

Australian Marist Brother awarded ACU's 200th honorary degree

Respected scholar and educator Brother Michael Green fms has received Australian Catholic University's highest honour.

Br Green accepted a Doctor of the University (Honoris Causa) in Sydney on 10 October, one year after his milestone Golden Jubilee since entering the Marist Brothers.

The Honorary Doctorate recognises Br Green's significant contributions to religious pedagogy, his scholarly work on Catholic spirituality and history, and the relationship between Catholic community and mission vitality.

Br Green said it was a "great surprise" to receive an Honorary degree for his service to the Marists and the Church in Australia.

"The first reaction of course was one of great surprise, but quickly that changed to one of gratitude and a sense of honour not to me, but to the work I've been doing and the people with whom I've been working," Br Green said.

Br Green is the 200th recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from ACU and the third Marist Brother to receive the prestigious degree.

Born and raised in Sydney, Br Green was educated by the Marist Brothers throughout his entire schooling years, a connection that played an enormous influence on his decision to enter religious life.

He was on track to study law after completing high school when he instead followed in his teachers' footsteps and devoted himself as a Marist Brother.

"I was quite captivated by some of the Brothers who taught me, and I could see myself being a Marist," Br Green said.

"It seemed to me a very worthwhile thing to devote one's life to."

Since becoming a Marist Brother, Br Green has served as a teacher, secondary school principal, university college rector, senior administrator, author and lecturer. He is also known by the Marists' international community for his scholarship and writing on the congregation's spirituality and history.

In 2010 Br Green was appointed the inaugural National Director of Marist Schools Australia to oversee the educational mission and spiritual formation in the country's 56 Marist schools.

"The Catholic school is one of the greatest treasures and contributors to God's mission," Br Green said.

"I think it's telling that although the pews in some churches may be a bit empty, many Catholic schools are not empty, in fact there's never been more schools and bigger schools.

"We need to ask why people are coming to our Catholic schools and not take for granted or undermine the potential contribution of people who are attracted to our way of educating, to the culture and the outcomes and the quality of our Catholic schools.

"We also have these wonderful people teaching in Catholic schools so we need to be asking ourselves, what are we doing to nurture their spiritual lives? What are we doing to educate them theologically? What are we doing to excite them about the faith?"

Officially known as the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary, the Marist Brothers were founded in 1817 by French saint Marcellin Champagnat to teach children and young people.

The first Marist Brother set foot in Australia in 1837, and for the next 20 years a small group of Marists worked as missionaries in the Australasian region.

The congregation established their first school in 1872 at the invitation of then Archbishop John Bede Polding.

Today there are over 250 Marist Brothers in the Star of the Sea Province covering 11 nations in the Asia Pacific region who continue St Marcellin Champagnat's way of imitating Mary, the Mother of Christ. They work in

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collaboration with thousands of Marist laity, over 1500 of whom are members of the Marist Association which this year is marking ten years of existence.

Drawing on his scholarly work on Marist spirituality, Br Green said a study by a French Jesuit in the early twentieth century found the Marist Brothers were “the least Marian” and “the most Marian” of all the many French Marian congregations founded in the previous century.

“He said the Marists were the least Marian because they hadn’t introduced any new Marian devotion, they had no new Marian symbol but, he said in another way they were the most Marian because their essence was to live Mary’s spirit,” Br Green said.

“Our Marist charism is not primarily devotional but imitational, of doing and sharing in Mary’s work to bring Christ to birth and to nurture Christ-life in people.

“In my experience that seems to be very attractive to both women and men, a charism of being merciful, being inclusive, being forgiving, being empowering, as a mother or a sister would do.

“Those are some elements of the Marist way that we’ve continued since the first Brothers came to Australia more than 180 years ago.”

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