

A Celebration of Vocation, Mission, and Life of a Sister of St. Joseph!

By Sister Maureen Finn



Sister Suzanne Wills lives in an Intercongregational Community, in the very rural town of Felisburgo, in the northeast part of the state of Minas Gerais. She lives with Sister Anne Marvin and Sister Reginalda, member of the Congregation Daughters of Jesus.

Sister Maria José, Jean, Joana and I, traveled to Felisburgo to be part of the three days of Mission and celebration from October 17th-20th. Activities included home visiting, an encounter for families and a youth event. On Sunday morning over 30 of the missionaries went by bus to a rural community where we had a morning of retreat in a beautiful area with lush green hills and great views of the countryside. On Sunday evening the final celebration was a Mass celebrated by Bishop Hugo who is very much respected and loved by the people. What a celebration! Flowers from people's yards were beautifully arranged, including flowering cactus; hand woven altar cloths; children (dozens and dozens!) all in their t-shirts with "Irmã Suzana 50 years of Religious Life" written on their backs! Photos of Sue and her work were projected on the front wall, our SSJ hymns sung with joy and gusto by the church choir. All the leaders from the Pastoral to the Child had made, to Sue's surprise, a t-shirt with Sue's photo on the front.

To begin the Liturgy of the Word, youth dressed as Indigenous people danced with great joy as they brought the Word of God forward. The first reading was proclaimed by a youth, without even looking at a paper.... He spoke from the center aisle with clarity, assurance and conviction. Our Maria José read the second reading, and the bishop asked that Joana proclaim the Gospel, telling the assembly how this was most appropriate since the Sisters mission has been 50 years of proclaiming the Gospel message with their lives and works. The Mass on October 20th was on World Mission Day, very appropriate for us.

At the offertory, the symbols presented included the sandals (flip-flops) that Sue uses on her many visits up and down the hilly streets of this town. All the religious men and women present were called by the bishop to come to the Altar and with Sue renew our religious vows.

We were also presented with beautiful slides and a song, remembering Sue's commitment with the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil. This Celebration was very long. Many were standing the entire time.

After Mass, the very full church moved outside and people were served caldo, a type of chicken soup, finger foods, and soda. In the small church hall there were many groups who expressed their thanks to Sue for her vocation and her work among them. She was given flowers, and many hugs. A beautifully decorated cake and the traditional happy birthday melody was sung with great applause. Under a tent outside, children lined up to receive popcorn and cotton candy and a fish pond where you could fish for a prize for FREE!

With her very special simplicity Sue expressed her thanks for such a wonderful outpouring of love and appreciation. Our 50 years in Brazil is being celebrated in so many places and in so many ways. The People of God in this town of Felisburgo, where our sisters are present just these last 5 years, have celebrated with us Sue's faithful response to her call to live as a Sister of St. Joseph for 50 years and are very much a part of our 50 year history in Brazil.