

Drs. Stephen Beall and Dinorah Cortés-Vélez sharing their memories and poetry as the University is mourning the loss of Rev. Joseph G. Mueller, S.J.



*Rev. Joseph, "Joe" Mueller, S.J.*

I first met Joe Mueller in the mid 70s. Although we were the same age, we were one year apart as students in the Jesuit high school in Detroit. He grew up in the suburb of Livonia in a prodigiously large family. He lost his mother as a child, and when his father remarried, he became part of a "Yours, Mine, and Ours" family that reached a total of seventeen children. The Muellers were not unacquainted with tragedy. When we were underclassmen, Joe's older brother, who had been elected student body president, suffered a neck injury that left him a quadriplegic for the rest of his life. When he died a few years ago, Fr. Joe celebrated a requiem Mass in our home chapel.

Our Jesuit teachers were brilliant and eccentric. One of them, Fr. Patrick Rice, taught an entire course on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church in Vatican 2, which planted the seeds of Fr. Joe's future research. We also had memorable courses in scripture, literature, and sexual ethics, as well as a hefty dose of foreign languages. Fr. Joe became so proficient in French that he majored in that subject when he continued his studies at Marquette University. By his own account, he was a typical undergraduate, with roommates for whom he did most of the cooking, a girlfriend, and a summer job digging graves in Livonia. But he also began to feel the

stirrings of a call to religious life; one watershed moment, he told me, occurred after reading Camus' *La Chute*. He entered the Detroit Province of the Society after graduating from Marquette in 1981.

As a scholastic, Fr. Joe received the usual formation, including a regency in our *alma mater* in Detroit. But the Society was determined to put his intellectual and linguistic abilities to best use. He was sent to Paris for doctoral studies in theology, which culminated in a massive dissertation on the *Apostolic Constitutions*, written in French. (He also made his daily meditation and prayer in French; I learned that he was pretty good with Latin, too.) In 1999, he was brought to Marquette as a visiting professor; he became a regular faculty member shortly thereafter.

I have sometimes described Fr. Joe as a "Company Man," meaning that he was willing to go wherever and do whatever the Society required, without taking sides or criticizing his companions. He loved research and teaching, and he formed many young theologians with his careful reading and pointed, but always charitable, criticism of their papers and dissertations. He was a good friend to our department, publicly advocating for the study of languages and celebrating the annual French Mass in the Joan of Arc Chapel. He also took on arduous and sometimes thankless administrative responsibilities, including turns as Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences and Assistant Chair in Theology. After his solemn profession in 2012, Fr. Joe assumed an increasingly important role in the government of the Society, becoming rector of the community at Marquette and, finally, Dean of the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. These commitments did not diminish his passionate involvement with the "queen of the sciences." Less than two weeks before his death, he shared his thoughts on the need for a theology of divinely inspired but apparently flawed institutions.

His many friends and colleagues describe Fr. Joe as a gentle soul who was generous with his time and energy. He also had a somewhat quirky sense of humor. He loved good food, assuring us that one did not commit the sin of gluttony until one actually passed out. He had a taste for "macho" action movies and (with his customary optimism) remained a steadfast fan of the Detroit Lions. During Lent, he would join my wife and me for fish fries and readings of poetry, ranging in tone and quality from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Ogden Nash; Fr. Joe would recite his own compositions, which we urged him to publish. He had a magnificent singing voice and would lead the carols at our Twelfth Night parties or the *Salve Regina* at gatherings for Catholic students.

Fr. Joe valued friendship, which he regarded as a gift from God. He had many friends, men and women of all ages, with whom he remained close throughout his life. We were fortunate to be counted among them.

By: Dr. Stephen Beall

*A friendly hand, blossoming forth, was his offering*

To Fr. Joe Mueller,  
in memoriam

Like the rustle of leaves  
on a late autumn day,  
his manner was gentle;  
his understanding was delicate,  
not unlike wildflowers  
scattered over a meadow.  
A friendly hand, blossoming forth,  
was his offering,  
that he extended  
with the quiet grace  
of a soul christened by  
the blue hope of the heavens

By: Dinorah Cortés-Vélez