

Society says goodbye to long-time Vincentian

Continued Society Work in WWII Internment Camp



At 101 years old, Tom Kobayashi was the oldest living Vincentian. He made it his life's work to continue spreading the message of St. Vincent and Frederic. He was, most assuredly, the type of person Frederic and the Society's other founders hoped would continue on with the mission they started. Mr. Kobayashi passed away on Thursday, January 4, 2018.

Tom Kobayashi was born on September 4, 1916 to a poor family of Japanese Americans and was the oldest of six children. He attended the University of Washington where he first became involved with the Society as a member of the Our Lady of Martyrs Conference.

His personal experience with poverty and the trials of living in it, helped Kobayashi maintain a personal connection with those in need he helped through his work with the Society.

“Thomas Kobayashi is a man of great faith and compassion and always sees the face of Christ in those he has served and I know they have seen the face of Christ in him,” said Roger Playwin, former SVdP National Council CEO in an interview for the National Catholic Reporter in 2011.

Bringing the Society to American Internment Camps in WWII

As a young man during WWII, Kobayashi and his family were among many Japanese-Americans forced into American “relocation centers,” or internment camps. The awful circumstances did not deter him from doing the work he felt called to do. During his time at the camps, he continued the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, collecting extra food and clothing for those in need. He wrote reports and sought prayer materials from the SVdP National Council.

On December 31, 1942, Kobayashi wrote in a report, “The members of the Society are doing their best work now and the results can be seen in the number of the non-Catholics receiving instruction. Our brothers can look back at the last nine months spent in assembly and relocations centers and say that much has been accomplished. May the New Year increase our flock a hundredfold. Pray for us.”

Continuing Vincentian work in Seattle

After being released from the relocation center, Kobayashi made his way back to Seattle and his family and worked with other Japanese Catholics to organize a “Japanese Relief Committee.” This

organization sent food, clothing and medicine to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Nagasaki and Tokyo, Japan.

“It was about 1950 in which I made helping the poor a lifetime goal,” Kobayashi once said. “The Bible says that we will always have the poor, so I thought, ‘That’s a job for me, helping the poor!’”

And help the poor he has. For nearly 84 years, Kobayashi lived and breathed the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

During his time with the Society, Kobayashi served in almost every office possible in a Conference or Council. He served as the president of the Seattle Council from 1962 – 1968. He was the first Seattle Archdiocesan Council president from 1970-1976.

In 1987, he was inducted into the Monsieur Bailley Conference in 1987, and received the first annual “Least of my Brethren Award” in 1991. In 1995, he served as the treasurer for the Seattle Archdiocesan Council and secretary for the Western Region.

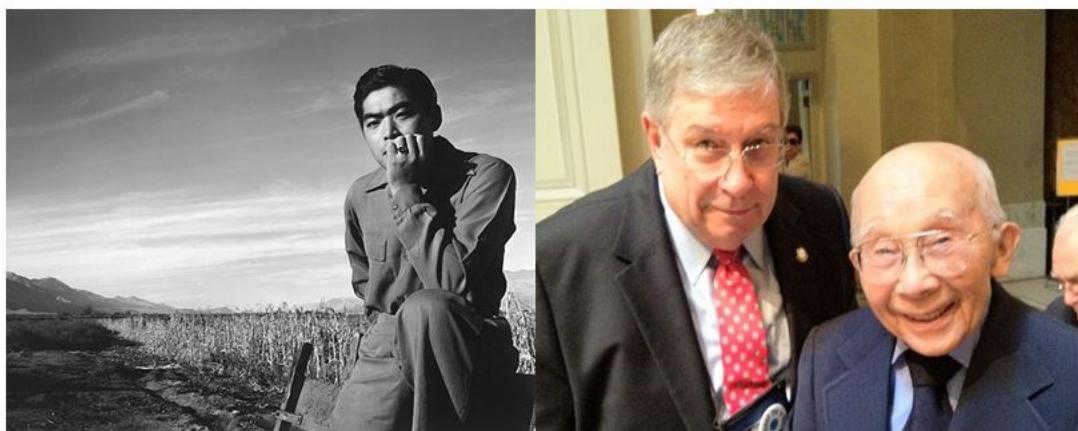
During his time serving in a variety of leadership positions within the local Society, he continued actively doing Conference work and represented the Society on the Washington Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WA VOAD) committee.

A True Servant Leader

“He existed to give himself to others, and not even imprisonment would deter him from serving the lord,” said Ned Delmore, executive director of the SVdP Seattle / King County Council. “He was intelligent, organized and understood the value of a systemic approach with his clear and concise record keeping throughout multiple leadership positions within the Society. He lived his Vincentian convictions longer than any other.”

Tom Kobayashi and his dedication to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will be greatly missed.

Playwin put it best, “Thomas Kobayashi is an example of what servant leadership is all about.”



Shown above: Tom Kobayashi as a young man.

Shown above: Roger Playwin, former SVdP National Council CEO and Tom Kobayashi.