

## Honouring Sr Mary Hayden

The following is an attempt to share with you the week after Sr Mary's death - a week where we came together to grieve, celebrate, farewell and honour her.

An hour after Sr Mary passed away on Sunday morning the 30<sup>th</sup> July, Fr Shea, who had spoken with her the night before by phone, arrived to say mass once more at her bedside.

*"There is one thing I ask of the Lord, for this I long, to live in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life." Ps. 26*

People started gathering at the convent as soon as word spread about her death. Even though it was a Sunday, the staff arrived to pay their respects to Sr Mary, to pray and to begin the week long preparations.

Sr Mary remained in her room until the following day and that night, a large crowd gathered for prayers. On Monday, the participants from the projects – Outreach, the Village Vocational Training Centre, Regina Centre, Sponsorship and Hands of Hope came to 'wai' (respect) 'Khun Mare' and mourn her passing. They continued to come each day for prayers at 11:30 and 4pm and to share in a mid-day meal, prepared by our project staff.



Late afternoon on Monday, Sr Mary was taken from her room to the convent chapel, a place she would formerly visit every day until being confined to bed. Evening masses were then celebrated from Monday through Thursday night, with an average of five priests concelebrating per night. Sr Pranee's brother, Fr Prasert and Sr Yanee's brother, Fr Ransang, both participated. The chapel door was opened and people spilled into the foyer and adjoining room with others gathering under tents outside. After every mass, an evening meal was served to all.



People continued to visit at other times during the day, pleased to have the chance to say their farewells. Many had thankfully had the chance to visit in recent months and those meetings were memorable and uplifting, as Sr Mary, despite physically becoming weaker, was able to welcome each one. Those who could not come due to distance or other commitments, sent moving tributes and comforting words from all over the world and we felt united with all those whose lives had been touched and inspired, as ours have been, by Sr Mary.



Jiranun 'wais' Sr Mary



Simone from the States – a friend of 50 years



Irish Ambassador,  
Brendan Rogers



As the week went on, the Good Shepherd Sisters began arriving from all over Thailand including the remaining Irish missionaries, Sr Joan and Sr Louise, along with representatives from Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma. Among them was the Provincial, Sr Regina. All helped to prepare for the celebration of Sr Mary's life, planned for Friday.

Sr Mary was accompanied through the night with people sleeping in the chapel with her and each morning was heralded with the 'Office for the Dead', prayed by the community.

*"Whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die."*

On the Friday morning we gathered for the closing of her coffin. Fr Ole, who had often celebrated mass with Sr Mary during her time in Nong Khai, officiated. Sr Pranee placed her threadbare and treasured Bible next to her and after another blessing, the lid was put in place. Her handwritten vows from her first profession in 1941, had been laid on her chest earlier in the week.



Her former drivers and others attentive to her needs from the projects, then carried her coffin to the awaiting 'pick-up', as Sr Mary left the convent for the last time – her home of the past 35 years. (Two previous years were spent in a rented house in the town.)



A long procession then proceeded to the parish church of St Alphonsus, which belongs to the Redemptorist Order. Traffic through the town, was stopped along the way by emergency and rescue staff, one of whom, a former project participant. In the days prior to the thanksgiving mass, women from the Regina Centre had worked tirelessly in the church to clean and prepare a wonderful arrangement of flowers adorning the altar and Sr Mary's coffin.

Those from the projects had been transported to the church earlier in the morning and were there to greet Sr Mary upon her arrival. The church was full and the atmosphere charged with what we shared in common – love, gratitude and admiration for Sr Mary and while happy for her that she was going to her long awaited home, sharing also a sadness of a communal and personal sense of loss.



The mass was celebrated by Bishop Joseph Luechai Thatwisai from Udon Thani and 15 priests. Fr Shea preached the homily in Thai and English and quoted Sr Mary's own words about her life's spiritual journey.





The song was played by Sr Chalaad and led by Antonia

Sr Mary had made one request for her mass and that was to have sung, “Be Not Afraid”, for she felt it expressed her life most appropriately. She believed that she had ‘crossed arid deserts’ and ‘passed through raging seas’ and had not been harmed, for God had been there always at her side.

*‘You have crossed the barren desert, but you did not die of thirst.  
You have wandered far in safety though you did not know the way.  
You have spoken words in foreign lands and all did understand.  
You shall see the face of God and live.*

***Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come follow me, and I will give you rest.***

*You have passed through raging waters in the sea, you did not drown.*

*You have walked amid the burning flames, you were never harmed.*

*When you stood before the pow’r of hell and death was at your side,  
know that I was with you through it all .Be not afraid.....*

*Blessed are your poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs.*

*Blessed are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh.*

*And if wicked men insult and hate you all because of me, blessed, blessed are you!’*

Words of thanks and memories of Sr Mary were then shared by Sr Regina, Provincial of the East Asia Province and Sr Pranee, Community Leader in Nong Khai, who had been with Sr Mary, since the first Nongkhai Community, including Sr Joan and Sr Margaret(deceased 2003),began. The Irish Ambassador to Thailand, His Excellency Brendan Rogers, spoke warmly about his meetings with Sr Mary and how she was the ‘true ambassador’!

Ireland’s famous folklorist and musician, Mick Moloney, who had previously recorded Sr Mary singing an Irish ballad he had never heard before, sang for her, a beautiful song, ‘John O’Dreams’.



The Bishop gave his own closing address in thanksgiving for Sr Mary’s life and work in the Diocese of Udon Thani, before offering the final commendations.

*‘Receive her soul and present her to God the Most High.’*



Sr Mary was then carried to the awaiting vehicle which left the church for the cemetery some 8 kms away, with a long line of vehicles following. The cemetery borders the Good Shepherd Garden of Friendship - a place dear to Sr Mary.



For days, people from the projects had been preparing the cemetery grounds and the array of flowers was once again a beautiful sight to behold.



After a final blessing, each one present came forward to place flowers on her grave.



Sr Mary's coffin was lowered into the grave which was then sealed.



Sr Mary is in good company, buried between Khun Suvan on her left and Sr Mercy on her right.

*' I know that my Redeemer lives:  
on the last day I shall rise again..  
I shall see him myself, face to face;  
and my own eyes shall behold my Saviour.'*

