



SPECIAL DAY: Bishop Peter Cullinane, of the Palmerston North diocese, with Sister Anne Keegan at the blessing of Sacred Heart Girls' College's new chapel. The chapel is dedicated to former teacher Mary Phelan.

Photo: NIC GIBSON

Chapel a labour of love

By SHARON MARRIS

NEARLY eight months ago, a Presbyterian church with a Methodist history was moved to a Catholic school.

Yesterday, after a lot of hard work by many people, Mary's Chapel at Sacred Heart Girls' College was formally opened.

Bishop Peter Cullinane, of Palmerston North, blessed the chapel in front of a crowd whose size surprised Sacred Heart principal Diane Kawana.

"I didn't realise how much this meant to the community," she said.

"We have our own smaller community here, but we have nuns from Wellington today and so many others, because it's part of their heritage as well."

The chapel was bought by the family of Mary Phelan, a teacher at the school for 19 years, before she died on May 19 last year.

Since it was moved to the school in September, retired builder George Tamati worked on it to get it ready.

Mrs Kawana said she knew that everything

would work out, but purchasing, moving and repairing the chapel had been a big job.

Tracey Phelan, one of Mrs Phelan's four children, said yesterday had been special and emotional for the family.

Even in her last days, her mother had been determined to see her dream of a chapel at the college become a reality, she said.

"She was bossing us around and I suppose we didn't really appreciate the fact that having a terminal illness had given her that focus."

Ms Phelan said the family had been involved with the school in one way or another since about 1960 and that the chapel would be a special place for them for a long time yet.

"Mum always got what she wanted and I think she would have had it finished three months earlier," she laughed. "But I think she'd be really proud of everyone involved."

Mrs Kawana painted a similar picture of a much-loved teacher and colleague.

"If we messed it up she would have been cross," she said.

"I think she would have been very pleased and it's very moving to have it here."