



Gertrude Massey

Palm Island Elder
Diocese of Townsville

When Gertrude was 6 months old the family was moved to Palm Island and when her mother died shortly after that the children were moved to the dormitories.

With the other Catholic children in the island she attended St. Michael's school in the Casement area, a 1 hour walk from the dormitories. All the children were escorted to and from school by the police.

Gertrude speaks with gratitude of her years with the Franciscan Missionary of Mary Sisters at the school where she said they were really prepared for life and for employment later on. As well as learning to read and write she learned the art of housekeeping, sewing, gardening and candle making.

In 1962 at the age of 18 she married Bertie Massey, a policeman, of the Kurandu tribe, North Queensland. Gertrude and Bertie had 5 children, 17 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren. Bertie died on Palm Island in 2005.

Gertrude has always been very involved with St. Anne's Parish and St. Michael's School and when Bishop Benjamin foresaw the days when the Parish would become priest less, in consultation with Fr. Mick Peters, he selected a number of Elders in the Parish to do theological and scriptural studies at Nungalinga College, Darwin and Wantulp College Cairns. When the parish no longer had a resident priest and with just 1 Sunday Mass a month, an FMM Sister became the Parish Pastoral Associate. She worked closely with Pastor Bill Coolburra and the Elders assisting them with on-going study and ministry.

Gertrude was commissioned to hold the Sunday Parish Communion Service when necessary, to baptize the children and to conduct the funeral services.

In addition to this Gertrude became invaluable to the school where she worked as a Teacher's Aid with the children, assisted with the Sacramental programs and became an advisor to the Principal and staff on cultural issues. She also assisted the children with Aboriginal art projects.

From the 1970s she has been a member of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council at local and diocesan levels, the Diocesan Indigenous Catholic Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

In NAIDOC week 2005 Gertrude received from Palm Island Shire Council a Certificate of Appreciation for her lasting contribution to the Palm Island community.