

Fr. Joseph A. DUCHENE 83 USA-East + March 10, 1999 Pittsburgh, PA  
\*March 31, 1915, Harrisburg, PA

One of four sons born to his parents, he and his twin brother Richard attended the grade school of Resurrection Parish, Brookline, PA, 1921-29, before entering the local high school, 1929-33. After two years of college at Duquesne University, Joseph transferred to the University of Pittsburgh, 1935-41. He studied metallurgy and earned eight credits in that field of learning, while also working part time at the Mesta Machine Company, where his father was in charge of sales. His twin brother also attended the same school and both of them were members of the R.O.T.C. Then when the USAA got involved in World War II, Joseph was assigned to the South Pacific theater of war, where he served at Iwo Jima as chief of staff of the island's Command Headquarters and rendered outstanding service in the supply section. His twin brother, who was almost inseparable from him, asked to be assigned to the same blood-soaked island to be close to him; and so they were together there during the fighting. It was at Iwo Jima that Joseph was so impressed by the ministry of the chaplains to the wounded and the dying that he began to consider becoming a priest himself. He also served in occupied Japan.

Demobilized with the rank of Lt. Colonel in 1946, he went to Duquesne University for one year of philosophy. Professed on August 22, 1948, he did his senior seminary studies at Ferndale, where he was ordained on June 6, 1952, and earned his BA and BD. His seminary record described him as endowed with many outstanding features presaging excellent service in life. On the negative side it mentioned occasional outbursts of temper and certain prejudices, but hardly anyone is perfect. Yet it was a feature that remained with him almost till the end of his life, giving sometimes rise to complaints, but that rudeness was less serious than it appeared to be; it did not come from a permanent antipathy.

Being an expert photographer, while in Ferndale he earned the Provincial's praise for supplying pictures of all members of the Province. Later in life he would produce extensive photographs of all the houses and works in the Province and in Puerto Rico.

His first assignment took him to Duquesne University, where he served until 1961. His function was assistant treasurer and in charge of the physical plant. It was a

big responsibility, but he did it to everyone's satisfaction. In his spare time he fostered scouting, including cub scouts. For forty years he was also adviser of the Alpha Epsilon Fraternity, the precursor of A.T.O. Mega Fraternity, known for its leadership on the campus. It was a difficult kind of ministry, but the young men loved his spiritual guidance and readily followed his advice. Many continued to consult him long after they had graduated from the university. While we are speaking about Father's pastoral work, we should also mention that for more than thirty years he did week-end ministry at St. Scholastica Parish in Aspinwall where his faithful ministry was honored by a special plaque when he celebrated the fortieth anniversary of his ordination. And the brothers of his fraternity established a scholarship in his name when he reached his eightieth birthday.

His close resemblance to his twin brother could sometimes give rise to amusing incidents. I recall that on the occasion of a relative's funeral in the 1950s, some of his confreres were shocked to see him wearing a tie—a thing then unheard of for a priest. They did not know that they were looking at his twin brother. Other people on different occasions warned the Provincial that they had seen him publicly walking around arm in arm with a woman—evidently a sign that he was ready to renounce his priesthood. It was hard to convince them that they had seen his twin. For recreation he loved fishing and boating, especially during his yearly vacation and on holidays.

To return to his life story, in 1961 he was named provincial treasurer and moved to its offices and residence, Dorseyville Road, Pittsburgh. He proved to be just the right man for that task and held it until 1977, while four Provincials came and went. Once again, he earned their gratitude for excellent service, not just by keeping the books straight but also by careful investment of available funds.

Meanwhile he had not broken his ties with Duquesne; from 1971 on he was a member of the Duquesne Corporation, governing the university. He returned to Duquesne in 1977 and resumed his function as director of the physical plant and financial vice-president till 1982. At that time he became religious superior of Trinity Hall until he resigned in 1986. He was also associate vice president for management and business and a board member of the Alumni association. In 1991 he became bursar of Trinity Hall. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his ordination, university President Dr.

John Murray expressed his gratitude for “the magnificent contribution” Fr. Duchene had made to the University.

In 1995 he resigned as bursar, but stayed on in retirement at Trinity Hall, while still assisting in the beatification of the university campus. Following a massive stroke, he died on March 10, 1999 in Mercy Hospital. Interment took place at the Spiritan plot at Sharpsburg’s St. Mary’s Cemetery, O’Hara Township.

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