

Be ***Fierce*** for ***Fair***

10 ways to be fierce for fair
Inspired by Australia's first saint



She was fierce.
She was fair.
Now it's your turn.

Download from marymackilloptoday.org.au
#FierceForFair

MARY
MACKILLOP
today

Being fierce for fair is not a personality type. It is a practice.

Saint Mary MacKillop was not born into power or privilege. She was a young woman from Melbourne who saw children going uneducated, communities being abandoned, and injustice being ignored and decided that none of it was acceptable.

She built schools in the dust. She challenged authority when it stood between people and their rights. She walked many kilometres to reach

communities no one else would go to. She was excommunicated, impoverished, and repeatedly told she had overstepped, but she kept going.

Being fierce for fair is not about grand gestures. It is about the accumulation of small, determined acts, the decision, made again and again, to see a need and do something about it.

Here are ten ways to start.



Saint Mary MacKillop first school

ONE

KNOW THE NUMBERS AND GO BEYOND THEM.

273 million children around the world are currently out of school. In Timor-Leste, only 20% of preschool-aged children are enrolled in early education. Around 70% of Grade 1 students do not meet basic learning outcomes. Children living with disability, and girls in particular, face the steepest barriers.

These statistics matter. But behind every number is a child with a name, a family who wants better for them, and a community working hard to make it possible. Social justice leadership begins with knowing the facts, and then being curious enough to find the human story inside them.

Try this: Follow one organisation, such as Mary MacKillop Today, working on education equity in Australia or internationally, and engage with their content for a month. Let the stories, not just the statistics, inform your understanding.

“Behind every statistic is a child with a name and a community working hard to make change possible.”

TWO

SAY IT OUT LOUD.

Mary MacKillop was a petitioner, a letter-writer, and an unapologetic advocate. She understood that naming injustice, clearly, specifically, and without softening the edges, was itself an act of courage. She didn't speak in vague terms about “the challenges facing disadvantaged communities.” She named what was wrong and said what needed to change.

You have a voice. In conversations with friends, in what you post online, in what you choose to talk about at the dinner table, you have more influence than you think. Naming educational inequity as a justice issue, not just a development problem, shifts the conversation.

Try this: The next time you share something about education, use clear, equity-focused language. Not “children who need help”, but “children who are being denied access to the education they have a right to.”

“Naming injustice clearly and without softening the edges is itself an act of courage.”

THREE

SHARE MARIA'S STORY.

Maria is nine years old. She lives in a remote mountain village in Timor-Leste, just one hour's flight from Australia and she is living with a visual impairment. Every morning she walks to school along dangerous dirt paths, crossing rivers along the way. Her father is her main advocate. Her classmates walk beside her to help her around school.

"I cannot see," she says, "but I can learn just like my other friends."

Through Mary MacKillop Today's Inclusive Early Education Project, Maria now has access to trained teachers, adapted learning materials, and a classroom that is built for her. She has progressed to Year 3.

When you share Maria's story, you extend the reach of the Fierce for Fair campaign and you make it harder for people to scroll past a child who deserves to be seen.

Try this: Share Maria's story on social media this August using #FierceForFair. Tag three people who you think should know about it.

When you share her story, you make it harder for people to scroll past a child who deserves to be seen.

FOUR

GIVE WITH INTENTION.

Mary MacKillop built the Sisters of Saint Joseph's work almost entirely on the generosity of ordinary people. Small gifts, given consistently, from people who believed education was worth fighting for. That relationship between those who give and those who do the work on the ground is what makes change possible. It always has been.

Every gift to Mary MacKillop Today this August makes a difference. \$25 can help provide locally written storybooks. \$80 can help support a teacher's professional development. And every gift, whatever the size, helps train teachers, provide inclusive learning materials, and ensure children like Maria are not left behind. Every gift is an act of solidarity.

Try this: Give before or on 8 August, the Feast Day of Saint Mary MacKillop, at marymackilloptoday.org.au/donate. If you can, set it up as a monthly gift. Consistent support is what makes long-term outcomes possible.

Small gifts, given consistently, from people who believed something was worth fighting for – that is what makes change possible.

FIVE

PRACTISE SOLIDARITY, NOT CHARITY.

There is a difference between doing something for someone and walking alongside them. Mary MacKillop understood this instinctively. She didn't manage communities from a distance, she lived with them, ate with them, and let their needs shape her actions. She followed the lead of people who understood their own circumstances far better than any outsider could.

Real social justice leadership looks the same today. It means listening before advising. Recognising that communities experiencing inequity are not problems to be solved but leaders of their own futures who deserve the right conditions to thrive.

Try this: Before engaging with a cause or community, ask one question: whose voice is centred here? Seek out content, campaigns, and organisations led by the communities they serve and let that leadership inform your support.

Solidarity is not charity. It is the decision to walk alongside and let others lead.

SIX

PRACTISE SOLIDARITY, NOT CHARITY.

Mary MacKillop was not working alone. She built the Sisters of Saint Joseph alongside Caroline Chisholm's tradition, in the spirit of women who had come before her, and in collaboration with the communities she served. She knew that the movement was bigger than any one person.

Today, the Fierce for Fair campaign is connected to a network of women leading change across Australia, Timor-Leste, Fiji, and Peru. Teachers like Joana, who trains other educators to include children with disabilities. Sera, manager at the Psychiatric Survivors Association in Fiji who is a survivor herself, advocating globally for her peers. Plus, all the other community leaders who are building futures on their own terms.

Try this: Find and follow three women-led organisations working on education equity or social justice this month. Engage with their work, share it, support it, learn from it.

“The movement is always bigger than any one person. Find the women already doing the work and walk with them.”

SEVEN

CHALLENGE THE NARRATIVE AROUND WHO DESERVES EDUCATION.

One of the most persistent and damaging ideas in the world is that access to quality education is something that has to be earned, through geography, family circumstance, disability status, or gender. Mary MacKillop rejected this completely. She believed education was a right, not a reward. She built schools for the children that the system had decided weren't worth teaching.

That belief is still countercultural. In Australia and around the world, structural inequities mean that a child's postcode, disability, or gender still determines their educational outcomes more than their ability or effort ever should.

Try this: When you encounter language that frames education as a privilege, in conversation, in media, in policy, call it out. Say it plainly: education is a human right. Every child deserves it.

“Mary built schools for the children the system had decided weren't worth teaching.”

EIGHT

SHOW UP FOR THE LOCAL AS WELL AS THE GLOBAL.

Mary MacKillop's fierce commitment to fairness was not limited by geography. She worked in South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, and New Zealand. She understood that injustice didn't respect state lines and neither should the response to it.

The same is true today. Educational inequity is not only a global issue. In regional Australia, limited access to quality education, financial literacy, and tertiary pathways continues to shape life outcomes. Mary MacKillop Today's First Nations Scholarship Program supports Indigenous Australians to complete tertiary qualifications, many becoming the first in their families to do so. Our financial literacy programs in regional New South Wales help families build the skills to break cycles of debt.

Try this: Identify one local organisation working on education access or financial inclusion in your own community or region. Share what they do. Give if you can. Show up for the issue that is right in front of you as well as the one that is far away.

“Injustice doesn't respect state lines and neither should the response to it.”

NINE

MAKE FIERCE FOR FAIR VISIBLE IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE.

Saint Mary MacKillop's work was visible. She wore her habit in the dust. She taught in ruins. She was present in places that made her conspicuous and she didn't apologise for it. Her commitment was not something she kept private.

You don't need to wear a habit. But making your values visible in what you share, what you talk about, and what you put your name behind signals to the people around you that fairness is something worth being public about, and it creates permission for others to do the same.

Try this: Download and share this guide with someone you think is ready to be fierce for fair. Add #FierceForFair to your social profiles this August. Let people know where you stand.

*Making your values visible
creates permission for the people
around you to do the same.*

TEN

DON'T STOP ON THE 9TH.

The Feast Day of Saint Mary MacKillop is 8th August. It is a moment to honour her legacy and to begin, or renew, a commitment to the values she lived by. However, Mary MacKillop did not fight for fairness once a year, she did it every day, for decades, through every obstacle that was placed in front of her.

The most powerful thing you can do after today is stay in it. Keep learning, keep giving, keep sharing and keep showing up. Let fierce for fair become part of how you move through the world, not just something you feel for a moment in August.

The world needs people who are in it for the long run. Be one of them.

Try this: Sign up to the Mary MacKillop Today newsletter at marymackilloptoday.org.au to stay connected to the work, the stories, and the campaigns and to know how your support is making a difference long after Feast Day.

*The world needs people who
are in it for the long run.
Be one of them.*



Maria, Aged 9

**She was fierce. She was fair.
Now it's your turn.**

Share this with someone who is ready to be fierce for fair.
#FierceForFair #MaryMacKillopToday

MARY
MACKILLOP
today

marymackilloptoday.org.au
Feast Day: 8 August 2026

Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible. ABN 88 808 531 480

Mary MacKillop Today acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land and these waterways,
the Cammeraygal people of the Eora nation and their Elders past, present and emerging.