

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE –

SR PATRICIA BARTLEY SM



2.III.1931-----26.VI.2024

On 8th July 2023 Patricia was taken to Royal North Shore Hospital where it was diagnosed that she had complete heart block. Due to her general declining health, surgery was not deemed to be a viable option and the following day she returned to her familiar surroundings at St Anne's Nursing Home, where she continued to be cared for with loving and compassionate attentiveness. Though confined to bed for almost twelve months, Patricia touched the lives of all who ministered to her and those who visited, remaining peaceful and accepting – her gentle presence a blessing for us all.

Patricia was born to Edward and Eileen Bartley on 2nd March 1931 in Waverley, Sydney - the eldest of seven children. Baptised *Mary Patricia*, she was known by her family as Pat, and in later years by her Marist Sisters as Trish, though to those who cared for her at St Anne's, she was always Mary. Patricia began her schooling at St Michael's, Lane Cove, and then moved to St Patrick's, Bondi, when the family re-located. She joined the 'Children of Mary' in her school years and her love for Our Lady grew and deepened with time. After leaving school she took up a position at David Jones as a typist. In 1952 Patricia entered the Congregation of Mary in Merrylands, where she was received as a Novice the following year and given the name *Christine*. She was professed on 9th February 1954 and for over 70 years lived her Marist commitment with faithfulness and dedication.

Patricia spent ten years of her early Religious life in Woolwich caring for the boarders, many of whom were quite young children. She was then given the opportunity to attend Teacher Training College at Mount Street, North Sydney, where she completed her studies in the Infants/Primary programme, later upgrading her qualifications through further studies at Polding College. For many years Patricia ministered in Education, spending a short period in New Zealand, before taking up appointments in Primary Schools in Bennettswood (Victoria), Merrylands (NSW) and Gladstone (Queensland), where she held the position of Principal for two years at St John's Primary School.

In the mid-1980's life took another significant turn when, following a preparation programme at Pacific Mission Institute (PMI) Turrumurra, Patricia left Australia to join our Sisters in The Gambia, West Africa. While spending a short time in Farafenni, it was in Fajikunda that she flourished. She loved her ministry in the Infant School and amongst the people of the Parish, and was greatly appreciated. One of our Sisters who lived with her at that time has written from Ireland to express her sympathy, saying: "Patricia worked tirelessly for the people of The Gambia. They loved her! She was very creative and led us in many a beautiful prayer session." The love Patricia (Trish) had for the African people never diminished and she remained always supportive of missionary outreach.

Trish was always ready to embrace opportunities that were offered, and with gratitude and appreciation she participated in courses and Renewal experiences at various times. Her photos attest to the significance of these events and the value she placed on the friendships that she enjoyed. Trish returned from The Gambia at the end of the 1990's and prepared to embark upon another venture, this time taking up pastoral ministry in south-west Sydney, including work with the Sisters of Charity Outreach Programme, and assisting migrants and refugees – often through English classes - while also involving herself in the life of the local Parish of Rosemeadow. It was while Trish was there that she accepted to spend time in our General House in Rome, offering community support for a period, before returning to Rosemeadow where she ministered until 2016. I recently found a letter that was written to Trish in July of her last year there saying: "You have touched so many lives and truly made a big difference. I am so fortunate to have met you. Thank you for your warm, caring and gentle spirit." Others have spoken of Trish's compassionate listening and genuine love for people.

It is not surprising that when the time came to withdraw from Rosemeadow Trish struggled to let go of active ministry. She loved life, and the people with whom she ministered, and 'retirement' held no attraction for her. Throughout her long life Trish faced many challenges, but I think one of the hardest for her to accept was her failing memory and the consequent impact this had on her life. She had always been strong-willed and determined, even at times somewhat feisty, and had never given up easily. Therefore, it was with a fighting spirit that she tried to keep dementia at bay. It took great courage for Trish to move into care at St. Joseph's, Hunters Hill, and later to transfer to St Anne's - courage with which God gifted her.

Trish had great love for her family and surrounded herself with photos of her siblings, nieces, nephews and their children, which stirred memories and brought her joy. Always ready to try new and creative pursuits, Trish could knit and enjoyed art and music. She delighted in the beauty of nature and took pleasure in the garden and the variety of plants and flowers that signaled the change of seasons. Having such interests, coupled with an outgoing nature, ensured that Trish could make the most of her early years in Residential Care, participating in the many activities offered. Gradually she began to lose her energy and, particularly over the last twelve months, we witnessed Trish's fighting spirit give way to deep peacefulness and acceptance. During my weekly visits to St Anne's I felt blessed to be in her presence. She would smile upon me and sometimes offer some words. I believe God was drawing her ever closer. It was on the night of Wednesday, 26th June, that God called her to her eternal reward. As I sat with her after death I imagined Mary embracing her and saying "Welcome Home good and faithful daughter". We will miss you, Trish. May you rest in peace.

(Julie Brand SM - 8th July 2024)

