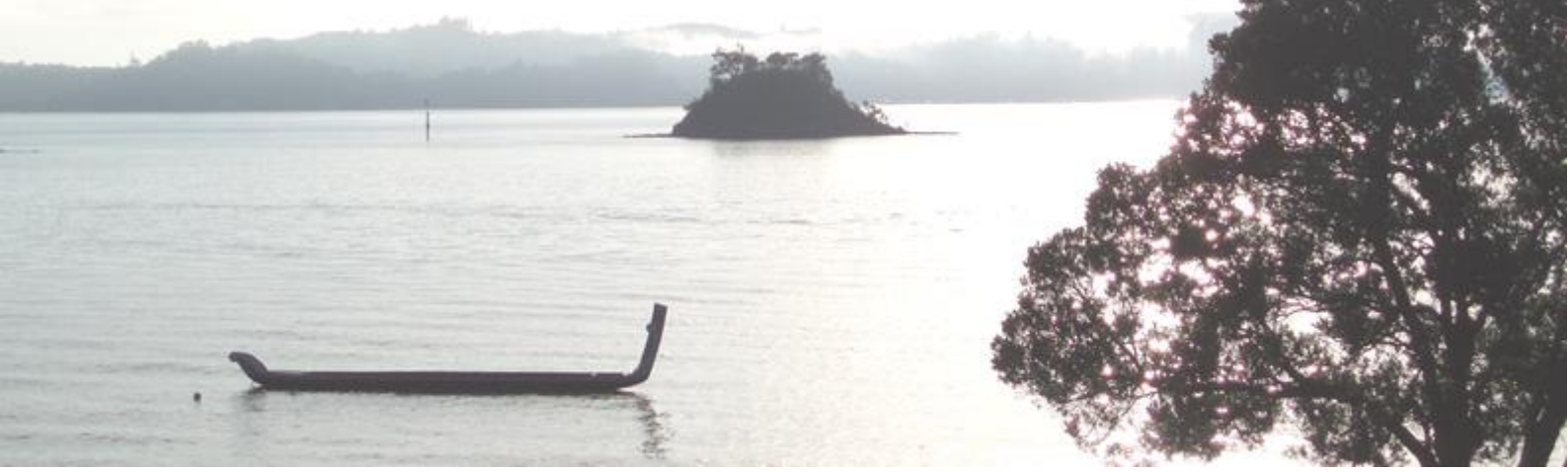


St Mary of the Cross MacKillop

Mary MacKillop was an Australian nun who co-founded the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart (informally known as Josephites). She is the first Australian to be beatified (1995) and having had a second miracle recognised by the Vatican in 2009 was canonised as a saint on 17 October 2010.

MacKillop was born in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. Her parents were Scottish migrants and she was the eldest of eight children. She was educated by her father who had spent time in Rome studying for the Catholic priesthood. From the age of 16 Mary worked as a governess.

Since childhood, she felt God calling her to make a difference in the world. She was passionate about bringing the message of God's love to everyone she encountered, and spent her life educating and caring for people from all walks of life.

With her own family often homeless, separated and suffering from poor health, MacKillop could personally relate to those who were ill or facing difficult financial circumstances.

Her dream was for all children, particularly those disadvantaged by poverty or isolation, to have the opportunity for education.

In 1866, at the age of 24, MacKillop founded the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Penola, South Australia, with English priest Father Julian Tenison Woods. Their aim was to serve the needs of struggling members of society.

One project was establishing a Catholic school system for the children of poor and isolated families in the Australian colonies. When MacKillop was 25 she founded the first Saint Joseph's School in a disused stable in Penola. With the support of Father Woods and the other sisters she also established a women's refuge, an orphanage and a House of Providence for older women.

MacKillop wore a simple black dress as a sign of her religious commitment. She lived simply and was ready to move to where she was needed. By the end of 1869 there were 80 young sisters looking after 25 schools and homes.

When MacKillop was 29, a misunderstanding by the bishop resulted in her excommunication from the Catholic Church for alleged insubordination. After five months the excommunication was lifted.

© Copyright to the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Ltd

MacKillop travelled to Rome to have the Constitutions of the congregation approved. When meeting the Pope he referred to her as "the excommunicated one". At this stage over 120 women had joined the order, working in 44 schools and four charitable organisations.

Aotearoa New Zealand Connection

While in Europe Mary MacKillop travelled widely to observe educational methods. During this time the Josephites expanded their operations into New South Wales and Aotearoa New Zealand. MacKillop relocated to Sydney in 1883 and in the same year sent three sisters from Adelaide to Temuka in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand to establish a school. This followed many requests for sisters from parish priest, Father Fauvel SM.

MacKillop visited Aotearoa New Zealand four times between 1894 and 1902, travelling throughout the country to visit the sisters and encourage them in their work. She liked the people in Aotearoa New Zealand and found her health responded well to the climate.

The number of sisters in Aotearoa New Zealand grew steadily and in the 1950s and 1960s there were over 200. Today her Sisters are in all the country's dioceses.

MacKillop suffered from ill health throughout her life, and died in 1909 in the convent in Mount Street, North Sydney where her tomb is now enshrined.

Her influence is still strong, with the congregation now numbering about 1200. The sisters work mainly in Australia and New Zealand but can be found in smaller numbers in countries such as Ireland, Peru, East Timor, Scotland and Brazil.

They are involved in a range of ministries including teaching, parish ministry, counselling, spiritual direction, social welfare and nursing.

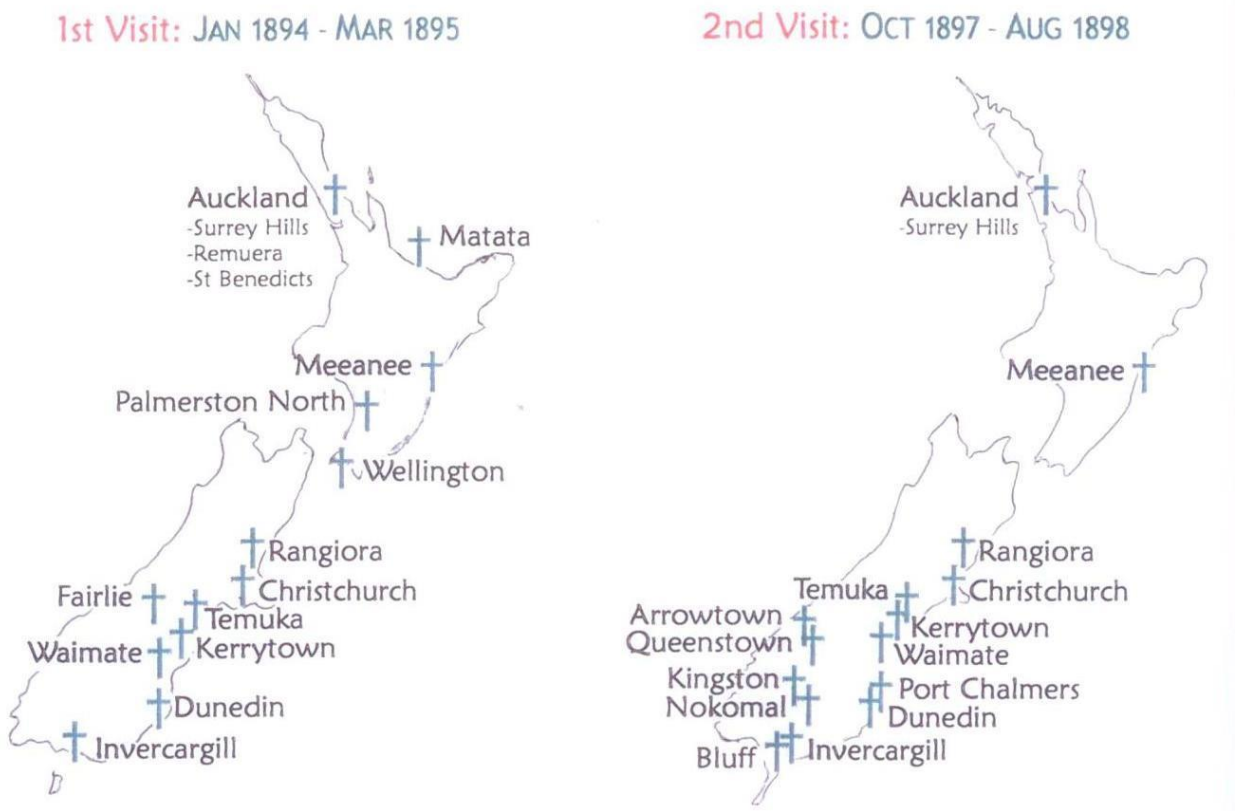
The work of the sisters is inspired by the clarity of Mary MacKillop's vision of a loving God at work in the world and present in every circumstance, and her belief that one should never see a need without doing something about it.

Sources:
Sisters of St Joseph, New Zealand and Australia, 2010
Sisters of St Joseph, Towards Canonisation: Mary MacKillop 1842-1909, 2009

www.catholic.org.nz/History

© Copyright to the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Ltd

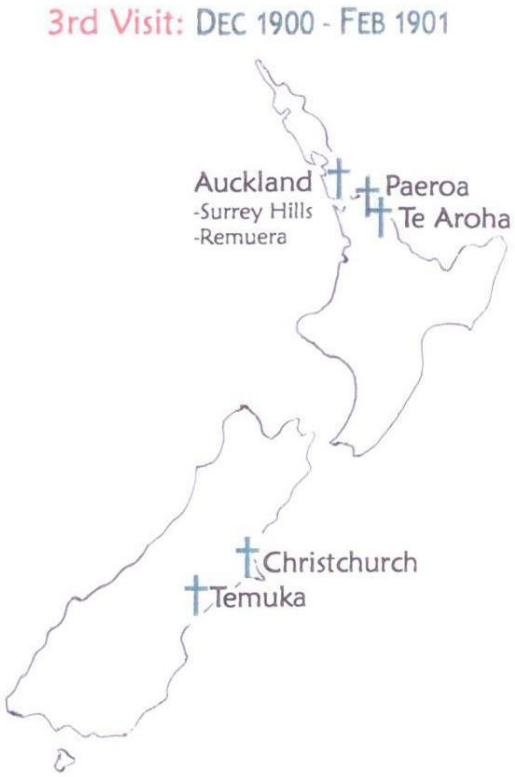
Mary MacKillop's New Zealand visits

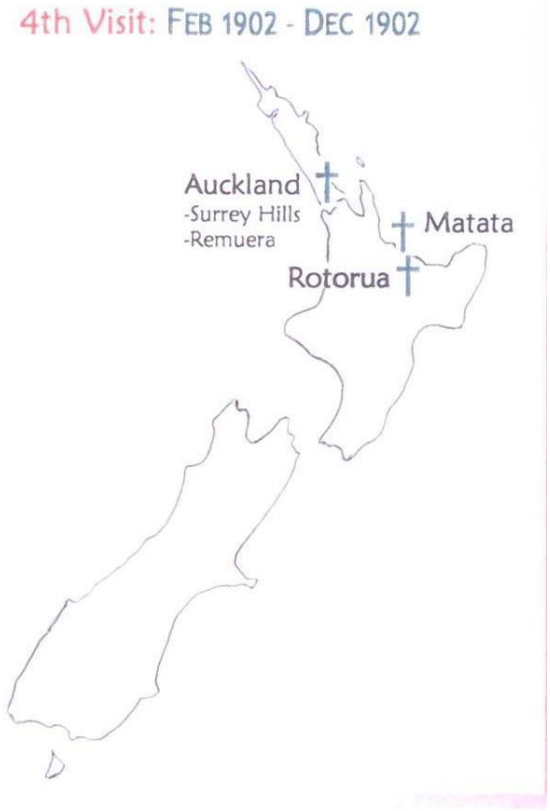


Sources:
Sisters of St Joseph, New Zealand and Australia, 2010
Sisters of St Joseph, Towards Canonisation: Mary MacKillop 1842-1909, 2009

www.catholic.org.nz/History

© Copyright to the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Ltd





Sources:

Sisters of St Joseph, New Zealand and Australia, 2010

Sisters of St Joseph, Towards Canonisation: Mary MacKillop 1842-1909, 2009

www.catholic.org.nz/History

© Copyright to the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Ltd

Canonisation

Mary MacKillop was recognised as a saint by the Holy Father in Rome on Sunday 17th October 2010. She is now known as Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

Around 10,000 pilgrims attended the canonisation. Among these were 150 Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. There were 14 New Zealand Sisters who made the pilgrimage and they were joined in Rome by three New Zealand bishops.

The Sisters sponsored two Maori people to attend the canonisation – Karen Erueti from the Mount St Joseph Administration Centre in Whanganui and Richard Puanaki from St Joseph's School in Wairoa.

On their pilgrimage, the Sisters were identified by scarves made for the occasion, which included blue and green colours to represent Aotearoa New Zealand, to which Mary MacKillop had a strong connection.

Sources:
Sisters of St Joseph, New Zealand and Australia, 2010
Sisters of St Joseph, Towards Canonisation: Mary MacKillop 1842-1909, 2009

© Copyright to the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Ltd