



# Missionary Sisters of Service

A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

## NEWSLETTER

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### Highways and Byways: Celebrating a new chapter

The incredible legacy of the MSS and their mission entity, Highways and Byways (H&B), continues into a new chapter. We recently celebrated the formal transition of H&B to Mary MacKillop Today, becoming the 'Mary MacKillop Today Highways and Byways Small Grants Program'. This vital partnership ensures the MSS's enduring mission to support those on the margins, particularly in rural and regional Australia, will carry forward. As Marg Casey, retiring Chair of the H&B Board stated, 'The power of what the MSS have done over the past 80 years will be carried forward in this new way, managed by Mary MacKillop Today.' A special High Tea held on 6 July, was our way of saying thank you to all who've been part of this important work.

The impact is already clear, with the latest round of applications for the 2025 MMT-HB program resulting in funding for 29 diverse projects, valued at more than \$125,500. As shown in this newsletter insert, these projects exemplify how the MSS legacy continues to make a profound difference, by supporting re-vegetation initiatives and partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, sharing land management knowledge. Your continued support, now through MMT, remains essential in empowering communities across Australia. See the full story and photo captions on our website: [www.missionarysisters.org.au/news](http://www.missionarysisters.org.au/news)



Photos courtesy Bernadette Madden MSS

## First Nations Woman Alarna Page awarded MSS Scholarship

It is with great pleasure that the third MSS scholarship, granted to a young First Nations woman, has been awarded to Alarna Page from Tasmania. As a proud Melukerdee woman, Alarna will undertake a Master of Theological Studies through the University of Divinity in Melbourne. This opportunity will deepen her understanding of theology, strengthen her identity as an Aboriginal Catholic woman, and enable her to drive meaningful change. The MSS community is thrilled to welcome Alarna, recognising her as an inspiring rising new leader along with former MSS scholarship recipients.



Photo courtesy Alarna Page

## MSS Join in Walk for Truth in Melbourne

On 18 June, a number of our women joined thousands in Melbourne for the Walk for Truth, an event described as 'a truly moving and historic moment'. Participants marched from Kings Domain to Parliament House to deliver the Yoorrook Justice Commission's report. This report, compiled over four years from the memories and stories of Aboriginal Victorians since colonisation, places the 'real story of colonisation' from the perspective of First Peoples on public record. It includes accounts of massacres, resistance, and their determination to preserve cultures, offering recommendations for action to address historical wrongs and pave the way for treaties. Corrie van den Bosch MSS stated that she found the 'whole experience very moving' and considered it 'truly a privilege' to participate. 'It was an expression of my personal support of this movement towards Truth and Treaty as well as that of our congregation of Missionary Sisters of Service,' she said. The MSS pray that this moment will lead to the desired recognition of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters through treaties and address the unfinished business of Victoria's colonial history, ultimately creating a future that is better for all Australians.



Photo courtesy Fiona Basile





## **Congratulations to some of our women, celebrating significant anniversaries**

On 15 August, we're delighted to acknowledge and celebrate Betty McManus MSS, Cecilia Bailey MSS and Margaret Windsham MSS who are celebrating their 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of joining the MSS (then known as the Home Missionary Sisters of Our Lady). Nancy Doyle MSS, Pat Brain MSS, Mary Cleary MSS, Bernadette Wallis MSS and Pat Kelly MSS celebrate their 60-year anniversaries of profession into the MSS. And Bernadette Madden MSS celebrates her 50-year anniversary of entry into the MSS. A big congratulations to all of you! We pray God continues to bless each of you abundantly, and all you encounter.

## **Catherine Carr reflects on her call to walk with our women**

Catherine Carr was employed as the MSS's Congregational Co-ordinator 3.5 years ago by Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited (EFCL), a ministry of Religious Institutes in Australia, set up to support those institutes who are transitioning to their fulfilment. In this role, she provides pastoral accompaniment to each Sister, co-ordinates their health and wellbeing, and oversees aged care services. Ensuring that each Sister remains connected to her mission is also vital.



Catherine says it is a 'dynamic role' that she 'loves'. 'The work of the MSS is embedded in the Australian landscape and draws on the scriptures to discern "the signs of the times",' she said. 'Immersing myself into the charism of the MSS meant understanding the original vision of Fr John Wallis for a group of women to go out into the "highways and byways", inspired by the Gospel, to meet the education needs of ordinary families in rural and isolated areas. Internalising the MSS charism in my role, is a dynamic process and takes time. It demands from me a capacity for working independently, versatility, relational skills and keeping options open. I love that my role also requires a sense of the adventure of new horizons and meeting many people.'

The MSS Sisters were amongst the earliest supporters of the vision of EFCL, which is in keeping with the MSS charism of discerning the signs of the times and following 'big maps'. Catherine said, 'It is my privilege to be accompanying the richly diverse women of the MSS in my role. In EFCL's words, we are "walking each other home".'

## Vale Mary Wagner, Patron of The John Wallis Foundation and Highways and Byways



It is with deep sadness that the MSS and their mission entities, formerly the John Wallis Foundation and later Highways and Byways, acknowledge the death of Mary Wagner in Toowoomba, Queensland, in May this year. A long-time friend and supporter, Mary's profound connection to the MSS began through her brother, Fr Pat Doyle, who was a close friend to the Sisters in their early days. She later became the patron of our mission entity, actively supporting and participating in numerous events,

including every John Wallis Foundation Memorial lecture and the launch of *The Silent Book* by Bernadette Wallis MSS. Bernadette shared heartfelt reflections, noting the 'amazing discovery' that Mary was on the same family tree as MSS Founder, Fr John Wallis, through her husband, Henry Wagner. Bernadette described Mary as 'a practical woman of faith and service, a woman with courage and strength as a leader... a vibrant, creative woman who loved colour and expressed her goodness and kindness in a myriad of ways!'

This spirit was evident in her practical support; in the early 1980s, Mary guided and mentored Imelda McMahon MSS in establishing a Catholic Family Bookshop in Toowoomba. They formed a friendship that lasted over 35 years. Mary provided enormous support for MSS and John Wallis Foundation events, leveraging her networks, hosting visitors, and taking on formal roles, including presenting at John Wallis Memorial Lectures.

From all of the MSS, and our extended community, we give thanks for Mary's life and for her enduring connection to the MSS and our mission. Our prayers remain with her husband and family. Read the full story on our website: [www.missionarysisters.org.au/news](http://www.missionarysisters.org.au/news)

### Vale Bernadette O'Connor

It is with sadness that the MSS acknowledge the death of Bernadette O'Connor, founder and Executive Director of Management Governance Australia Pty Ltd. Bernadette was instrumental in providing governance and human resources assistance to the MSS congregation along with the running of its mission entity, The John Wallis Foundation, later known as Highways and Byways (H&B). Former executive officer of H&B, Liz McAloon, knew Bernadette both personally and professionally through H&B. Liz shared these words:

*It was wonderful to work with Bernadette on Highways and Byways governance issues. I have known Bernadette my entire life and we had close family friendships for many years, traveling overseas and enjoying lots of times together, especially election night parties. Seeing Bernadette in action, and working with her in her professional capacity was inspirational. When Bernadette turned her attention to our issues, she was 100% there and her guidance and strategic recommendations were spot on! Rest in peace, Bernadette.*