



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

Media Release

Monday, 18 August 2025

Honorary Doctor of Letters awarded to Sister Patricia Rhatigan, AO SSJG for service to Church and education

The University of Notre Dame Australia has awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters to Sister Patricia Rhatigan, AO SSJG for her dedicated service to the Catholic Church and tireless commitment to education.

Sister Pat has made education her lifelong mission, with a special focus on providing quality learning and teaching opportunities for Aboriginal students in the Kimberley.

The Honorary Degree recognises her remarkable and lasting contributions to education, the Church, Notre Dame's Broome Campus and the broader Kimberley community.

It was conferred on Sister Pat during a moving graduation ceremony in Broome, which celebrated the academic journey of almost 40 students and marked the 30th anniversary of the Broome Campus.

Sister Pat joined the Sisters of St John of God convent in Broome in 1958 and later gained her teaching qualifications.

She was an inaugural staff member at Nulungu Girls College in Broome - a residential and day school for Aboriginal students – and led several groundbreaking educational initiatives during her nine years at the college.

Sister Pat's dedication to Aboriginal education saw her take on the role of Aboriginal Curriculum Consultant in 1983, and in 1985 she was instrumental in establishing the Catholic Education Regional Office in Broome, working to develop remote Catholic schools and provide training for Aboriginal teaching assistants.

She took a leading role in promoting the establishment of Notre Dame's Broome Campus after the closure of Nulungu College, and went on to become the campus's inaugural director, ensuring Aboriginal people had access to higher education in a supportive and culturally relevant environment.

Notre Dame's Chancellor, The Hon. Christopher Ellison, said Sister Pat's service to the Catholic Church and commitment to advancing education for Aboriginal students would leave a lasting legacy.

"Sister Pat stands as a remarkable example of what it means to serve with purpose and with faith," he said.

"Her ongoing commitment to reconciliation and cultural inclusion has changed the lives of people in the

Kimberley. She ensured Aboriginal culture, history and religion were incorporated into the University curriculum during the establishment of our Broome Campus and played a key role in building our connections with communities across the Kimberley.

“May her example continue to inspire us all to live with faith, purpose and service to others.”

Sister Pat’s 2006 Doctoral thesis on the Holy Child Orphanage in Broome served as a significant step in the healing process and the acknowledgement of past wrongs.

She built on her research through the *Relationships Exhibition*, which shares the social history of the Sisters’ relationship with Kimberley communities.

Sister Pat’s extraordinary contributions to education, community service and reconciliation have been widely recognised. She was named WA Senior of the Year in 2007 and awarded an Order of Australia in 2008.

Media contact: media@nd.edu.au