



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY



IN MEMORY OF
Fr Brian Gore SSC
the poor man's priest

1944 - 2025

May he rest in peace

The Columbans in Oceania, the Philippines, and around the world are mourning the sudden death of Australian **Columban Father Brian Gore**, who died in Negros, Philippines, on the evening of Easter Sunday, 20 April 2025. They are joined by the Filipino parishioners he served and a host of friends, supporters, and many others from around the world who heard or read his story and were inspired by his dedicated commitment.

Born and educated in Fremantle, Western Australia, Brian joined the Columbans in 1960. He completed his seminary formation in Sassafras, Victoria, and Turrumurra, NSW. He was ordained in Fremantle by Bishop Myles McKeon on 29 June 1968, the 50th anniversary of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban.

Fr Brian was appointed to the Philippines in September 1968 and assigned to the island of Negros, where he was to serve for the next 16 years. It was a time of political upheaval, injustice, and oppression under the Marcos regime. During these years, Fr Brian was pastor in several parishes in Negros and became deeply involved in the plight of the impoverished sugar cane workers exploited by rich landowners.

From April 1975, along with other priests and lay leaders, Fr Brian and his co-workers set up Basic Christian Communities (BCC) as a non-violent way to struggle for the rights of workers. Although his activities were supported by the local bishop, they earned the ire of the landlords. The workers' struggle was supported by Pope John Paul II in his 1981 visit to Negros who said, "the church should not hesitate to be the voice of those who have no voice." These words encouraged the priests but also fired up the opposition.

In September 1982, Fr Brian was falsely charged with inciting to rebellion and possessing illegal explosives and ammunition. He and 6 pastoral workers were jailed for 3 days. The opposition was relentless. The following year, the ante was raised even higher when Fr Brian, Irish Columban Fr Niall O'Brien, Filipino Diocesan Fr Vicente Dangan, and 6 lay workers were imprisoned on trumped-up charges of multiple murder. The world's media was drawn to the jailed men who won international fame as "the Negros Nine". The 3 priests were released for a time, but when they realised that their freedom compromised their cause, they famously 'broke back into jail' to be in solidarity with the 6 accused laymen. Under the glare of the international media, the case was finally dropped in July 1984, and Frs Brian Gore and Niall O'Brien had to leave the country within 30 days.

Fr Brian returned to Australia where he was in great demand for talks on peace, justice, and non-violence on radio, TV, churches, and public halls. After the fall of Marcos, Fr Brian returned to the Philippines in 1986 where he served in vocation work for 5 years.

In 1994, Fr Brian was appointed Director of Australia and New Zealand for two terms. His high public profile raised awareness of Columban mission's commitment to justice, peace, and the cry of the poor and the exploited earth. He then served as Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinator in Australia from 2000 to 2003.

Fr Brian returned to the Philippines as JPIC Coordinator for Luzon and Negros in 2004, District Superior in Luzon and Negros 2005, Regional Director 2006-9, and JPIC Coordinator Philippines 2009. The Negros Nine Human Development Foundation, of which Fr Brian is a Trustee, was set up in 2000 and continues the original BCC work of securing the rights of the poor through integral human development.

Fr Brian's final years were as priest-in-charge in San Columbano Mission Center Batang, Negros, where he played the role of grandfather to the priests and people of Negros whom he had loved and served and whose rights he had defended so passionately throughout his adventurous missionary life.

In death on Easter Sunday, Fr Brian joins Fr Niall O'Brien and others of the Negros Nine who have died.

Fr Brian was a fearless advocate for the rights of the poor and for integral human development. May he receive merciful judgement and enjoy the rewards he so richly deserves. May he rest in peace.

Rev Dr Patrick McNerney
Regional Director of Oceania

Memories of Fr Brian Gore



the poor man's priest

