

The big picture

Before 1900, poor people in Australia did not receive money from the government. Life was hard, especially in remote parts of the country. Schools were expensive, so poor children often missed out on an education. Many families could not afford doctors when they fell sick. Old or homeless people begged in the streets. The only help available came from the churches.

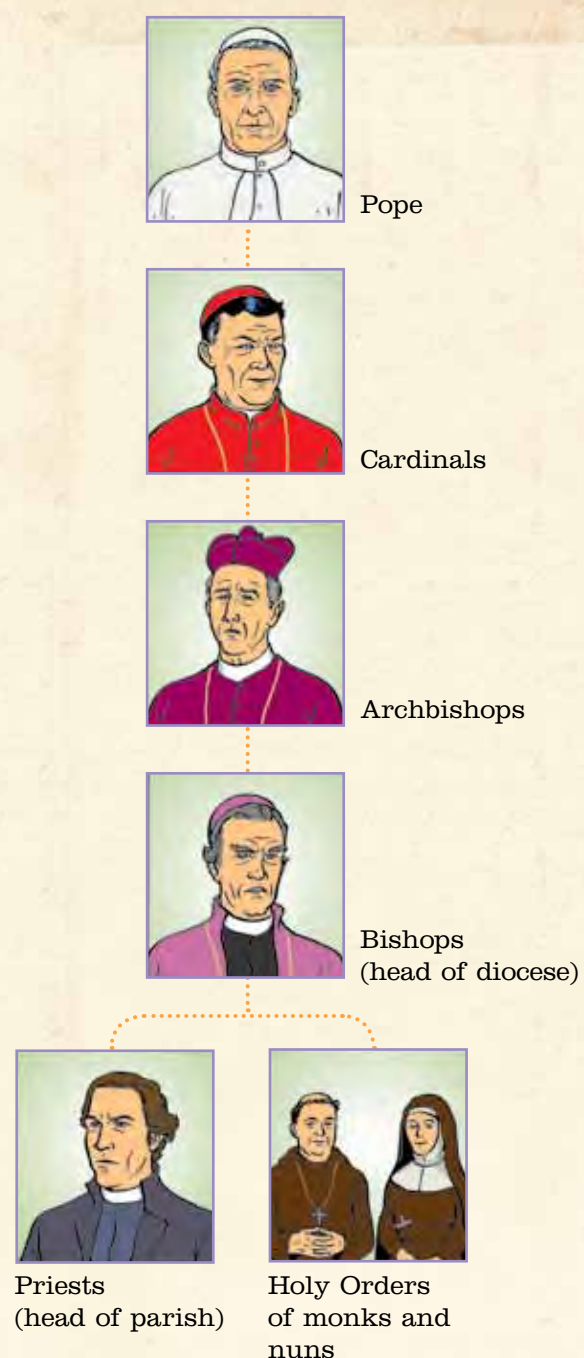
The Catholic Church

In Australia, the **Catholic** Church set up schools, hospitals and hostels for the poor. These were run by **religious** women known as **nuns**, who devoted their lives to teaching poor children, nursing the sick and looking after elderly people.

The Church had a strict order of leadership. In Australia, all nuns took **vows** of obedience, which meant they must obey their **bishops** without question.

This fitted in with attitudes towards women in the 1800s. At that time, women were thought to be weaker and less intelligent than men. Most men did not believe that women could be strong leaders and decision-makers. Nuns in the Catholic Church were not supposed to think for themselves, but Mary MacKillop was different.

The **Pope** in Rome was the head of the Catholic Church. Under him were **cardinals**, then **archbishops**, then bishops and then parish **priests**. **Orders** of monks and nuns in Australia were under the leadership of the local bishop.



Mary's Sisters of St Joseph

Mary's goal was to establish an Order of nuns run by an Australian woman for Australian conditions. When Mary set up the Sisters of St Joseph she was determined that they would not stay locked away in **convents**, but would travel in small groups to remote areas. They would open schools and shelters for the poor and homeless, and welcome all those in need. The sisters would take a vow of **poverty**, and would be as poor as the people they helped. Most importantly, Mary MacKillop would make decisions as head of her Order, to ensure that they were free to do their good work without any interference from Catholic priests and bishops. She would answer only to the Pope in Rome.

The Sisters of St Joseph provided shelter for women, children, homeless and troubled people and never turned anyone away. These sisters worked in Camberwell, Victoria, in the early 1900s.

Eyewitness words

“Never see a need without doing something about it.”

Mary MacKillop, 1872

Key people

Two people played key roles in setting up the religious Order of the Sisters of St Joseph.

Maria (Mary) Ellen MacKillop

Born: 15 January 1842 in Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria

Role: Co-founder and first head (Mother-General) of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph

Religious name: Mary of the Cross

Age at the founding of the Order (1866): 24

Died: 8 August 1909

Appearance: Average height, slim, clear grey eyes, dark eyebrows, auburn hair

Character: Clever, clear-headed, calm, kind and dutiful but strong-willed and quietly determined. Deeply religious, but also good-humoured and practical.

Comments: Mary MacKillop was a natural leader with strong ideas. Nothing would stop her from doing what she believed was God's will. She begged in the streets, stood up to powerful churchmen, and went to the **Pope** in Rome for help. She saw troubles as 'crosses', or challenges, sent by God to strengthen her, and refused to judge her enemies harshly.



Julian Tenison Woods

Born: 15 November 1832 in London, England

Role: Priest and co-founder of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph

Age at the founding of the Order: 34

Died: 7 October 1889

Appearance: Tall, slim, brown wavy hair, dark lively eyes

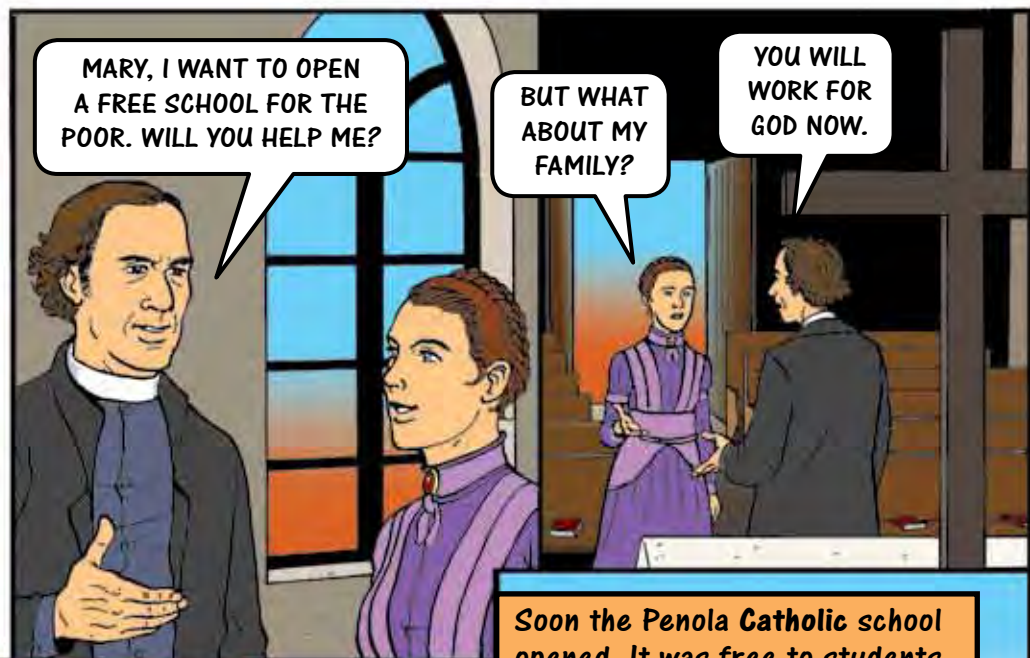
Character: Intelligent, talented, widely read and charming, but also over-confident and headstrong

Comments: Father Woods set Mary MacKillop on the path to a religious life. His persuasive manner helped the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph to survive its first years and grow in numbers. However, Father Woods could also be difficult and unwise. He believed he could see into the future, spent money he did not have and argued with his **bishops**. Father Woods' strange beliefs and poor decisions finally drove away his friends, including Mary MacKillop.

First steps towards sainthood

Mary MacKillop had always wanted to be a nun but she had to work to support her family. Then she met a young priest, Father Woods, who invited her to work with him in Penola, South Australia. There, they planned a new Order of teaching nuns, the Sisters of St Joseph. Mary would be the first member.

January 1866 Mary MacKillop travelled to Penola, South Australia, to help Father Woods.



Mary searched for a schoolhouse.



Soon the Penola Catholic school opened. It was free to students. Mary was not paid for her work.



19 March Mary decided to dedicate herself to God.



Mary and Father Woods drew up rules for the new Order of nuns. This marked the beginning of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph.

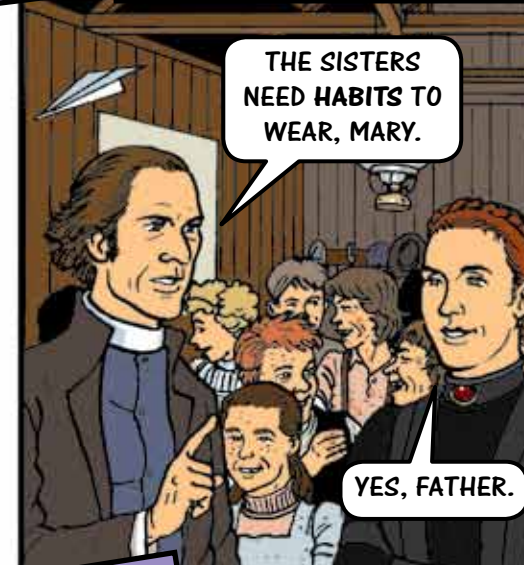
Sisters of St Joseph must:

- be poor and own no property
- be led by a sister
- take orders only from the Pope in Rome.

As the school at Penola grew, so did the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph.



April Meanwhile, back in Penola ...



15 August Mary took her vows as a nun.

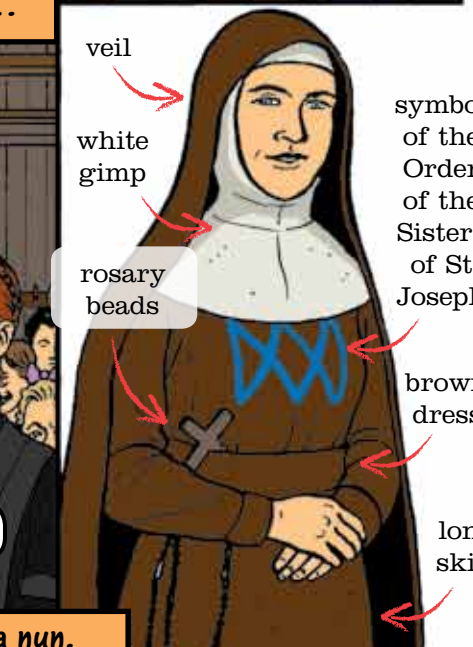
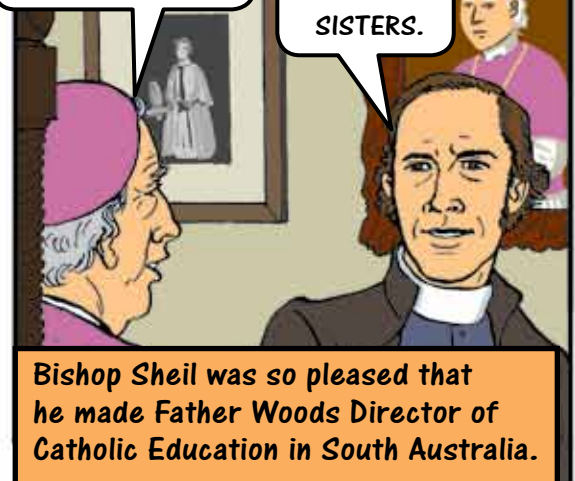


1867 Word about the sisters' work spread to Adelaide.



WE NEED SCHOOLS FOR THE POOR HERE IN ADELAIDE, TOO.

I'LL BRING SOME SISTERS.



Soon the new habits were ready.

July Mary set up a convent in Adelaide and opened a school, which the sisters supported by begging.



Within a year, there were 30 sisters running 8 schools and 2 homeless shelters in South Australia.

