

Mr Tom Stephens; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Bill Johnston; Mrs Liza Harvey;
Mr John Kobelke; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Eric Ripper

MARY MACKILLOP — CANONISATION

Motion

MR T.G. STEPHENS (Pilbara) [4.32 pm]: I move —

That this house acknowledges the canonisation of Mother Mary MacKillop, founder of the Order of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart, who becomes the first Australian saint formally recognised by the Catholic Church, recognising with appreciation the work of her Sisters of Saint Joseph in Western Australia, particularly their special work in education and welfare, working with the poor, the disadvantaged and with the Aboriginal community.

The celebration of the formal canonisation of Mother Mary MacKillop provides this house with an opportunity to express our appreciation for the work of the Sisters of St Joseph, who are the living legacy of this first Australian-born saint to be formally recognised by the Catholic Church. In Western Australia, these sisters, probably known as the “Brown Joys”, are now a community of just 53 women working in the East Kimberley across the Pilbara and various other parts of the state through to the south west corner. In paying special tribute to these women, I note the quality of the lives and work of the women working in the Pilbara. Sister Betty Keane, who previously worked in the East Kimberley for many years, works in Newman, while Sister Bernadette Haynes, RSJ, lives and works in Tom Price and has followed in the steps of her colleagues Sisters Gemma Scott and Christine Symonds.

The focus of the Sisters of St Joseph in Western Australia is most especially on display in their compassionate work for the poor and destitute and in their partnerships with others across the state to deliver schools, education programs and pastoral care for some very remote and disadvantaged communities.

In the East Kimberley, the sisters have trailblazed two-way partnerships in remote locations such as the Warmun community at Turkey Creek and the Yuraman community at Ringers Soak near Gordon Downs east of Halls Creek, as well as in the more populated centres of Wyndham and Kununurra where they have established the schools of St Joseph. The sisters’ ethos is on display in the confident way they have involved themselves in the support and encouragement of local Aboriginal people and their communities to take on a decision-making role in the processes that impact on their lives and that of their families and their communities. The sisters have been involved in providing pastoral and counselling services, and, by lending a sympathetic ear, they have met the needs of many individuals across the state. Patients in hospitals and people in nursing homes across Western Australia have all benefited from the ministry of these sisters. The Sisters’ Place in Fremantle offers a safe bed for women who would otherwise sleep rough in the streets of Fremantle. Their places of hospitality offer respite and a quiet space for those in need. Increasingly, the sisters can be found in various parishes around Western Australia helping to provide faith education, administrative leadership and performing the duties of the pastoral associate in city, rural and remote areas.

Mary MacKillop believed in and modelled the role of service to meet the needs of others. In the words of the sister’s 2007 constitution, the sisters adopted the following words for their guidance: with our hearts full of new energy, acting justly with loving tenderness, while walking into the future humbly and confidently with our God.

My first association with the Sisters of St Joseph was at the hostel in Moongoong Darwung in the late 1970s when I worked closely with Sister Angela Morrisson, who was a trailblazer in the field of education. I have been lucky to watch closely the quality work of the late Sister Veronica Ryan, Sisters Margaret and Betty Keane and Sister Alma Cabassi, the first cousin of Paul Omodei. Sister Alma was the former provincial leader in Western Australia. All these women work in dedicated service to respond to the needs of others. Sister Clare Ahern, who is now back in Ireland, was the provincial leader before Sister Pauline Morgan and Sister Alma Cabassi.

Sister Clare Ahern’s work warrants particular reference. She came to Australia at the age of 15 or 16 years. She was working as a teacher in Kununurra when I first met her and she established a new school, firstly at the Warmun community at Turkey Creek and then at Yarruman at Ringers Soak. She arrived at both of those communities with her colleague Sister Theresa Morellini, and together they worked under the most basic conditions without reliable water or power while living in an unshaded caravan in blistering heat. The first of their classrooms were timber bough shelters with spinifex walls and roofs made of spinifex to provide shade. When the schools were secure, the women established the Mirringki Centre just north of Warmun, which operates today as a spirituality centre and a place of quiet reflection. The centre is used constantly by the Aboriginal people of the Kimberly and beyond as a meeting place where they can tackle the issues of leadership, family and community safety, alcohol and drug addictions and the various social and spiritual issues which they face. Clare Ahern went on to contribute very significantly in her theological studies and teaching at the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle and Broome where she helped sensitively explore the connection

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between belief and faith with the traditional Aboriginal communities and the opportunities for connection with the Christian movement. Sister Theresa Morellini still works at the Warmun community in support of the local women and community leaders. Their association spans more than 30 years.

Western Australians have been lucky to have the Sisters of St Joseph delivering support and services to our communities. All these women and their friends hold in their hearts the special memory of their colleague Sister Irene McCormack, who was born in the WA Wheatbelt town of Kununoppin in 1938. After an already full life of work as an educator across Western Australia, she moved to Peru in 1987. While working there in the service of the poor, she was murdered, martyred by the Shining Path Rebels in May 1991 as a direct consequence of her faith-filled, unselfish and dedicated work for the poor. Products made by women living in poverty in Peru are still sold throughout the extensive network of the "Brown Joeys" and the funds are utilised to support the Peruvian women and their families.

It is for all these reasons that it is only right that we mark the occasion of this celebration of the formal recognition of the sanctity of the life of Mother Mary MacKillop, the foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph. The celebration takes place this weekend in Rome. It is right also for the Parliament of WA to express on behalf of the community its appreciation for the contribution of the life of this special woman and of her legacy, as centred around a community of women who have delivered so much for so many for so long.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [4.37 pm]: This is a very special time for Catholics in the Australian community. The member for Pilbara has described Mother Mary MacKillop and her association with Western Australia extremely well, and so I will make only a few comments. Mary MacKillop was a true pioneer of social justice and continues to serve as a role model for people around Australia and the world. My electorate has a very special connection to Mary MacKillop. The Mary MacKillop parish and Mary MacKillop school are located in Ballajura. Last Sunday, I attended a special mass. It was the official farewell for a group of 55 parishioners and friends who are embarking on a 21-day pilgrimage. Their trip will take in both the canonisation celebrations in Rome and a visit to the Holy Land. The pilgrims are being led by Father John Jegrow. Counsellor Maria Haynes will also attend the pilgrimage. Father John Jegrow had been planning the pilgrimage to the big event at least 18 months before the announcement was made on 19 February that Mary would become a saint. He was ready to go and ensured that a group from the parish would be there for the special day. Father Jegrow has been a long-time member of the Australian Catholic Press Association and has been promoting Mary MacKillop and her achievements to the Ballajura community through the publication that he circulates across the area called *The Cross Roads*. The group left yesterday morning. When I met them on Sunday, they were all very excited about what will be an incredible experience. I wish them all the best. I know that they will be there along with thousands of other Western Australians to celebrate the very holy day. I understand that between 8 000 and 10 000 pilgrims have left Australia to attend the very special ceremony.

I thank the member for Pilbara for moving this motion. This is a truly magnificent event, and I thank Parliament for recognising it.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [4.40 pm]: I join with my colleagues on this motion and advise the house that this Sunday will really be a red-letter day for over five million Catholics throughout Australia when we see Pope Benedict XVI canonise the blessed Mary MacKillop in St Peter's Square in Rome. Mary MacKillop was a true Australian pioneer, an amazingly strong woman who dedicated her life to educating the poor. In 1869 she formed the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. When one thinks about those very early days, we think about Western Australia only being founded in 1829; in 1869 in South Australia Mary MacKillop formed the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. When we think about the living conditions in Australia at that time, the conditions for women in particular, she must have been an amazingly strong woman to take on that role. Some people in this house may not be aware that Mary MacKillop was excommunicated from the Catholic Church at one time. The principal reason behind that was because she had disclosed to the bishop some issues to do with paedophilia by a local priest. The acts had been committed against children in her community. I think she must have been a very strong woman to take up that issue and was prepared to put her vocation on the line to raise those issues. Before his death, the bishop who moved to excommunicate Mary MacKillop renounced that excommunication, and she was of course brought back into the church and reinstated.

I want to pay tribute as part of this motion to all of the Catholic sisters right throughout Australia since the start of our Western Australian colony and our nation. Sisters of all orders, not just the Sisters of St Joseph but also the Sisters of Mercy who educated people like myself, have played an amazingly important role in the education of children generally. At primary school level the nuns have traditionally educated both boys and girls; at the high school level they have predominantly taught girls. I have often thought that it was interesting to note that in the last Labor cabinet Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Hon Sheila McHale, Hon Judy Edwardes and I were all educated by Catholic nuns. Margaret Quirk, the member for Girrawheen, who joined the cabinet at a later stage,

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was also educated by Catholic nuns. Those women set an extraordinarily strong example to young women, as did the Catholic nuns two centuries ago in this nation. They dedicated their lives not to teaching the elite, not to teaching in wealthy areas, but to teaching those from the poorest communities and supporting those families to ensure that girls had the opportunity of a good education and all the opportunities that flow from that. I want to pay tribute not just to Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph, but to the sisters of all orders around Australia who I know will be rejoicing on Sunday when Mary MacKillop is canonised.

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot) [4.43 pm]: I start by acknowledging and thanking my friend the member for Pilbara for moving this motion. I sincerely appreciate the work and effort he has made to acknowledge the work of Mary MacKillop.

As we know, Mary MacKillop co-founded the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, after my own namesake's saint, on 19 March 1866 at the age of 24. The sisters lived in poverty and dedicated their lives to educating poor children. With Mary its first member and superior, the society was founded at Penola, South Australia, where Mary moved to in 1860. The school was open to anyone who wished to learn and was revolutionary for its time as it accepted and educated both those with the means to pay for an education and those without. This became an important model for Catholic education. Mary believed a sound education would improve children's situations later in life. Mary was a significant Australian, as more than a century after her death her legacy continues today. Since the foundation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart there have been more than 3 000 members of the congregation. Today they number 2 500 in 22 dioceses of Australia, four in New Zealand and even one in Ireland.

Having been the fortunate beneficiary of a Jesuit education in Sydney, the work of Mary MacKillop was repeatedly reinforced to me throughout my schooling. When the extraordinary event of the excommunication of Mary MacKillop occurred in 1871, it was indeed the Jesuits of Norwood who realised that Bishop Sheil had acted invalidly, and gave her shelter. It is fitting that Mary MacKillop, our first Australian saint, displayed the same glimmer of indifference to authority to do what she knew was right regardless of the consequences. That still echoes through the character of Australian people today. It is part of what makes us who we are. This Sunday, 17 October 2010, Mary MacKillop will be canonised by Pope Benedict XVI and be the first Australian to be both beatified and canonised. Among the many things named in her honour, the South Australian state seat of MacKillop was created in 1991.

In closing I would like to say one of Mary MacKillop's most often quoted sayings is "never see a need without doing something about it." I pray that as members of this house we can be a bit more like Mary MacKillop and hold her out to be a light to guide us in our actions regardless of our religious beliefs.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [4.46 pm]: I join to support the motion that was ably moved by the member for Pilbara. I note that I am a product of a Catholic education. I, like the member for Midland, was taught by the nuns, although not in high school. I attended a high school at the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart College in Canberra. According to the last census, there are 8 617 Catholics in the electorate of Cannington. That is the largest religious group in my electorate. There are three schools in my electorate—St Norbert College, St Joseph's Catholic Primary School and St Jude's Catholic School. There are also three Catholic churches at Langford, Wilson and Queens Park. On behalf of all those people, and myself and my family, I would like to associate myself with this motion.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough) [4.47 pm]: I too rise in support of this motion in celebration of the canonisation of Mother Mary MacKillop. Mary MacKillop, a co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, was a true feminist and a great Australian pioneer. It was rumoured that she initially intended to become one of the Sisters of Mercy; a great collection of women whose educational endeavours I am a product of. Mother Mary MacKillop's pending canonisation is the realisation of many years of effort to recognise her life's work, which officially started in 1925 when Archbishop Kelly set up a tribunal of investigation after her death in 1909.

Mary MacKillop faced many hurdles in pursuit of her calling. From a young age, she wished to devote her life to poor children, and, as she put it, "the afflicted poor". Indeed her life's work was about achieving outcomes in that area. Mother Mary's work was by no means easy. In a very different and much less prosperous Australia than the one we enjoy today, she not only endured physical hardship but had to tread a cautious and difficult political path through the hierarchy of the Catholic Church at the time, even to the point, as previously mentioned, of excommunication at different stages of her life. Paul Gardiner SJ, in compiling the official biography of Mary MacKillop's life, said that she always endeavoured to resolve these difficulties not only justly but also with undiminished respect and unaffected charity. Mother Mary MacKillop is remembered as a generous woman who remained full of peace, patience and grace while under pressure and while enduring the

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toughest of challenges. We can all learn from her simple faith and trust in God; a trust that allowed her to always respect and love people even when at their worst. She stood for the dignity of every human being and indeed dedicated her mission to the outcasts of society, the poverty stricken, the disaffected—the forgotten ones. Mother Mary MacKillop's life provides inspiration and proof that a hardworking life dedicated to a noble purpose can indeed make a difference. The Sisters of St Joseph refer to her as an ordinary woman living an extraordinary life. Sunday, 17 October 2010, will be a momentous day for Australian Catholics, and indeed Catholics worldwide. I commend this motion to the house. I thank the member for Pilbara for his efforts in allowing us to commemorate such a great Australian today.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta) [4.50 pm]: I wish to support the motion moved by member for Pilbara and also celebrate this very special occasion of the canonisation of Mary MacKillop. Clearly, it will be a day of great celebration in the Catholic Church, and I suspect quite a few other Christian communities, that Australia will finally have its first saint. The ramifications of her work and the legacy go very much to the benefit of the wider Western Australian community. As the member for Pilbara pointed out, the Josephite sisters have made a wonderful contribution in so many areas, whether they be education, orphanages, neglected children, the aged, poor or incurably ill, and in so many areas where there were difficult jobs, particularly back at the time of Mary MacKillop when they went into remote areas and faced considerable difficulty in what they had to deal with, living off alms, so really doing it very tough but providing incredible services to people. I put to the house that that legacy is not only in the ongoing work of the sisters, but also in St Mary MacKillop, or St Mary of the Cross, as a role model that hopefully will help many more people than just those people of the Catholic faith.

We are at a time now when we see so many problems around us. We are fortunate that we have volunteers in a whole range of religious and community-based organisations who contribute to building up our community. When they look to Mary MacKillop, they will see someone who, as a woman at a time when decisions were made by men, gave leadership to deliver benefits to people in need. She was someone who could build a community. She drew other young women around her in her group of Josephite sisters and lived in a community. She was building that strength of women sharing together, but very much sharing with the wider community. Unfortunately, too many of our role models today, whether they be sporting stars or celebrities, do not hold out those values of building community, of service and of having an inner strength and commitment to delivering something of real benefit to the community.

I also see that while it is a great day of celebration for Catholics and people of Christian belief who see the value of having saints, there is a real benefit for the wider community in recognising the wonderful contribution of Mary MacKillop, and, hopefully, this will inspire others to take up roles in which they will contribute to building our community and the giving of themselves to help others who really need that support.

MR A. KRSTICEVIC (Carine) [4.52 pm]: I too feel privileged to be able to speak in support of this motion. As a practising Catholic and a former vicar of the youth in the parish of Our Lady of Grace in North Beach, it gives me great pleasure to say a few words celebrating the canonisation of the Blessed Mary MacKillop, which will take place on 17 October 2010. After this date she will be known as “St Mary of the Cross”, Australia's first saint.

Mary MacKillop was born in Melbourne on 15 January 1842. She left home to work when she was 14 years of age. By the time she was 15, Mary had decided that she was going to be a nun. She wanted to devote her life to the poor. In 1861, she went to work in Penola, a small town in South Australia, where she met a Catholic priest, Father Julian Woods. Together they opened Australia's first free Catholic school. Mary felt a strong religious calling but could not find an order that suited her, so she and Father Woods founded the sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. She took a vow of poverty, which meant that Mary and her followers had to beg for money. In 1867, Mary moved to Adelaide and opened another school. Before long they were 17 schools under her care. Mary MacKillop and the Josephites were also involved in an orphanage and a reformatory as well as numerous other charitable activities. The number of Mary's followers grew, and by the time she died on 8 August 1909, there were St Joseph's schools all over Australia.

May I encourage all members to find the time to visit the tomb of Mary MacKillop located in the Mary MacKillop Chapel in Mount Street, North Sydney. God bless us all.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [4.54 pm]: May I add a few words to the excellent words from members on both sides of the house. I was actually fortunate to teach with a Josephite nun, Sister Leonie, at Corpus Christi College in 1984. I think that she reflected the spirit and the aims of all Josephite nuns, which was to provide education for all people, especially the poor. The spirit that endeared her to all students and also her colleagues is something special, which I think is part of the reason that Mary MacKillop is now to become our saint.

May I also express congratulations to all Catholics in the Armadale parish, who will of course celebrate with a special mass this weekend.

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MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse) [4.55 pm]: May I just say how fitting it is that the house should take this opportunity to pay our formal respects to a truly remarkable Australian. On Sunday, when Mary MacKillop is canonised, I think it's important that we all remember that the Catholic Church does not make saints—the Catholic Church recognises them—and what happens on Sunday is not a mystical process but a recognition of a remarkable woman who had an impact on tens of thousands of Australians, not only while she lived but subsequent to her passing.

Much has been made of Mary MacKillop's first school in Penola in the Coonawarra in South Australia. I think she started off with a small cottage in town and, if I am correct, the school moved to a converted stable where she started off with 33 students. Of course, the focus of Josephite education has always been on an egalitarian approach. I am reminded of a story. The fame of her school spread. The then governor of South Australia wished to have his son educated at Mary MacKillop's school. In those days students of that class in society had a partition to separate them from the mere mortals in the classroom. The governor wished to send his son to Mary MacKillop's school. She refused to entertain the idea of a partition. Subsequently, the governor's son did not attend the school. I think he is probably all the poorer for that.

I saw that egalitarian approach to education, when I was involved with the St Joseph's School in Busselton when I was the chairman of the school board, and the very delicate way in which the then principal Sister Kathleen Hitchcock dealt with the financial and other issues that confronted a range of families in my electorate. As I have said, Catholic education has been strong in my electorate since 1903 when the sisters of Our Lady of the Mission moved to Busselton; in fact, I was very lucky because at one stage I owned the property in which they originally established their first school. The brown Josephites moved into Busselton in 1922, so they have been active in my electorate at a primary school level for some 88 years. I was very fortunate to host in 1999, at that property, their seventy-fifth anniversary, and to see a gathering of practically every Josephite nun in Western Australia, and several other states, at that time was a wonderful thing. We shared a great day reflecting on 75 years of Catholic education in my electorate.

I should also say that my local primary school, St Joseph's School, has been lucky. Two of the past three principals have been Josephite nuns. That is unfortunately a rare thing nowadays. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge those principals, Sister Mary Kirrane and Sister Kathleen Hitchcock. Our town was also served by another Josephite, Sister Moira Murphy. Sister Moira served in pastoral and social care responsibilities within the parish. All three of those ladies exhibited the tireless giving and enormous commitment to service that is reflective of Mary MacKillop. I am also very lucky because in my electorate I have the MacKillop Catholic College. Every year when I attend the graduation ceremony at that college, I see a modern manifestation of the spirit of Mary MacKillop in each one of the young children who graduates through that college, no more so than in their willingness to pack up and travel annually to East Timor to support various communities in East Timor.

In acknowledging Mary MacKillop today, we acknowledge a woman who has had a tremendous impact on our society at all levels. We are indeed blessed as a nation to have had Mary MacKillop serve us; we are blessed as a state; and my electorate of Vasse is indeed blessed to have been touched by Mary MacKillop.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [4.58 pm]: I would like to join with members on both sides of the house who have made speeches in celebration of the canonisation of Mary MacKillop. The founding of the sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart brought an instant benefit to this state during her lifetime. The sisters opened their first school in Western Australia at Northampton in 1887, the year before the official proclamation of the rules of the order in Rome in 1888. The next initiative here saw them reopen the school in Southern Cross in 1906. What followed was a rapid expansion of activities to areas as far apart as Perth, New Norcia, the South West, the Wheatbelt, the Great Southern, and eventually, over time, into the Pilbara and the Kimberley.

A provincial headquarters was set up in South Perth in 1915. The post-war baby boom saw the order lead the response in bringing Catholic education to new Perth suburbs. It is fitting that one of these schools was in Kensington—an echo of the original mother house founded in 1872 at Kensington, South Australia. After more than two generations as leaders in education, the order is a major positive force in community work in the Kimberley and in Perth. The Sisters' Place in Fremantle, a vital service for homeless women, is an example of the order's contemporary work. The work of the sisters in Western Australia is a living memorial to, and a continuation of the gift of, a great Australian and our first saint, Mary Helen MacKillop. I congratulate the Catholic community in Australia on the canonisation of the first Australian saint and join with all those people who will celebrate this event on Sunday.

Question put and passed.

Extract from *Hansard*

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House adjourned at 5.00 pm
