



Missionary Sisters of Service

A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

NEWSLETTER

Easter Blessings to All

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As we enter the season of Easter, we hold in prayer all those affected by the recent bushfires in Victoria, especially in the Yea district, a place deeply woven into our story as the home of our founder, Fr John Wallis. This year marks the 25-year anniversary of Fr John's death on 3 August. Over many years, the Yarck to Yea Walk-Run-Ride (shown in the photos below) gathered friends and supporters in this region to raise funds for our mission entity, *Highways and Byways: Healing the Land, Healing Ourselves, Together*. While that event is no longer held, our connection with the Yea Catholic parish and wider community remains strong. To all reading this newsletter, you remain in our hearts and prayers.

This year, we congratulate Marcia McMahon MSS who celebrates the 60-year anniversary of her profession, and Stancea Vichie MSS, who celebrates the 50-year anniversary of profession.



During this Easter season, we entrust the land and its people to the hope of the Risen Christ, praying for renewal, resilience and the promise of new life.



Image: Gerd Altmann, Pixabay

Bernadette Wallis MSS: Immersing Herself in a 'Living' Archive

For Bernadette Wallis MSS, working in the archives of the MSS has become a deeply meaningful part of her life and mission. She reflects that she could never have imagined earlier in life that she would be so immersed in the archives of the congregation. Yet through life, she has realised she has always had a real interest in history and an appreciation of story, for its potential to offer knowledge, inspiration and wisdom.



Learning some basics from longtime MSS archivist Carmel Hall, Bernadette gradually came into the work of the archives. She said it simply came into her pathway. Carmel had a strong flair for conservation and preservation and carefully shared the practical details of archival work with Bernadette over the years. With this background, Bernadette says she came into the archives at a time when the MSS were preparing to do the work that is required when a congregation is in the process of coming to completion.

The MSS archives hold the story of the community's life and mission. They include letters of Fr John Wallis and congregational leaders, Circular Letters to the sisters, documentation, early constitutions, chapter papers, books, diaries, and records of their mission, such as the religious correspondence school, as well as the *Highways and Byways* newsletters that connected the sisters with family and friends. Through the letters, stories, and records of mission life, the archives reveal how the sisters responded to the needs of people across Australia and how their mission developed and diversified over time.

For Bernadette, archives are living. They help people understand where their way of life, spirituality and mission have come from and how they continue to unfold. She is also passionate about the vision of the Australian Religious Archive, which seeks to preserve and share the archival stories of religious communities and organisations, so they can offer knowledge, insight, inspiration and hope, and continue to see how archives contribute to an understanding of the story of Church and society in Australia. But what of the future of archives? Read the full story at www.missionarysisters.org.au/news

Bern Madden MSS: Walking with Communities Impacted by Fires

For the past six years, Bernadette Madden MSS has volunteered with the Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministry (VCCEM), offering psychological first aid and pastoral support to people affected by disasters. Following the recent bushfires in Victoria, Bernadette spent time in relief centres and fire-affected communities, listening to people's stories and connecting them with support services. Travelling through the Murrindindi Shire, she encountered both heartbreaking loss and deep gratitude. As Bernadette reflects, recovery after disasters like these is a long-term journey, and the need for compassionate presence continues long after the headlines fade. Read more at www.missionarysisters.org.au/news

Treasures from the MSS Archives: Remembering Anne Murphy MSS



Anne (Mavis) Murphy MSS, pictured on the far right in each photo, was born in Launceston, Tasmania, in 1923. She joined our community of women, then known as the Home Missionary Sisters of Our Lady, in 1945.

We remember Anne as a joyful pioneer missionary and a gentle, welcoming woman who endeared herself to the people and priests of the Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese in NSW. Many people treasured the letters she wrote after returning to Hobart due to the cancer that would eventually claim her life.

She faced her death with the same courage and humour that had characterised her life. Anne was the first member of our congregation to die, on 19 November 1960. She was 36 years old.



Above left: Sr Anne Murphy MSS (far right) in the Correspondence School, Hobart, Tasmania.

Bottom left: Sr Anne Murphy MSS sorting the mail.

Bottom right: Sisters Paul Coad and Anne Murphy MSS posting the mail, Hobart, Tasmania.

Small Grants Projects making an impact across Australia

The Highways and Byways Small Grants Program, now part of Mary MacKillop Today, continues the mission of the Missionary Sisters of Service by supporting small, community-led initiatives addressing disadvantage and exclusion, particularly in rural and remote Australia. With flexible, modest funding, the program responds to pressing local needs, enabling grassroots projects to create meaningful and lasting impact.

In 2024–25, under the theme Valuing Community Connections in an Ancient Land, the program recognised Australia's deep First Nations heritage alongside the ongoing impacts of natural disasters and COVID-19. Across the country, 33 projects were funded to strengthen social connection, reduce isolation, build skills and support sustainable land practices.



Photo taken in December 2025, courtesy of Waminda Community House. Photo used with permission.

One project, supported with a \$4,000 grant in Benalla on Yorta Yorta Country in Victoria, enabled Waminda Community House to create a Bush Tucker Garden and Seasonal Story mural. Local Elders Aunty Cheryl Cooper and Aunty Carol Alliman, alongside community partners and Aboriginal children from the Anganya program, shared knowledge of traditional plants, seasons and art. The resulting mural and booklet celebrate culture, connection and community pride.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to support the Mary MacKillop Today Highways and Byways Small Grants Program. Simply:

1. Visit the Mary MacKillop Today donation page (scan QR code or go to: www.marymackilloptoday.org.au/donate)
2. Select the amount and fill in your details
3. In the 'Your message' box, write: 'Please direct my donation to the Highways and Byways Small Grants Program'



Your generosity helps continue the MSS legacy of connection and service in communities across Australia.