

SESQUICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

The Sesquicentenary celebrations of the presence of the Sisters of St Joseph in New South Wales commenced on Saturday, July 16 with a Welcome to Country by Wiradyuri Elders. Over 300 people gathered at the Cathedral of St Michael and St John to celebrate the arrival at Perthville of the Sisters of St Joseph. On July 16, 1872, four brave young women, Teresa MacDonald, Mary Joseph Dwyer, Hyacinth Quinlan, and Ada Braham travelled from Adelaide and made the first foundation in New South Wales at Perthville (Queen Charlotte's Vale). The sisters lived in the sacristy of the church because the convent was not yet ready. Six days later, they were teaching 30 students in the church. Those present for the current celebrations shivered as the barometer moved into minus territory and marvelled at the resilience of the early women. Teresa MacDonald wrote to Mary MacKillop - "this place is most awfully cold".

Sr Anne Porter, Leader of NSW Sisters of St Joseph welcomed all to the gathering. Bishop Michael McKenna concelebrated Mass with local and visiting priests, welcoming all present - including over ninety Sisters of St Joseph from New South Wales and beyond. He preached on the First Letter of St Peter 3:8-15, specially chosen for the Sisters by Father Julian Woods to encourage unity and forgiveness. Sister Josephine Dubiel, on behalf of Sr Monica Cavanagh, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph, thanked the Bishop, priests and people, expressing gratitude for the strong unity and connection the Sisters have with the community. This Mass is the beginning of celebrations in New South Wales, commemorating the sisters' presence in city and country locations over the past 150 years.

Friends mingled together for lunch in the Cathedral school hall, singing together at the cutting of the sesquicentenary cake. Over 150 people then moved to Perthville for the launch by Sr Josephine Dubiel of the Acoustic Self-Guided Tour of the Perthville Convent Heritage Centre (Bathurst Step Beyond.) This App, developed by the Bathurst Visitor Information Centre in liaison with the Perthville Convent Heritage Committee, makes possible a self-guided tour of the site. Furthermore, one can now make a pilgrimage, not only at Perthville itself, but from anywhere in the world. Dan Cove, Manager Tourism and Visitor Services Bathurst Regional Council, spoke about the importance of technology in modern tourism, the value of the current Perthville Convent Heritage Centre App, and the strong mutual support between the Sisters and the Visitor Information Centre.

Sr Alice Sullivan, Chair of the Perthville Convent Heritage Centre committee, thanked the many people who had given their valuable time and who had helped finance the development of the App. Margaret Smith gave an impromptu speech in appreciation of the life and work of the Sisters. Sr Therese McGarry thanked the committee and all those who attended. She then invited local Perthville-born Archbishop Patrick O'Regan of Adelaide to offer a blessing. The celebrations concluded with the hope that the story of the past will encourage, inspire and help to build the future.