Milestones Memories

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The Reverend Sean Hogan, CSSp, pulls his address book from his desk drawer. It’s actually a thick binder, full of dozens and dozens of names, addresses and phone numbers of alumni. Even though he formally updates the binder once a year, there are handwritten notes beside some of the names.

“Every single person in this book is important to me and I do my best to keep up,” says Hogan, referring to his binder. He speaks softly, with an accent still tinged by his Irish roots.

Alumni hold a special place in Hogan’s heart. And Hogan has touched many hearts himself over the course of his life and career, which have hit several milestones: 40 years as a priest, 30 years at Duquesne, and this year, his 65th birthday.

When Hogan looks back over his life, it is with a combination of pride and a feeling of deep satisfaction.

One of eight children, Hogan continuously felt drawn to the idea of becoming a priest while growing up in Killarney, Ireland. He eventually decided to follow in the footsteps of four generations of relatives and, in 1959, joined the Spiritans.

“There was the history with my family and the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, so it was kind of logical,” he says.

He studied philosophy at Holy Ghost College in Dublin and was appointed to teach at Dublin’s Blackrock College in September of 1962. Two years later, he began studying theology at Holy Ghost College. In September of 1967, he was ordained to the priesthood.

From Ireland to Kenya to Duquesne

A year after becoming a priest, Hogan was sent to Kenya, where he worked as a high school principal and pastor. He also built the first youth centre in Kenya, which remains open today.

“It gave great hope to the young people,” says Hogan.

Hogan became ill and had to leave Kenya in 1975. He traveled to the United States and decided to continue his studies at Duquesne. When he arrived in Pittsburgh, he was dropped off several blocks away from campus, so he started walking.

“My first impression was that Duquesne was hilly,” says Hogan.

“Fortunately, I had only one suitcase.”

In August 1976, Hogan received a master’s degree in Education, and decided to stay on at Duquesne.

“I planned to be here for a year,” he remembers. “The rest is history.”

In 1980, he was appointed associate director of Development at Duquesne, working on the first capital campaign for the new Law School building. Two years later, he was named the first director of the Office of International Education and helped launch Duquesne’s ties with international students.
He continued his service to the University by serving as interim vice president for Student Life for two years before being named vice president for Student Life in 1988 and executive vice president for Student Life in 1991.

One-on-one relationships
“He truly embodies Duquesne University,” says Hogan’s friend and former student Vince Morreale. Hogan baptized Morreale’s four children. “I think it’s the one-on-one relationship with the students.”

Alumni enthusiastically talk about how their relationship with Hogan has continued years after graduation.
To many, he is like another member of the family …

Hogan’s office in the Administration Building is a shrine to the students he has served while at Duquesne. Photos of Hogan with alumni at their weddings compete for space with photos of Hogan with alumni at their children’s baptism ceremonies. Colorful trinkets from around the world — sent by alumni — fill his book shelves.

He has lost count of the number of weddings and baptisms he has performed, but it’s easily several hundreds. He travels the world to take part in the special days of alumni.

They enthusiastically talk about how their relationship with Hogan has continued years after graduation. To many, he is like another member of the family, celebrating holidays together, sharing meals and sharing Mass.

“From the moment I met him, we became fast friends,” says David DiCio. Hogan presided over DiCo’s marriage in the Chapel in 1998, and baptized two of his children. “I never met anyone who cared more about the students.”

Hogan reunites many alumni at his yearly Pentecost Sunday Mass and luncheon. He expects about 150 alumni and their families to attend each year.

Morreale, his wife, Mary and their children attend every year.

“It’s like a homecoming,” says Vince Morreale.

Hogan also has a special relationship with his staff.

“He’ll say, ‘I know I’m asking a lot of you but I’m asking you for the students we serve,’” says Director of Residence Life Sharon Oelschlager, who has worked with Hogan for 20 years.

Hogan hosts a dinner for Residence Life staff each August to thank them for another year of work and to get them started on a new semester.

Not only students
He is also anxious to help his co-workers in their personal lives. Last year, for example, he helped Oelschlager’s family celebrate her parents’ 50th wedding anniversary by celebrating Mass with their parish priest at their church. He also said Mass at the family’s church when Oelschlager’s brother tragically died a few weeks later.

“Father Hogan has a big heart and is there in good times and in bad,” says Oelschlager.

Hogan is passionate about making a difference at Duquesne and working with colleagues to serve students.

“I really enjoy getting to know the students, seeing them change and develop, and keeping in touch with them,” Hogan says.

Hogan’s job as executive vice president for Student Life requires unwavering dedication and the willingness to be available to his staff and students 24 hours a day. Despite the demands of his job, he manages to carve out a bit of each day for himself, working out at Pittsburgh’s YMCA, reading novels and magazines, and listening to audio books.

The way he hoped it would be
Hogan has seen a lot of change in his three decades at Duquesne. One of his most memorable moments was about 12 years ago, walking out of the Union with the Reverend Henry McAnulty, CSSp, Duquesne’s longtime president.

“We were walking back to the Administration Building on Academic Walk and Father McAnulty turned around and said, ‘This is the way I always hoped it would be,’” says Hogan, pointing out that McAnulty was thinking about how far Duquesne had come from a small, struggling college to a flourishing institution.

When Hogan thinks about the future, it includes remaining at Duquesne to serve the students who are so close to his heart.

“I think God has been very good to me,” says Hogan. “I certainly have enjoyed my priesthood, the camaraderie of the Spiritans, the whole experience of getting to know Duquesne and the great people here.”

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Photos by Keith Hodan

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