Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2412148

Mitchell, Josephine

(1930 -)

Born	19301228, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Human rights activist, Religious Sister, Teacher

Summary

Sister Josephine Mitchell has contributed to the education of children and the training of teachers both in Australia and in East Timor. From 1983 she promoted literacy in East Timor through the production and distribution of educational materials in Tetun, now the first-named principal language in its Constitution. She has long been an advocate for Australian government support for East Timor and East Timorese refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

Details

Josephine Mitchell was born on 28 December 1930 at Belmore NSW, one of the seven children of First World War veteran, Sydney Charles Mitchell and Kate Mary née Fitzjohn. Educated by the Sisters of St Joseph at Belmore and Dulwich Hill, she completed her secondary education at St Scholastica's College, Glebe.

Joining the Sisters of St Joseph in 1951, she trained as a teacher in North Sydney and obtained a Certificate of Primary Teaching from the Council of Public Education, Melbourne in 1959. She taught at various regional primary schools in New South Wales before graduating from the University of Queensland with a Bachelor of Arts degree and Certificate of Education in 1966. She was awarded a Diploma of Education at the University of New England in 1971 and a Bachelor of Letters in 1983. Her other qualifications include a Diploma in Theology from the Theology Faculty, Sydney in 1968, a Certificate in Counselling from the Institute of Counselling, Sydney in 1972 and she attended courses in theology, spirituality and training at the Jesuit Centre in Quelph, Canada, and Boston College, USA in 1983. She was a lecturer in teacher education at the Catholic College of Education (now the Australian Catholic University) from 1971 to 1985 and has long promoted social justice, particularly during the two years she served on the Justice Desk of the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes from 1982.

Josephine began working to promote literacy and health-care programs in East Timor from 1983 following the visit to Australia of the Apostolic Administrator of East Timor, Monsignor da Costa Lopes. In 1993, in response to a request by Bishop Belo of the Diocese of Dili, Josephine established the Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies (MMIETS). Under her direction the Institute produced and distributed a literacy program consisting of illustrated reading books, teachers' manuals and guides, dictionaries and support materials in the principal language of the East Timorese people, Tetun. Following the destruction of most schools and the Institute's teaching materials in the violence in East Timor in 1999, the project resumed producing and distributing its publications. In 2006 the Institute contributed to the new Tetun curriculum launched by Prime Minister Jose Ramos-Horta on behalf of the Ministry of Education in East Timor in October 2006. Tetun is now the first-named official language of the new nation.

Since 1997 Sister Josephine has made representations to the Australian Government, conducted media appearances and advocated in conjunction with a range of East Timorese support groups for justice in that country. She also worked to support East Timorese refugees and asylum seekers seeking protection in Australia from 1975 to 1999. Following the disbanding of the MMIETS in 2012, Josephine continued to support the education of disadvantaged women and girls in East Timor. Josephine was a finalist in the NSW Senior Citizen of the Year awards in 2012, and was awarded the Medal of the Order of Timor-Leste in 2014.

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History Collection
Josephine Mitchell interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens

Author Details
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