



Press release from the Star of the Sea Province – Marists of Champagnat

Br Vincent, the oldest living Marist Brother in the Star of the Sea Province and resident of Campbelltown celebrates his 100th birthday

Brother Vincent William Shekleton is set to become the oldest living Marist Brother in the Star of the Sea Province. Born on 19 June, 1924, Br Vincent will celebrate his 100th birthday this year, marking a significant milestone in the history of the Marist Brotherhood in the Pacific. He has not only lived through pivotal global moments such as the Great Depression, WWII, the Cold War, and 9/11 but has also actively helped those in significantly disadvantaged conditions. Br Vincent has served as a teacher in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands immediately after WWII, volunteered in refugee camps in Thailand, and worked in China following the Tiananmen Square incident.

After professing his vows in 1943, Br Vincent's first assignment was in Lismore, New South Wales, signalling the beginning of over 80 years of unwavering resilience, dedication, and commitment to the Marist educational mission.

He is currently in aged care in the Marist Brothers Community, St Gregory's College, Campbelltown.

Early Life and Calling

Born to a World War I veteran, Br Vincent grew up in Concord West, Sydney, during the economically strained interwar years. His family later moved to Bexley, where Br Vincent first encountered the Marist Brothers at a local Marist School. His curiosity led him to join the Juniorate in Mittagong – the Marists' spiritual home – in 1939, at just 15 years old. Despite the sacrifices required at such a young age, Br Vincent embraced his calling with enthusiasm.

An International Journey

Br Vincent's first international trip was to the Solomon Islands, where he taught at a small school that had previously served as an American army hospital. "We taught the students in the mornings, and in the afternoons, together we would clean, organise workshops, operate tractors and do other maintenance work," he says.

He initially spent three years in the Solomon Islands until 1953, then returned in 1974–78, and later in 1996–97.

Papua New Guinea:

After his time in the Solomon Islands, Br Vincent was assigned to Rabaul, in Papua New Guinea, where the Marist Brothers taught at a school established by the local Chinese community. "I



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really enjoyed my time there; it was a calm and peaceful setting. Also, getting to know the families and being welcomed into the vibrant Chinese community was an incredibly enriching experience for me," Br Vincent recounts.

A Profound Thai Encounter

In 1987, Br Vincent went to teach in the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp in Thailand, where he educated refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. "The Church was seeking people to teach refugees who had fled Vietnam and other countries and were currently housed at the refugee camps in Thailand, and I decided to volunteer," he says.

At the camp, Br Vincent taught English and prepared refugees for life in Australia, their potential new home. "The refugees would be given notice of their departure date and flown to Australia for free since they had no money. But they were anxious about how life would unfold in a foreign land," he explains. His lessons provided a glimmer of hope and a sense of preparedness for their new lives.

Br Vincent spent three years at the camp, a period he describes as both meaningful and emotionally challenging. The harsh realities of camp life, including witnessing refugees taking their own lives, left a lasting impact on him.

A Chinese Adventure

China holds a special place in Br Vincent's heart. He taught at the Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing from 1989 to 1990 and again from 1992 to 1993. Despite the language barrier and the tense political climate following the Tiananmen Square protests, Br Vincent found the Chinese people incredibly welcoming.

He adopted a Chinese name, Shi Le Tein, and endeared himself to his students with his dedication and humour. "The students were always so well-behaved and focused on their studies. There were a lot of people, and not many jobs, so the kids knew they had to work hard to get ahead in life," he notes.

Love is the only answer

Joining the Brotherhood at only 15 and spending 81 years as a Marist Brother, did Br Vincent ever regret his decision?

"Never. Not once. This has been my life, and I have loved it since I have known it. I was fortunate to travel to so many countries, meet different people, and experience diverse cultures. What could be more beautiful than this?" he answers.

And his secret to living such a long and joyful life? "Love. It really is that simple. Love people, seek out those who need that love, be there and take care of each other. When I look at the news, all I see is anger and pain, and what all those people truly need is love. It's not complicated at all."



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Being a True Marist

Br Vincent embodied the very essence of Marist characteristics. Simplicity and humility continue to be the hallmarks of his being, and his profound Marian devotion clearly underpinned his approach as an educator, bringing joy, love, and fulfillment to the hundreds of students he taught.

He remains a living testament to the Marist spirit, and as he turns 100, the Star of the Sea family wishes him love, happiness, and health.

About the Star of the Sea Province (Marists of Champagnat)

On 8 December, 2022, the Marist Brothers' Star of the Sea Province (SOTS) was formed, bringing together 11 Pacific-Asia nations, making it the largest and newest province in the worldwide Marist Institute.

The countries that make up SOTS include Australia, Cambodia, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea (including the autonomous region of Bougainville), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu.

For more details, please contact

Br Jeffrey Barrington

Marist Brothers Community

St Gregory's College

100 Badgally Road, Gregory Hills 2557

0414 930 472.