

MEDIA RELEASE

Loreto Founder Honoured in 2025 Victorian Honour Roll of Women as 150-Year Legacy Celebrated

Melbourne, 3 September 2025

Loreto Province of Australia and South East Asia warmly celebrates the induction of **Mother Mary Gonzaga Barry ibvm** into the **2025 Victorian Honour Roll of Women**, recognised in the *Trailblazer* category for her extraordinary contribution to education. This honour comes in the milestone year marking **150 years since the Loreto Sisters first arrived in Australia**, bringing with them a vision of learning that continues to shape generations.

The award was presented at a ceremony held at **Arts Centre Melbourne on 2 September 2025**, where **The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP, Minister for Women**, formally inducted Mother Gonzaga Barry and 23 other remarkable women. On behalf of Mother Gonzaga, the award was received by **Felicity Knobel, Director of Mission, Loreto College Ballarat**, and **Michelle McCarty, Director of Mission and Leadership, Loreto Toorak**, with the role of Mother Gonzaga symbolically represented by **Eva Cummins, a Year 9 student from Loreto College Ballarat**.

A visionary educator and trailblazer

One of four inductees in the **Trailblazer** category, Mother Gonzaga Barry was truly ahead of her time. She led the first group of Loreto Sisters — members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) — who arrived in Australia from Ireland in 1875. From Ballarat, her work expanded through Victoria with schools in Portland and Melbourne, ultimately inspiring the establishment of Loreto schools across Australia.

In Victoria, **Loreto College Ballarat** and **Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak**, together with **Loreto Kirribilli** and **Loreto Normanhurst** in New South Wales, **Loreto College Marryatville** in South Australia, and **Loreto College Coorparoo** in Queensland, stand as enduring testimony to her vision for the education of girls. Several current parish primary schools in Ballarat also trace their foundations to her initiative.

As she herself once wrote: *“There is no subject of greater, perhaps as great, importance to a nation as that of its women’s education.”*

Her achievements included:

- Founding **Loreto College Ballarat** and expanding Loreto education to Portland and Melbourne.
- Navigating **church politics, property acquisition, curriculum reform, and social justice advocacy** with intelligence and resolve.
- Establishing early childhood education in Victoria and pioneering the **kindergarten movement**.
- Establishing **Teacher Training Colleges in Ballarat and South Melbourne**, preparing women for roles as professional educators.

- Founding **St Mary's College** at the University of Melbourne — the first residential college for women in Australia.
- Championing **equal access to education for girls**, ensuring the same academic quality as their brothers.
- Promoting a **holistic education**, nurturing both heart and mind through arts, science, and humanities.

“Mother Gonzaga Barry’s courage and leadership transformed the educational landscape for women in this country,” said Wendy Hildebrand, Province Leader, Loreto Australia and South East Asia. “Her induction into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women is not only a tribute to her life, but also to the thousands of women and men who continue her vision today in schools, ministries, and communities across Australia and beyond.”

The Victorian Honour Roll of Women honours women whose leadership, service, and innovation have made a lasting contribution to the state. This year’s inductees represent diverse fields of endeavour, and the Loreto Sisters are deeply proud to see one of their founders recognised among them.

As Loreto marks 150 years in Australia, celebrations and initiatives are being held across the country to honour the legacy of Mother Gonzaga Barry and the founding companions. Their courage, vision, and commitment to the Gospel continue to inspire future generations to achieve “*what women can do*” in the service of justice, freedom, and truth.

For enquiries about the Victorian Honour Roll of Women:

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Attached Photo Information:

- 1) Loreto College Ballarat student Eva Cummins, representing Mother Gonzaga Barry, receiving honour from The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP, Minister for Women at Victorian Honour Roll of Women 2025 - 2 Sept 2025
- 2) Pictured left to right: Felicity Knobel, Director of Mission, Loreto College Ballarat, The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP, Minister for Women, Eva Cummins, a Year 9 student from Loreto College Ballarat, Juliana Addison MP, Member for Wendouree, and Michelle McCarty, Director of Mission and Leadership at Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak - 2 Sept 2025