

# Brother Rene's art is pure prayer

Pictures by Paul McSherry



**ANYONE** who has visited St Aloysius recently will have noticed unique and thought-provoking Easter themed installations in the sanctuary, which have been created by a Jesuit artist in residence at the city centre church.

Brother Rene de los Reyes spoke movingly to *Flourish* about how his art is inspired by God.

He said: "What I put into a

painting or an installation is not me but what God wants others to see.

"I do my art through prayer. My art is a prayer – not a form of prayer but a prayer. If I'm asked to paint something I pray over it and I would stay with that for a day or two or even a week before I pick up my brush and paint and begin..."

Originally from the Philippines, Brother Rene, 52,

BY **BRIAN SWANSON** joined the parish pastoral team at St Aloysius six months ago where he used his artistic skills to create a 3D Nativity scene for the church and later produced the parish liturgical calendar illustrated with exquisitely detailed images of Scottish wild flowers.

One of seven children, he was taught to paint by his late father Jene, a farmer and prominent activist who worked with a Catholic radio station called Radio M,

which fiercely opposed the brutal Marcos regime in the Philippines.

Between 1975 and 1985 the Marcos-supporting military was responsible for 3,250 deaths in a period in which also saw several thousand tortured while countless others simply disappeared.

It was the example of his devout Catholic family and particularly his father, a fearless critic of the regime, which inspired Rene to fight for social justice which ultimately led him, in 2013, to join the Society of Jesus.

He said: "From a young age I went with my father to meetings and political rallies and what I learned there inspired me to help marginalised and dispossessed people."

As part of his Jesuit studies Brother Rene, who first came to the UK in 2006 to work as a critical care nurse in London, has developed close links with Inuit people in Canada, worked in a prison in Birmingham, and was a manager with the Jesuit Refugee Service in London.

His spiritual journey has

now taken him to Glasgow where he continues to use his experience to work alongside a team of dedicated St Aloysius volunteers who run the well established and highly successful ESOL classes for refugees and asylum seekers.

And Rene, who expects to continue to serve the parish for the foreseeable future, is full of praise for the warmth of the welcome he received – and for the famous Glasgow patter.

He said: "Not long after I arrived here they asked me just to go out and talk to people so they'd get to know me and I'd get to know them."

"So I got out and you know at once I felt the warmth and the friendliness of the people and I got so touched by that."

"One of the first tasks I was given was to open the church in the morning and get to know the people and one of them said, 'Are you the new bouncer then?' and now that's what they call me!"

"I've been to many countries and cities around the world but I have never felt so much warmth as I felt here in Glasgow and that gave me such a boost and I thought 'yes this is it' – The start of my apostolate and my pastoral work begins right here."