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## Twenty-Seven Years at the Student Life Division of Duquesne University

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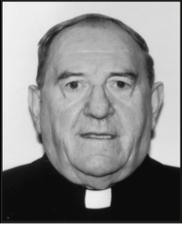
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Sean M. Hogan,  
C.S.Sp.

Sean M. Hogan, C.S.Sp., a fourth generation Spiritan, was ordained in September 1967 at Kimmage Manor, Dublin and sent on mission to the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya in 1968 for eight years. After Masters in Educational Psychology in Duquesne University, Pittsburgh (1975), he became the Director of Mission Appeals in the U.S.A for the Archdiocese of Nairobi, joining the Duquesne staff in 1980 as Associate Director of a Capital Campaign. He founded the Office of International Education and in 1987 became Vice President for Student Life, for 27 years. Currently, he serves as President of Duquesne University Scholarship Association.

## TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AT THE STUDENT LIFE DIVISION OF DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

### BEGINNINGS

On a sabbatical after eight years of mission in Kenya, I arrived at Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, Pittsburgh, on August 26, 1975. The provincial administration was advising us to think about continuing our studies. Following the completion of a Masters in Educational Psychology, a request came from Nairobi to take up the job of mission appeals for the archdiocese. I was at first not too sure whether to accept this or not, but after some persuasion from the Nairobi diocesan chancellor and discussion with the pastor of the parish where I lived and his acceptance that I could continue to live there, I agreed. For the next two years, I lived in the parish, then transferred to the Spiritan residence in Long Island City, New York. But living in New York did not sit right with me, so after 6 months I returned to the parish in Pittsburgh.

In 1980, the new Spiritan president, Fr. Donald Nesti, C.S.Sp., asked if I would come and work at Duquesne. He agreed that I could continue to make the mission appeals. My first job was as Assistant Director for a Capital Campaign, titled, "Strategies for a Second Century." The goal was to raise \$20 million. The campaign raised \$24 million. I was then asked to found the Office of International Education to help increase the number of international students. We had only fifteen of them then. Years ago, as seminarians, we heard, "Join the Holy Ghost Fathers and see the world." I certainly have seen the world. It is easier for me now to tell where I have not been than list the countries I visited recruiting students for Duquesne. This was a great experience, even though I found the travel sometimes tiring and had a few bouts of food poisoning. I do not think I can do so now.

Following a series of events in August 1986—a family death in Ireland, the death of an assistant, a series of ill-matching temporary secretaries, preparing for a month's travel in South America—I did not feel well. My doctor told me I had pneumonia and got me into Mercy Hospital. I have no recollection of what happened in the next few days. I eventually woke up in a strait jacket and on life support. I wrote on a pad, "Have I been anointed?" "Yes," came the reply, "seven times!" I had Legionnaire's disease, but during the procedure to find out what type of pneumonia I had, I also got Hepatitis B. It took quite some time to recover.

One Saturday morning after recovery, a call came from the President's office to come and see him. The Vice President

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for Student Life had resigned and he needed an Interim Vice President for six weeks. It was a long six weeks, stretching to twenty-seven years! I acted as Interim Vice President for Student Life for one year. A new President decided to make my position permanent. There was so much to do. Reporting to me as Vice President for Student life were the following offices: Residence Life, Greek Life, Health Services, and Commuter Affairs; Freshmen Development, Career Services, Judicial Affairs and Special Services; Recreation, Athletics, Multi-Cultural Affairs, and the Tamburitzans.<sup>1</sup> Reporting also to me was the Assistant Vice President for Student Life who supervised Community Service and Programs and Activities, the Student Government, and Student Organizations.

The initial problem I had to deal with was staffing. Much had to be done by way of inculcating the Duquesne spirit among staff, and through them, to the students. In July 1988, I had only one staff member in Residence Life. Some staff in the various departments were not greatly committed to the values of Duquesne and had to be released. But we were ready for the opening of the new academic year at end of August.

## **WINDS OF CHANGE**

The Student population then was about 10,000, with some 3,300 living on campus. The late 1980s was a time of great change on campus. In 1987, the president resigned, followed quickly by an interim president. In May 1988, Dr. John E. Murray, Jr., became the first lay president. There were many cultural changes as well as changes in personnel. Mobile phones were everywhere. In 1989, the President of Student Government asked for TV's in the student rooms. Fortunately, I found out that the city's contract with the TV company required free installation in educational institutions. Next was the internet in the rooms. A friend of mine had a cable company in the area. He offered me the cable at cost. Coincidentally, the president had received a million dollars' donation from a Foundation. I asked for \$67,000 for this project and he graciously agreed. The cable company agreed that they would pull the internet cable along with the TV cable and we could connect as needed. Both installations became great recruitment points for the next ten years. At that time, Duquesne University was one of the most cabled universities in the country.

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## **STUDENT CHALLENGES**

The usual issues with students continued and increased. The needs of students from very different backgrounds demanded much attention. Psychological problems seemed to increase on

*Psychological problems seemed to increase on a daily basis*

a daily basis. To help with these issues we decided initially to reinforce the presence of the Mission Statement, the values that flow from it, and our expectations of a Duquesne Student. In cooperation with some members of the Board of Directors, we produced a wallet-sized card that had the Mission Statement on one side and the expectations of a Duquesne Student on the other.

1. Read, understand, and live out the values contained in the Mission Statement.
2. Build on the values you have received from those who love you and strive to meet their expectations.
3. Be diligent and sincere in your education, open to learning and change, and strive for academic excellence.
4. Be honest and have integrity in all that you do.
5. Recognize the importance of service to others and our community.
6. Grow spiritually, preparing for life not just a career.
7. Appreciate diversity, be welcoming to others.
8. Respect your body and avoid addictions.
9. Develop a sense of self around your ethical and spiritual values.
10. Develop friendships and know the value of teamwork.
11. Be proud of Duquesne, show school spirit and support university activities.
12. Be at peace, love God, your neighbor, and yourself.

*Appreciate diversity, be welcoming to others*

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Quickly the word “Duquesneable” became a slogan on campus. This led to a great increase in the number of students doing service work off campus—called Duquesne University Volunteers (DUV)—for which Duquesne received recognition for several years from the White House. “We serve God by serving students” from the Mission Statement quickly became part of the language of the student body and the parents. Each year at Parent Orientation, the university presented these values to parents, giving each parent a copy of the card. One result of this emphasis was the decrease in damage in the Residence Halls and throughout the campus. As I listened at the various student meetings, the word ‘respect’ became part of the Duquesne student vocabulary. I attend wedding receptions of

alumni regularly and I usually find alumni who proudly show me that they still have their cards in their wallets.

Many students bring psychological problems with them and all colleges have seen a great increase in such issues. Students and parents expect the ready availability of counseling services for students. Initially we fought against this and had instead a policy of dealing with immediate issues on campus and addressing long-term problems through off campus treatment. The Department organized therapy with local psychological agencies to deal with deep and ongoing counseling issues. As this policy became less acceptable, a large increase in staff and facilities was required. The Counseling Department was moved to a larger area in Fisher Hall to help with the increasing numbers and the demands on the staff.

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The use of marijuana and other drugs, though present, was not a major issue during my term. Today, with the legalization of the use of marijuana in many states, it can be a real issue. I always felt amused when students were surprised at being caught smoking marijuana in their rooms. The unmistakable smell came through the ventilation! Today, there is a campus wide no smoking ban and this has helped to decrease the smoking of marijuana.

The misuse of alcohol, particularly by freshmen, was a big problem. Many started drinking in high school. If I had a few dollars for every time I went to a police station to bail out a student in the middle of the night, I could do a world tour! In the early 1990s, Residence Life set up a program called "CARES" to help with these issues and the program has achieved great success and received several large state grants to help control the problem. This continues to this day. I have contact with several students who had alcohol problems as students and who through the counseling of "CARES" now live great family lives.

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Depression is a major problem for many students. Duquesne is academically challenging and with the freedom of College, some students can quickly get behind. Some find that they are not well prepared for college and, besides, have money problems. Many students bring preexisting sickness conditions with them to college and frequently fail to inform our Health Services until these conditions raise their ugly head, leading to hospitalization and major bills. The need to belong and get involved can bring social problems with excessive partying, alcohol consumption, and frustration. Beginning at freshman orientation, we tried to link freshmen with the Orientation Staff to help with their continuing orientation. We were not too successful in this effort.

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## STUDENT BONDING AND SOCIETIES

There is an argument that Universities should ban Greek Life (social organizations at colleges and universities that continue through life). Accepting the problems that are part of the system, I nevertheless believe the sororities and fraternities do much good. The bonding that occurs, the contributions to the social life of the campus, and the friendships that build up are beneficial, and of course, the marriages and baptisms that follow are all very positive. Greeks are among the best groups to support their University or College after graduation. Greek Life adds a tremendous lot to the social life on campus, which is a positive. In current American society, with small families the norm—where students are often without a sister or brother—Greek Life helps students overcome whatever they lack in this area; it also help them develop leadership skills.

We made a strong effort to link student events to the celebration of Holy Mass and this led to the tradition of the various Greek organizations sponsoring a Mass in which the whole group would be present in their Greek colors. Members greeted the students as they entered church, did the readings, and served at the altar. Student events, like the induction of student leaders, were always held as part of Sunday liturgy.

The student body can be split into commuters and residents. The small Commuter office on the third floor of the Union did not serve the students adequately. President Murray had the idea to extend the Union and give more space to the commuters on the ground floor. This initiative has proved very successful as a facility for the building of relationships among commuter students.

## NEW BUILDINGS

The Residence Halls were not in good shape. The colorful plastic chairs in the student lounges and the dangerous plastic chairs in the dining room all needed to be changed. The accommodation of students from for-profit schools down town was also problematic. One morning, after a confrontation between Duquesne Students and the non-Duquesne students during the night, I bluntly told the President that the latter had to go. He agreed, provided I convinced the Vice President for Business and Finance. This was not easy, but I promised him that I would have all the beds full within a year. This happened. In fact, we quickly needed more Residence Halls. Since then Duquesne has built two residence halls and acquired an apartment complex adjacent to campus.

The University has spent over \$100 million dollars on the Commuter Center and the Residence Halls in the last decade. Regularly I hear from alumni and prospective students and

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their parents that, having visited other schools, they found our facilities much better. Nevertheless, students today want their own private apartment from their first semester, but that is something that has many dangers. They come from a home where they have their own private room and often their private bathroom, but I believe that, with the problems that can arise during the first year, single facilities are not suitable for freshmen.

We made many efforts—new painting, new chairs, painting and a new menu—to improve the conditions of the dining room. I remember vividly accompanying the Director of Residence Life to tour the bathrooms in the Towers Building. I met her at the entrance and she asked me to visit the Dining Room first. There was a gathering there, including the president and members of the university administration and I was informed that it had been decided to name the facility, “The Hogan Dining Room,” in my honor. I was speechless. Unfortunately, this seemed to make some students think I was responsible for the food and such regularly confronted me about issues in the dining room!

The Palumbo Center, built in 1987–78, was to include a recreation center for the students, but we could not get the funds to do both. I was like a stuck penny at administration meetings advocating for the building of a recreation center. It eventually came with the building of the Power Center, called after the first President of the University, Fr. William Power, C.S.Sp.

## **PRESIDENT OF DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP ASSOCIATION**

Tuition costs are rising at alarmingly high rates and the scholarship money available cannot meet the needs. Duquesne is very generous with scholarship grants, but there is not a bottomless pit. Freshman students can be very upset when the family does nothing to support them and they find themselves with a big bill to pay at the end of their first semester. As Vice President for Student Life, I was regularly frustrated when a student had to leave because the family could not or would not support them, or they had not completed the family tax returns to submit to FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). This was necessary to get grants from the State or Federal Government, Stafford Loans, etc. To afford the high price of college tuition, many students must get jobs, often two or three, and then they begin to spread themselves too thin.

After twenty-seven years in Student Life, I told President Dougherty that I would like to retire. He was not receptive to the idea and eventually came back to me with the idea of starting an office to provide support for students in financial difficulties. On

the death of my parents, my assistant had already established a scholarship in their name and subsequently some friends on my birthday and on other anniversaries fund-raised in my name. That scholarship is one of the largest I now control as President of the University Scholarship Association. On taking up the challenge, I thought it would be only a part time position. However, the need is great and I am busy. It has gone well. I have been able to add three new large scholarships, while continuing to increase the scholarships I had initiated while in Student Life or had inherited through a previous President, Fr. Henry McAnulty, C.S.Sp. It is certainly no part time job!

It is tough to deal with the emotions of a student when they know they have to leave the University because of outstanding bills, but there is no bottomless pit. International Students experience many problems trying to continue their education in America. Once they receive a grant from Admissions when they are accepted, they cannot get tax-free money after that, and they cannot work except in the University. The Scholarship Association is now able to help many of these students each year as a fund has been established to help them.

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My years in Student Life were the happiest years of my life. I had a tremendous staff who put up with me, and the demands I made of them. My present position does not have a large staff but the ones I have are a great support and add a lot to the office.

The giving culture, the Spiritan presence, and the dedication of the staff and faculty are obvious at Duquesne. It has been a great honor to work here, to get to know many people, and continue the friendship with the many students with whom I have come in contact. I have had the honor and privilege to officiate at their weddings and, of course, to baptize their children and to have a continued relationship with them. It has been a great honor and I am now welcoming these children to study at Duquesne. And I have officiated at several weddings of these students.

The confreres at Trinity Hall, the Spiritan Residence on campus, have been most supportive and I wish to thank them for their fraternal love and understanding over the years.

*Sean Hogan, C.S.Sp.  
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh*

## ENDNOTES

1. A multi-cultural song and dance company.