



Fr Kevin Kerley SM, OAM

23.07.1928 - 29.09.2021

Kevin Kerley was born in Gympie, Qld, in 1928. He spent three years schooling with the Sisters of Mercy and ten with the Christian Brothers, matriculating in 1945, then working in the Commonwealth Bank, Brisbane, for three years. Kevin was professed as a Brother in the Society of Mary in Sep 1950 and spent three years as assistant bursar at St John's College, Woodlawn, NSW, before transferring to Oceania Marist Province in 1953.

From 1954–72 Br Kevin's worked in Bougainville as diocesan procurator, builder, manager of woodwork in Tsiroge Technical School, a small ships master and supervisory work at a saw mill. During 1973-74 he was bursar at Tutu Training Centre, Fiji.

In 1975 Br Kevin began studies for the priesthood at Catholic Theological Union, Hunters Hill, reaching diaconate in Dec 1978. Then followed pastoral experience in during 1979-80 in Bougainville and priestly ordination in Brisbane in Sep 1980. Returning to Bougainville, during 1981–83 Fr Kevin was parish priest in Tsimba, Sipai, and Kuraio, isolated parts of NW Bougainville. From 1984–88 he was part of Kieta Area Ministry Team based in Manetai and working in Tunuru and many neighbouring parishes.

In Nov 1988 the Bougainville Conflict erupted, the worst catastrophe in South Pacific since WWII, with deaths of up to 20,000. For years Fr Kevin experienced PNGDF, Resistance and Rebel gunmen close by. While thousands of expatriates departed Central Bougainville, Fr Kevin was one of the few who stayed on and ministered. He was an unofficial 'chaplain' to both sides, eventually receiving recognition and thanks from both.

In late 2001 Fr Kevin returned to Australia to live at Villa Maria, Hunters Hill, and work on his memoirs of the Bougainville conflict. He attributed his survival to the intercession of Emmet McHardy who 'blazed the trail' in the Kieta region. Fr Kevin intended his memoirs for Marists and the Church. As they responded slowly the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, nine Pacific Research libraries that give priority to vulnerable and/or elusive material, intervened. The PMB continued to microfilm Fr Kevin's notes of years of his work.

In 2014 Fr Kevin was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for his commitment to the people of Bougainville. In 2015 he moved briefly to the Montbel community before taking up residence at Twilight Aged Care facility, Hunters Hill, where he continued his work of recording and collating memories of the Bougainville crisis. He died peacefully on Sep 29, 2021, aged 93. May he rest in peace.