
† What motivates you to reach out to the needs of others? When have you been called to show your reliance on God?
† Today many people are like John’s followers. They ask: ‘What should we do?’ What is one act of generosity that you or this group could do to make a difference in someone’s life this Christmas time?

Prayer for lighting the third candle of the Advent Wreath
As you light the Advent candle, name some people or groups that bring a spirit of joy into our world.

God the source of goodness, You invite us to be bearers of the ‘Good News’ like John the Baptist and Mary MacKillop. Fill us with courage so that we may bring joy to the troubled places of our community and our world as we prepare for Christmas. Come Lord Jesus, come fill our lives with joy.
Fourth Sunday Of Advent
A time to nurture the new life being formed within

Gathering moment
Welcome all. (Play an appropriate Advent hymn or pray the Advent prayer)

Read the Gospel - Luke 1: 39-43
In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed, 'Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'

What word is touching your heart?

Connecting with the life of Mary MacKillop
The story of the visitation invites us to consider the value of hospitality in our lives. Like Elizabeth, Mary MacKillop welcomed all. She took in for charity, a helpless old man named Captain Jones who was a non-Catholic. The Sisters did everything for him until other provisions were made. She provided a place of hospitality in the House of Providence to those who were left homeless. Like Mary, she set out on many arduous journeys to visit her Sisters and others who sought her care. One orphan boy remembered years later how Mother Mary would visit the boys at Kincumber and with tears running down her face, she would tell them how much she loved them. Like Mary, Mary MacKillop believed in God’s dream for her. She gave birth to a new way of Religious Life to suit the needs of the society of her time and to serve the needs of God’s poor.

Personal Response
† How are you being invited to create a welcome space in your life for the needs of others?
† Recall a time when you set out to visit someone or someone visited you and you were gifted through this experience. How did you experience God in this visit?
† What caused your heart to leap for joy?

Prayer for lighting the fourth candle of the Advent Wreath
As you light the Advent candle, name some people or groups that bring a spirit of joy into our world.

God of the Advent season, You invite us to open our lives to the Spirit working in our midst. Like Mary Your mother, St Mary MacKillop was ever attentive to placing her life at the service of Your dream for her. May we like these two women of faith be bearers of the ‘Good News’ in our wounded world. In our journey of life may we provide places of welcome and hospitality to those struggling in our community. Come Lord Jesus, come reign in our world.
Gospel  And the Word became flesh and lived among us.  

John 1:14

A word from Mary MacKillop - December 14, 1890
Will each of you go in spirit to the crib of our Infant Spouse and meditate for one half hour on the lesson He teaches there – His poverty, His helplessness. Think of Who He is and who and what you are. Ask if you are trying to be like Him, and if not, find out what hinders you, and with all your heart ask Him to remove the obstacle.

Prayer for Lighting the Christmas Candle

May the light of this Christmas candle burn brightly in each person present here today. Let us give thanks for the light of Christ shining brightly in people like St Mary MacKillop and all our loved ones, through their faithful living of the Gospel.

All  May Christ fill our lives with peace and joy

To light an Advent candle is to say, in the face of all that suggest the contrary, that God is still alive, still the Lord of this world, and because of that, ‘All will be well.’

(Ron Rolheiser, OMI – www.tidings.com 2004)

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