

Tom "Tommy" Kobayashi (1926-2018)



Tommy was born on September 4, 1916, in Seattle, and passed away on January 4, 2018 at the age of 101 years. Tommy graduated from Garfield High School in 1934 and the University of Washington in 1938. In World War II, with his family, Tom was evacuated to the Minidoka Internment Camp in Idaho where he began to serve others in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP), visiting others in the camp and bringing with him a caring heart, a listening ear, and ultimately hope and love itself. Kobayashi served as a member of SVdP for 77 years, having joined as a member of SVdP in 1936 when he was only 20 years old.

From Minidoka, he volunteered for the Army and served with the 442nd Infantry Battalion and the Military Intelligence Service. In 2012, Tom received the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of his military service. Tom worked for the Veterans Administration, the Military Sea Transportation Service and the Port of Seattle. He retired from the Port of Seattle in 1979.

In 1934, while attending the University of Washington, Kobayashi joined the St. Vincent de Paul conference associated with Our Lady of Martyrs, a Japanese parish. The pastor was Maryknoll Fr. Leopold Tibesar, who was fluent in Japanese and also served as the spiritual advisor to the St. Vincent de Paul conference.

Tom was the ultimate servant leader. As a young adult, he was scoutmaster, basketball coach and young adult advisor to the teens at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, the Maryknoll Church in Seattle. In 1991, he was honored with the first annual "Least of My Brethren Award" given for extraordinary service to the poor by the Society. Tom was a member of St. Matthew Catholic Church from 1959 until his passion in 2018.

In 2013, the council of the St. Vincent de Paul of Seattle | King County (SVdP) renamed its Georgetown Food Bank and Community Center after Mr. Kobayashi. A plaque located inside the Foodbank reads in Kanji "The Tom Kobayashi Center" named after Tom, the longest-serving SVdP volunteer in the United States at the time.

In the words from Mr. Kobayashi himself: "I was born on Sept. 4, 1916, into a poor family, the oldest of six children. "I knew what it was like to be poor," Kobayashi said in an interview with the National Catholic Reporter. "I was taught at an early age by Maryknoll sisters who instilled the idea of doing what is right to help the poor," he said.