



Sr Pat Rhatigan AO SSJG
Diocese of Broome

Sr Pat Rhatigan has spent her life in the Kimberley area of Western Australia, first as a child growing up on a cattle station and later as a member of the Sisters of St John of God (SSJG). After entering the convent in Broome in February 1958, Sr Pat completed her Junior Certificate by correspondence and later studied to obtain teacher qualifications. Since then, Pat's life and work has centred on education with special focus on the Indigenous students in the Kimberley. Among the many significant roles she has held was the appointment as part of the inaugural staff to establish Nulungu Girls College, a residential and day school for Aboriginal students in Broome. During her nine years at Nulungu Sr Pat was involved in a number of innovative educational developments.

Passionate about quality education for Aboriginal students Sr Pat accepted the challenge in 1983 to take on the role of Aboriginal Curriculum Consultant based in Broome but to travel throughout the Kimberley. A strong advocate for services to be located in the Diocese Sr Pat assisted in the official establishment in 1985 of the Catholic Education Regional Office in Broome. The following eight years were ones of great innovation in both school administration and curriculum development. She facilitated the opening of several remote Catholic schools and led the way in providing training opportunities for Aboriginal Teaching Assistants. The establishment of the Catholic Education Aboriginal Advisory Committee for the Diocese was a further achievement.

In 1993 Sr Pat accepted the challenge to establish, what is now the Broome Campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia, thus ensuring that Aboriginal people had the opportunity to study in a supportive environment within their own region. Sr Pat continued her innovative activities by laying a foundation of practical reconciliation through involvement of Aboriginal people in the Broome Campus and ensuring that their history, culture and religion were part of mainstream studies for all students.

In August 2006 Sr Pat completed her doctrinal thesis, based on the Holy Child Orphanage in Broome which the Sisters had established and managed from 1939 to 1962. This involved a journey of healing and acknowledgement of past wrongs. Sr Pat then took the knowledge gained from her research into a new venture where the social history of the relationships between the Sisters and peoples of the Kimberley is shared with the public in the Relationships Exhibition. She presently coordinates the SSJG Heritage Centre in Broome as curator and researcher.

In 2007 Sr Pat was named WA Senior of the Year and in January 2008 was awarded an AO for her educational endeavours with Aboriginal people and community work.