

Address at the Book Launch 31 May 2026

Sr Jan Tranter

Bishop Michael, Hilary Regan, visiting Sisters of St Joseph, priests, our local Sisters and friends,

I would like to greet someone else who is with us, but not seen, Mary MacKillop. Hello Mary.

I have here your first biography, written in 1916 by one of the Sisters just seven years after God took you home. This book was sent by another Sister who knew you to her brother and sister-in-law at Paterson, where she grew up. She, one of her sisters and three other young women went one by one to Newcastle, then Sydney, and across the mountains to the Sisters of St Joseph at Perthville after a mission at Paterson by Fr Tenison Woods. But my attention, now, Mary, is on words of yours quoted in the Preface of this book. You spoke them some time after 1900.

Circumstances have overshadowed the part played by Father Woods in the inception and early growth of our Institute. Nearly all was due to him, as will appear from our correspondence, which I have preserved. He may never be overlooked in what God has done by our Sisters. Sisters here will recognise these words.

Mary, see what you think of today and this book launch and if it addresses your concerns.

Those words of Mary point to the motive behind the articles in the book and the mighty project to bring the articles together in a book.

Mary recognised that Father Woods' part in the foundation and early growth of the institute was overshadowed and spoke firmly that his part 'may never be overlooked in what God has done by our Sisters'. Despite that instruction by Mary, over the next hundred and twenty years, Fr Woods has continued to be overlooked and still is. Countless, cumulative references to the founding of the Sisters of St Joseph do not mention Fr Woods. There is not even a hint of a mention. He is virtually and actually obliterated in both Catholic and secular references. (It is so good to see with us the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, our big sister congregation, coming all the way from Sydney.) The website of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart and that of our Lochinvar Sisters of St Joseph refer to the founding roles of Fr Woods and St Mary. But this ownership and recognition of Fr Woods as well as St Mary has not penetrated Catholic consciousness, let alone secular understanding.There has got to be a shift.

It will not only lift the profile of Fr Woods, as it needs to be lifted. It will raise the profile of the Catholic priest, a priest with a heart and a vision for bringing faith and life to those in need, especially to children, a priest with his eye to the future, a priest everywhere loved by the people. It will show the world a priest who combined faith and science seamlessly, a priest the scientists treasured as a friend.

This book is a consistent project to bring light to Fr Woods, to bring him out of the shadows, the shadows Mary MacKillop recognised and wanted addressed. I can say Mary's own words have echoed in me as I have written.

This book has grown from decades of searching to know Fr Woods, bring him to recognition, let people not just know about him but meet him, get to know him, be inspired and humbled by his life. Meeting and knowing him will change you.

I have been grateful for the opportunity to bring all the articles into one volume. It gives strength. It is more than the impact of separate items.

The book, *Julian Tenison Woods, the Human Story: Priest, Founder, Friend* shows Fr Woods' human story, his flesh and blood story, his joys and sufferings that we can identify with and even wonder at. It shows that priesthood was central in his life. It shows his essential role as Founder. It shows his life-long capacity for friendship. It shows his human vulnerability.

Having the book come to this point has been a challenge, but it has been worth it.

Acknowledgements

There are people I need to acknowledge. First, my parents, my grounding strength. I acknowledge the support of my brothers, my Religious Sisters, and all who encouraged me in writing, especially Sr Ruth Long, the Congregational Leader who invited me to further study, study that opened the way to writing the articles in this book. I acknowledge my niece and cousins who have come. I thank the friends who in practical ways supported me. You are here and know who you are. I thank many people *in* the articles. Any research builds on the work of others. I cannot not mention Margaret Press, a Perthville Sister who deeply enriched our understanding of Fr Woods. I cannot not mention Anne Player, initially a Goulburn Sister, who did the same, and for years sent every reference that she found to Fr Woods in our diocese. I thank our Leader and team, Srs Patricia McCarthy, Laretta Baker, Christine O'Connor and Louise Gannon, who gave their blessing and warm encouragement for this book project, funded it, and organised this launch. I thank Rose McCallister, from our diocesan support team, who helped greatly to prepare for today and Mary O'Connor, our librarian, overseas at present, but a ready support along the way.

I thank particularly Hilary Dominic Regan, of the ATF (Australian Theological Forum) Press who has seen through the publishing process, bringing the copies of articles to this beautifully presented book and has come from Adelaide for the occasion. (So fitting. We hail from Adelaide via Perthville.) The sometimes rocky seas have led to a safe harbour in our beautiful Newcastle. I thank especially Fr Roderick O'Brien of Adelaide, whom I have never met in person, who gave the idea and encouragement to have my articles published as a book. I take the chance to recommend his book, *Julian Tenison Woods, A Pioneering Journey in Faith and Science*, published last year by Hilary with ATF. His articles include ground breaking studies of Fr Woods in Asia, where he, Fr O'Brien, has also worked.

Finally I thank Bishop Michael for accepting the request to launch the book.

Thank you all for sharing this day.

Mary, do you think this has addressed your concerns?

Note: The 1916 book - *Life and Letters of Mother Mary of the Cross MacKillop by a Sister of St Joseph* was given by Sr Isidore Dunning to her brother Joe and sister-in-law Kate in Paterson. Their daughters, Bridie (Mary Bridget) Moroney and Mary Ursula Clements, gave this book to Sr Jan at Bolwarra on 7 April 1986. Bridie and Neville Moroney's daughter Anne (Monsour) and Jan have been friends since 1956, at school at Lochinvar. Sr Isidore and her sister, Sr M Ursula, were among the Wilcannia Sisters who transferred to the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in 1902. They kept contact with Fr Woods till his death. His letters to Sr Ursula and Sisters at Wilcannia in his last two years are in the Sisters' archives. Kate Dunning's sister was another of the five who met Fr Woods at Paterson and entered at Perthville. She was Sr de Pazzi O'Brien. She is buried at Perthville. The book holds the one story of Fr Woods, St Mary, Perthville, Lochinvar and Sydney Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart.