

Our History

Tenison Woods College's roots are deep. They stretch back to the very early days of white settlement in the South East of South Australia, where Fr Julian Tenison Woods and Mother Mary MacKillop established the first Parish School in Penola in 1866.

During the next 140 years Catholic Education in the South East grew from these early beginnings and today includes three catholic schools in the region: Mary MacKillop Memorial School in Penola, St Anthony's Primary School in Millicent and Tenison Woods College in Mount Gambier – all catering for the needs of Catholic families in the South East.

Tenison Woods College was formally established in 2001 as an R-12 Catholic Co-educational College as a result of the combined efforts of the Parish of Mount Gambier, the Boards and community of Tenison College and St Paul's Primary School.

The name Tenison Woods serves to remind us of the contribution of the pioneer Priest, Scientist and Educator Father Julian Tenison Woods to Catholic education, not just in South Australia, but Australia generally.

The site Tenison Woods College occupies was once part of a pastoral holding, Moorak Station. In the late 1920's the Parish of Mount Gambier purchased part of the remaining property from the Pegler family with the intention of establishing a secondary school for boys. That school, which began in 1931, was known as Marist Brothers' Agricultural College.

The Sisters of Mercy began teaching in Mount Gambier in 1880 and moved into the Penola Road Convent in 1908, at that stage called St Joseph's Convent of Our Lady of Mercy. In 1952 the Parish School of St Paul's was merged with St Joseph's to become Mater Christi College, however in 1969 the primary section once more became St Paul's School with secondary education functioning independently as Mater Christi College.

In 1972 Tenison College was formed following the merging of Mater Christi College and Marist Brothers Agricultural College. In the ensuing years since, both St Paul's and Tenison College emerged as significant Catholic educational institutions within the South-East of South Australia.

Marcellin Champagnat, the founder of the Marists and Catherine McAuley, founder of the Mercy Order had similar aims when they established their orders of Religion. They would teach children, not just in the 3-R's, but in the Catholic faith. They devoted themselves to the poor, often the rural poor, whose need for a Catholic education had not been met. The Marist and Mercy charism that reached out to the people of Mount Gambier and outlying districts in those early years of Catholic education continues to thrive today. It is marked by deep faith in Jesus and His mother, Mary and a desire to serve Christ through educating young people.

The lay leadership of both schools brought new challenges and successes to the community and will continue to do so as responsibility for 'Church in the World' is devolved to the laity, working closely with the Mount Gambier Parish to support the faith formation of the whole family.

The amalgamation of St Paul's Primary School and Tenison College in 2001 formed Tenison Woods College, starting a new chapter in the history of Catholic Education in the Mount Gambier region.

Tenison Woods College has a strong commitment to educating all students to achieve their personal best in academic, spiritual, social and sporting achievements.