

## PATRICIA'S FAREWELL FROM FIJI (from Sr Kath Boland DC)



An article "Sister Pat's Fiji Swanson" by Bernadette Rounds Ganilau in Mai Life Magazine published this week says it all, "*while she leaves Fiji - a country and people she has grown to love - in the first week of February, her work in fundraising and two more workshops at Waikete and Matainoco keep her mind occupied until she flies out a few days later. Working for the Fiji's communities until the last minute - you are something else Sr. Pat.*"

Each village wanted to celebrate but Patricia insisted that there would be one only Parish celebration in Nausori. She was astounded when 100's of people gathered for the Mass with the Liturgy beautifully prepared by the people and concelebrated by Fr Alan Finn and 4 Vincentians. In the homily Fr Alan acknowledged the tireless work done by Patricia linking it so well with our charism of service of Christ in the Poor and our motto *the Charity of Christ urges us*. He highlighted Patricia's special gift of touching the hearts of many so that they gave generously to those in need. A fitting day, he said, to celebrate on the feast of Blessed Josephine Nicole, a Daughter of Charity, who was fired by the same spirit.

Afterwards we all gathered in the hall to honour Patricia with the traditional Fijian ceremony, feasting and entertainment by the youth of the different sectors. Patricia herself spoke very well and no one was forgotten as she moved amongst the people to thank them and to say *moce*.

On Thursday it was the children's farewell celebration at the Parish School. As well as knowing many children from her work in the villages, Patricia has been successful in raising funding for many improvements at the School and helping many children with school fees. After the official presentation and many expressions of thanks, each class treated Sr Patricia to items of entertainment in her honour. She insisted that the only thanks she requested that they work hard to make the best use of their opportunities and to pray for her. After the feasting it was time for departure. The children spontaneously lined the roadway to wave and smile their final goodbyes.

At 5 o'clock it was time for our Community Prayer Gathering/Sharing with Gabby and Rosie, the 2 Australian Young Vinnies, who volunteered to spend their 3 month University holiday break with the Daughters of Charity in Fiji. These 2 young women have been a special gift from God for us and have worked tirelessly with Sr Patricia as she completed all her many projects.

As the Mai Life Magazine article says, "the ever-smiling Irish woman whose slight build belies a tremendous vigour". All afternoon Patricia circled the town to say her goodbyes to shop keepers and neighbours who had become her friends over the 10 years. They kept coming - people from all religions and walks of life until 10.00 pm. She kept saying, "Everything I need is in my room." Yes it happened she was packed ready for a good night's sleep and off to the airport early in the morning.

Farewells not finished yet! Despite the fact that Patricia had insisted that people not come to the airport there were many waiting for the last farewell. The road runs parallel to the runway so as the plane taxied down the runway we all stopped to wave goodbye and watch the plane take off into the sky. It was a privilege to work with you Sr Patricia and to witness the expressions of love from the men, women, youth and children who had grown to love you over your years of service in Fiji.