

THE JOSEPHITE CHARISM

- **IN THE LIFE OF MARY MACKILLOP,**
- **IN THE SISTERS OF ST JOSEPH OF THE SACRED HEART,**
- **IN ST AGNES SCHOOL'S CIRCUMSTANCES TODAY.**

(from *Josephite Charism*. Mary Cresp R.S.J.)

ST AGNES CONTEXT

The history of St Agnes School has been intimately connected to the Josephite Spirit.

On his return from service as a Padre during World War II, Fr John Rosenskjar was an Assistant Priest within St Joachim Parish, Holland Park. St Joachim Parish embraced Mass Centres, including St Agnes, all the way to Woodridge. Fr Rosenskjar knew the spirit and dedication of the Sisters at the "Hut" School for children of families who occupied the huts of the former American Military Hospital at Holland Park.

Following the establishment of St Agnes as a Parish in 1950 with himself as its first Parish Priest, Fr Rosenskjar invited the Josephite Sisters to found St Bernard's School, Upper Mt Gravatt in 1953. He invited the Josephite Sisters to found St Agnes School in 1962. The Convent for the Josephite Sisters at St Agnes was formerly a home along Cavendish Road transported on the back of a truck by Jack Tierney. Josephite Sisters led the School as Principals until 1985, and continued to teach in the School until 1992. The Sisters continued to contribute to the Parish Community until 2002.

The huts of the former American Military Hospital became an important resource for St Agnes Parish. The first St Agnes Hall was two former Huts transported to St Agnes and placed end to end. Other huts became Mass Centres in other parts of the Parish.

Young families came in great numbers to live in Mt Gravatt in the post-World War II period. Their generosity and the vision, leadership and pastoral care of Fr Rosenskjar and his Associate Pastors during that time, along with the hands-on efforts and spirit of the Josephites, were a rich blend for the good of all in the St Agnes Parish and School Community.

BAPTISM AND CHARISM

We believe baptism celebrates and calls us in Christ to live the mission of Jesus in our lives. How we do that individually or together depends on the gifts of personality, inclination, talents and grace. St Paul calls these gifts of the Holy Spirit – 'charisms' – a word from Greek for 'gifts'. In any group, the charisms expressed will depend on how people collaborate, and also very much on how the founders established the group and what they were trying to express. We can reflect on what understanding of God they had and what impression of God they wanted to communicate in their mission.

MARY MACKILLOP AND JULIAN TENISON WOODS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF GOD

Mary and Julian were greatly influenced by the great devotion of their era- devotion to the Sacred Heart. It was a commitment to God who is compassionate love. The Hebrew notion of “compassion” relates to the notion of the “womb” – reflecting the depth of God’s life-giving love for us. The Latin derivation of “compassion” means “to feel with” – God feels with us. Mary and Julian’s experience of the compassionate love of God, symbolised in the Sacred Heart, compelled them to express that compassion in works for justice such as education and care of the neglected – action for God’s people.

We must enter into their (children’s) joys, and to some extent share their sorrows. We must reverence their innocence and love their virtues, while to their faults and defects we must be compassionately considerate, using no more severity than may be just sufficient to eradicate them. (Book of Instructions, 1867)

Max Harris, agnostic and writer, described Mary as an “icon” of “an Australian goodness ... a nuts and bolts saint, a toiler, a battler and a sociological radical”. Although not on such a prominent scale, Fr Woods is also recognised as a great man of letters, science and spirituality.

A CHARISM SHARED BECOMES A MOVEMENT

When people share in the “charism” of the founders, it means more than people identifying with them. We believe that the gift given by the Spirit to the founders impels people to use that same gift in carrying out Jesus’ mission in their new circumstances.

“Charism” then can be understood as a gift of the Spirit, given to persons and taken up by a group to carry out the mission of Jesus, having characteristics in their way of being and serving which mirror a particular experience of God’s presence in our world.

In response to reality and need, and with a particular experience of God, an inspiration is given and received, even beyond the person’s own expectations. It becomes a movement. This can be seen re-occurring throughout history such as in the monastic movement in the fourth century, the mendicant movement in the twelfth century e.g. the Franciscan movement..., and etc...

JULIAN AND MARY AND THE JOSEPHITE CHARISM

There is a bigger picture for the experience of the Josephite charism and movement beyond Mary MacKillop and the Josephites in Australia.

There are approximately 14 000 Josephite Sisters throughout over 50 countries throughout the world. There are also Josephite Congregations of priests and brothers also founded independently and serving through the world.

Each of these Congregations of Josephite men and women belong to independent Institutes. In Australia, there is the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph throughout Australia and abroad with their central house in North Sydney, and there are Congregations of Sisters of St Joseph who belong within particular Dioceses in New South Wales, Tasmania and New Zealand.

Though founded independently of one another in many countries throughout the world, the Josephites have a language and vision in common with the first Josephite Community founded in 1650 in Le Puy, France, with a motivation to serve God and the poor in their community. As a young Englishman before coming to Australia, Fr Julian Tenison Woods visited this community of Sisters. He perceived their love of God's presence with ordinary people in lowly walks of life.

In 1860, on meeting Mary MacKillop, Julian recognized the same spirit in Mary. Though it was impossible to bring the French Sisters to Australia to respond to people's needs here and for Mary to visit the Sisters in France, it's as though Julian and Mary shared the same charism as the Sisters of St Joseph in France and developed it for the good of people in this land.

The Josephites share an incarnational spirituality. Their approach to ministry and to working for justice is founded on images of God's love and compassion expressed through words such as "roll-up-your-sleeves", hospitality, practicality, ordinary, being with, simplicity, humility, no fan-fare, serving God *in* the neighbour.

CONCLUSION

Josephites are not the only people or tradition to find God in the ordinary circumstances of daily life. However in common with all who do so around the world – each within the mystery and mix of their own identity – people who live the Josephite Charism do so with gratitude and joy.

Mary MacKillop is for us a rich expression of the worldwide Josephite Spirit. With her Sisters, she nurtured families and children in their belonging together to communities of God's unconditional and unsurpassable love.

In our own circumstances as for Mary, can we perceive a call for us:

- *to respect for each and every person;*
- *to care for people who are poor or who are in any kind of need;*
- *to get in and do what is ours to do, and all we can do;*
- *to let God's love for every person be our guide in every challenge;*
- *to nurture our belonging within the Church, the Body of Christ, and to co-operate with the leaders and the people.*

Mary MacKillop's last words to her Sisters were, "Go on!"
Let's go!