

Mary's News *today*



WINTER 2025

Read how your generosity is changing lives:

- You helped ease Margaret's financial burden
- Your support is empowering women to become leaders in Peru
- Sr Monica Cavanagh shares her reflections on His Holiness, Pope Francis ... and many more inspiring stories made possible by you

MARY MACKILLOP
today



Welcome to the 2025 Winter edition of Mary's News Today where you can read about the amazing impact of your generosity.

I want to update you about Olandina, the mother of seven in Timor-Leste whose story I recently shared with you. Thanks to your kindness, she has joined our Women's Livelihoods Project – the Cooperative BEHAFU.

Olandina says:

"I want to thank Mary MacKillop Today's donors. Because of you, I've been able to keep my children at school, and get a kiosk business up and running. I've learnt so much about providing for my family."

We're pleased to share more inspiring stories with you, including a heartfelt article by Sr Monica Cavanagh reflecting on her memories of His Holiness, Pope Francis.

We are all deeply saddened by the recent passing of the Holy Father. His legacy is one defined by humility, compassion, and unwavering advocacy for marginalised communities, along with a profound care for our common home. Mary MacKillop Today remains committed to carrying forward his vision of hope, justice, and peace.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who recently completed our Supporter Survey. Your feedback will help us improve and grow our life-changing programs. We truly appreciate your ongoing commitment to our mission.

I hope you enjoy reading about the transformative impact you make possible.

With gratitude,

Jane Woolford – CEO

Margaret regains a financial peace of mind

Margaret*, an 86-year-old grandmother from Bathurst, has spent most of her life living modestly. However, recent times have become increasingly challenging due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Things took a turn for the worse when Margaret was offered a cash instalment plan through her credit card provider. While the plan provided her with cash to help cover living expenses, it came at a steep price—her monthly card repayments more than doubled.

As she relies on a fixed income from her age pension, Margaret struggled to meet the repayments, which seemed never-ending. This left her in a difficult position, as the monthly payments consumed most of her pension which negatively impacted her already fragile health due to a heart condition.

Fortunately, Margaret reached out to Mary MacKillop Today and met with Emma, our Financial Counsellor. Emma contacted Margaret's credit card provider, explaining that the cash instalment plan had been offered without proper consideration of her ability to afford it.

Thankfully, the credit card provider took her situation into account. After reviewing her case, they agreed to waive the remaining balance on Margaret's credit card and close the account.

With a sense of relief, Margaret cut up her card, freeing herself from the burden of the monthly bills that had caused her so much stress.

Margaret shared ***"Although I no longer have access to my credit card, I feel so much better as I have peace of mind knowing that I'm not being drained by debt I can't afford."***

Thanks to your generosity, people like Margaret are turning their financial situations around.



Margaret*

Inspired by Australia's first saint, Mary MacKillop Today empowers communities in Australia and overseas to realise their dignity through education, health, financial inclusion and livelihoods. All photos by Mary MacKillop Today unless otherwise stated. When necessary, names have been changed for privacy. Some content in this newsletter has been translated. Front Cover: Evangelina tending her crops in Timor-Leste.



Mary MacKillop Today acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land, past, present, and emerging, on which our offices are located.



Mary MacKillop Today NGO is accredited by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), responsible for managing Australia's development program. To maintain accreditation, Mary MacKillop Today's systems, policies and processes are rigorously reviewed by the Australian Government. Mary MacKillop Today receives support through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Mary MacKillop Today is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and complies with industry standards of good practice, transparency and accountability.



Mary MacKillop Today is a Registered Charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), the national regulator of charities.

"The workshops taught me to be stronger... and to find a support network."

Sonia is the President of the Bicentennial Women's Organisation in her town in the province of Quispicanchi, Peru.

She has been a participant of the 'Enhancing Women's Civil Participation in Rural Peru' project, led by our local partner CCAIJO, for the last few years.

"Before I joined the women's organisation, I was going through difficult times. My mental health was not good, and I was neglecting my daily activities. But, once I was elected as a representative of the organisation, I began to emerge from the depressive period I was experiencing.

The workshops I took part in taught me to be stronger. There are women like me who have issues who can't say it openly, but this space allows us to share and learn.

At first, I was surprised to see that in other districts there



Sonia

were many women organised and strengthened. And I asked myself: Why can't we, in this town, be as organised? That's where we started. We have already made our work plan, and we are walking to other

communities to bring this message to more women.

Sometimes my husband thinks I'm wasting my time being involved. I tell him that women must find a space for ourselves, where we feel happy, calm and free to express ourselves. We learn about our rights, such as the right to political participation and healthy coexistence through workshops, and meetings and this allows us to recognise ourselves as complete citizens.

My greatest dream is for women to understand that when we are united...we can build a peaceful home, and a healthy society."

Thanks to your compassion, women like Sonia are taking on leadership roles that are changing the lives of their families and communities forever.

Enhancing Women's Civil Participation in rural Peru receives support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

"I was struggling to teach my children at home... Now this has changed!"

Beatriz lives with her husband and six children in a small village near the north coast of Timor-Leste. She runs a small business from home and ensures that all her children complete their homework – a significant challenge given Beatriz didn't finish her own schooling.

Beatriz was eager to share her experiences with the Parents Training Program which is supported by generous supporters like you.

"During the two weeks of training, I learnt how to make presentations in front of the class, how to read storybooks, how to cut letters out of used cardboard, and how to teach our children at home.

I also learnt about child protection. This is new to me, and Mary MacKillop Today gave us great ways to pay attention to our children to work out if they need help.

Before I did the training, I used to hold my children's hands to help them write. However, with the training, I learnt how to teach my children with the alphabet in a simple but easy way.

The teachers only have a few hours to work with my children but now I realise that I can continue this work at home. That even before they get to school, they can already be learning!"



Beatriz

"The more people that Mary MacKillop Today can help... the better."

Chris' connection to Saint Mary MacKillop began in 2002 when he was diagnosed with a non-terminal form of leukemia. A visit to Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney during his treatment had a profound impact on him - he became inspired by Mary's unwavering commitment to those in need.

As Chris learned more about Mary's story, he also discovered the work of Mary MacKillop Today, which continues to resonate with him.

He explains, ***"I particularly like the way that Mary MacKillop Today works with communities in helping people to look after themselves. It gives people a sense of belonging and lifts their self-esteem when they learn new skills. They can then teach others in their community."***

Chris recognises that one of the most meaningful ways he can make a lasting difference is by supporting the future of Mary MacKillop Today.

"God calls us to help those in society who are less fortunate than ourselves, and one of the best ways to do this is to leave a bequest," he says.

For him, the decision to leave a bequest was straightforward. By doing so, he ensures that the work of Mary MacKillop Today continues to impact lives for generations to come.

Chris takes pride in knowing that his bequest will be used to empower others, giving them the same sense of hope that Mary inspired in him so many years ago.

If you would like to include a gift to Mary MacKillop Today in your Will, just like Chris, please contact April on (02) 8912 2720.



Chris

"We give thanks for his deep faith, his strong leadership, his compassionate heart and his advocacy for justice."

Sr Monica Cavanagh, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, shares her remembrance of his Holy Holiness, Pope Francis.

"The Sisters of Saint Joseph join Catholics and people around the world to mourn the death of Pope Francis. Pope Francis cared for the poor and those on the edge. He also had a willingness to meet with world leaders and was not afraid to speak his truth."

It was my privilege to meet Pope Francis on two occasions while involved with International Union of Superiors General. On these occasions, he was ready to engage with the questions of Women Religious. He was particularly interested in those

Religious living in war torn situations, those working with refugees, and those working in poverty-stricken areas. His warmth and openness were evident."

In 2023, Pope Francis held a General Audience, focusing on the life and example of Saint Mary MacKillop. "One essential characteristic of her zeal for



Sr Monica meeting with Pope Francis in 2023. © Vatican Media.

the Gospel," said Pope Francis, "was her desire to care for the poor and marginalised. This pushed her to go where others refused or were unable to go."

Pope Francis noted that Saint Mary MacKillop learned to love the Cross of Christ and found her own way to respond to the needs of her times."

"May her efforts to form young people inspire us today," he prayed, "and may her intercession sustain the daily work of parents, teachers, catechists, and all educators, carried out for the good of young people and a future that is more humane and full of hope."

We give thanks for Pope Francis' deep faith, his strong leadership, his compassionate heart and his advocacy for justice."

"Mary MacKillop Today is Saint Mary MacKillop in action in this day and age."

Mary has been a generous monthly donor supporting the work of Mary MacKillop Today since 2013. Her connection to Saint Mary MacKillop and the Josephite Sisters began when she was a young girl attending a Josephite school.

Mary shares: *"I was inspired by the Sisters to become a teacher myself and spent forty years teaching in Catholic schools in South Australia. For many years, I have been a Josephite Companion and this led me to becoming the Chair of the Josephite Companions Leadership Team (JCoLT) in 2013. In my role as Chair, I visited Peru in 2016 and travelled around the country to where Sisters were working and witnessed Mary MacKillop Today's work in action. It was incredible to meet some of the women involved in the Ethica Project in Lima – one woman told me how the project helped save*



her husband's life as they could now afford his medications.

While in Peru, I got a serious toothache, and was taken to the local dentist, who had received his training thanks to a scholarship from Mary MacKillop Today. I witnessed first-hand the difference these programs were making to communities!

In 2017, I was invited to visit Timor-Leste and sat in on a Mary MacKillop Today Parents Training session. The parents were learning basic skills they could do with their children at

home – like learning to count by using stones from their garden. I realised how much we take for granted here in Australia about education and the resources we can access. I was very blessed to see this project in action.

I'm so proud to be a regular donor. By making this commitment, I'm supporting Mary MacKillop Today's ability to plan for the future. I have a sense of self-satisfaction knowing that my regular donation will make a difference over time."

Regular, monthly donations like Mary's help some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Australia and around the world to live safe, fulfilling and self-determined lives.

If you would like to join our 'Independent Spirits' family of monthly supporters and help create a better world, please visit <https://www.marymackilloptoday.org.au/how-you-can-help/give-regularly/>.

Your generosity will help to transform lives.

Give the Gift of Education

Did you know that you can help transform lives through education in Australia and around the world by donating to Mary MacKillop Today on a regular basis?

By making regular, monthly donations, you can help children access books through our Mobile Learning Bus which travels to remote communities to visit schools, bringing fun and creative tools to help children learn.

- \$25 per month: can help supply schools with locally produced story books written in the local language to help children read and write

- \$50 per month: can buy much needed hygiene products for schools to ensure clean and healthy environments.
- \$105 per month: can buy resource packs for classrooms including storybooks, notebooks, pencils, colour pencils, rulers, and other items to support the children's educational journey.

Join our powerful community of supporters today and help children access education and break the cycle of poverty. By making a monthly gift today, you will help transform lives.

Scan here



You Spoke; We Listened

Thank you to everyone who generously spared the time to respond to our recent Supporter Survey. Your love and kindness shone through in your responses. Here are some highlights and insights:

- **72% said** you liked receiving our communications and found them enjoyable and interesting to read
- **86% said** your favourite hobby was reading followed by 74% Gardening and 55% Cooking

You shared the values and motivations that inspire your generosity:

- Giving aligns with my faith and personal values
- I see need in the world, and I want to help
- I have been fortunate in my life, and I believe it is my duty to give back
- I was raised to help others

Your main reasons for supporting Mary MacKillop Today:

- I want to support the important work of Mary MacKillop Today helping communities in need
- I feel a special connection to Saint Mary MacKillop
- I was educated at or have worked in a Josephite school
- I have a personal connection to the Sisters of Saint Joseph



Students in rural Peru understand the importance of education to their future, and so do our supporters

You said:

- *"It is extremely important for children to obtain an education. It will enable them to find a job and break the cycle of poverty and hardship. It also boosts their self-esteem and gives them a sense of belonging."* – Chris
- *"Thank you for all the good work you do. And certainly, it is needed in our world today. Saint Mary set a wonderful example."* – Tina

- *"Education is a key element in lifting the underprivileged out of poverty. Also, it is a powerful example to the generations to come."* – John

STAY CONNECTED

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Yes, I want to provide life-changing opportunities to people in need.

Please accept my gift of:

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ My choice \$ _____

My contact details*:

Title: _____ Name: _____

Surname: _____

Street address: _____

Suburb: _____

State: _____ Postcode: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Date of birth: _____

I would like to make an ongoing impact with a monthly gift of \$ _____

- ☐ Please debit the credit card below. (You can change or cancel at any time)
- ☐ Please contact me to set up direct debit.

My payment details:

- ☐ Cheque made payable to Mary MacKillop Today OR
- ☐ Please debit my credit card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Amex
- Card no.: _____ Expiry: ____/____
- Name on card: _____
- Signature: _____

To donate online please scan



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Please give to Mary MacKillop Today - PO Box 1646 North Sydney 2059 - ABN 88 808 531 480 - Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible. Thank you.