

Farewell to Fr. Don MacKinnon, CSsR After 25 Years of Service

by Fr. Don MacKinnon and Sr. Michaela O'Connor, SHF

Colorfully clad in native dress, Kmhmu' from across the Pacific Coast and their friends arrived at Transfiguration Parish in Castro Valley, CA to celebrate an ending and a new beginning. It was early July 2016, a glorious Bay Area day.

Bishop Emeritus John Cummins, whose initiative had begun the Kmhmu'-Laotian Pastoral Center many years before, presided at the Mass that began the day-long celebration. Key persons who were at the celebration included President Kanseng Souriya of the national Kmhmu'-Catholic apostolate; Frs. Lee Champoochan and Ben Wonganat, both Thai born priests of the Oakland Diocese; Sr. Michaela O'Connor, SHF, pastoral associate of the Kmhmu' Center; Sr. Felicia Sarati, CSJO, director of the Diocesan Ethnic Pastoral Office; and many representatives of the other Ethnic Centers. The celebrant of the Mass was Fr. Don MacKinnon, CSsR, who was retiring after 25 years of service to the Kmhmu' community. Most numerous of all were the many Kmhmu' families from nearby Richmond, California, augmented by families from Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon from the North and Fresno and Orange County, CA from the South, all of whom totaled more than 500 faithful Catholic Kmhmu' present for the festivities.

As the joyful, tearful, hopeful day unfolded there were native dances, presentations of flowers, tables full of native foods and, of course, speeches recalling the successful growth of the Kmhmu' Center from a beginning with seven families. A very young Kan Souriya had brought those families together for Mass when most of the young parents who brought their children that day were not more than children themselves. There were memories recounted of the first outdoor Mass that Bishop Cummins offered in a regional park on San Francisco Bay, and others told of homes blessed and families prepared for the baptism of their children. Some remembered the struggles to prepare for the U.S. citizenship exams. Many recalled the after-school program that encouraged and helped their children, eventually resulting in graduations from high school, college and, in some cases, even graduate school.

The farewell to Fr. Don included the appreciation of new beginnings highlighted by the presence of Fathers Lee and Ben. They began, after Fr. MacKinnon's re-assignment, to take turns offering the weekly Saturday Kmhmu' Mass at St. Paul's parish. St. Paul's is a welcoming Franciscan Conventual parish in San Pablo, CA where the Kmhmu' people have been able to celebrate a Kmhmu' Mass weekly for 25 years. The two young Thai-speaking priests have continued

the tradition of serving the community, all the while being active pastoral associates in two very large parishes in the Oakland Diocese. Because of their active service to the people of those communities the daily share of pastoral leadership for the Kmhmu' comes from Kan Souriya and Sr. Michaela, whose generous caring for the Kmhmu' community has never flagged.

The most important Kmhmu' events, as always, will be those celebrated in family homes. Also, of special note, is the huge Christmas Day celebration that packs the Richmond Veterans' Hall each year, and the Chautauqua Mass and Procession honoring all the Ethnic Pastoral Centers of the Oakland Diocese. Special summer educational and "for fun" field trips outside their immediate neighborhoods are also being planned for the children of the Kmhmu' Pastoral Center.