

In Memoriam

Rev. George Dorn, champion of poor, dies at 82

Redemptorist Father George Dorn, who was known for his unfailing kindness and generosity to the poor, died of cancer Wednesday, June 21, at St. John Neumann Residence in Saratoga Springs, NY. He was 82.

The Funeral Mass for the Baltimore native was offered Wednesday, June 28, at 10 a.m. at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Baltimore, with burial to follow at Sacred Heart Cemetery.

The youngest of five children of Bernard and Lillian Klass Dorn, Father Dorn was born Feb. 13, 1924, and was raised in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Baltimore. After graduating from the parish grammar school, he entered St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA, and spent his novitiate at Ilchester, MD. He earned his undergraduate degree in Suffield, CT, and completed his seminary studies in theology at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY.



He made his first profession of vows as a Redemptorist in 1945 and his final profession in 1948. He was ordained to the priesthood June 18, 1950.

Most of Father Dorn's priestly ministry was spent in what is now the San Juan Province, then including missions in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Father Sylvester Feeley, who served as San Juan Vice Provincial, recalled that at one time he was considering a transfer for Father Dorn "because he had so many talents and he fit in so well wherever he was sent." Then he learned that the self-effacing priest, "always a very unassuming person," was concerned that he must be doing something wrong to be moved on so often. The truth was, Father Feeley said, that "he was a very dedicated priest, a talented man who could be sent in on any job you needed done."

Father Dorn's first yearlong assignment (1952-53) was to Aguas Buenas, PR. For the next five years he served in Las Matas de Farfan in the Dominican Republic. Father John Lavin recalled that it was a very distressful time in that island nation under the dictatorship of Gen. Raphael Leónidas Trujillo. Redemptorist Bishop Thomas Reilly, who gained a widespread reputation for standing up to the strongman, considered Father Dorn to be "one of the best missionaries he ever had," Father Lavin said. In 1958, Father Dorn returned to Puerto Rico, serving in Ponce for one year and then in Mayaguez until 1961. He went back to the Dominican Republic, serving at San Juan de La Maguana for a few months.

San Juan Provincial Manuel Rodriguez said that it was in the Dominican Republic that Father Dorn made devotions called "Calvaries" -- carrying a large cross bearing an image of Christ. This he did walking barefoot through rural areas of the country.

In 1962, he was sent to Fajardo, PR, and the following year he was assigned to Guayama. He then served in Aguas Buenas (1967-69), Puerta de Tierra (1969-70), Aguadilla (1970-75) and, as rector, at Ponce (1975-78). He was named rector of Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Thomas, VI, in 1978. Father Thomas Travers, who served as San Juan Vice Provincial, said that Father Dorn suffered a stroke on St. Thomas and was told by his doctor to slow down. This advice proved difficult for the zealous priest to follow, as his rectory was accessible by an 83-step outdoor stairway from the Main Street on which the cathedral is located. He was transferred back to Puerto Rico, assigned to Caguas in 1980, to Aguadilla in 1981, and to San Lorenzo in 1982.

Father Travers said the confreres in Puerto Rico knew Father Dorn as "a very, very kind man who always asked did they need any money or did they need anything fixed." He was "very dedicated to the people and whatever

they asked for, he would try to give them," he added. Father Dorn cultivated a gruff image, but he was "a work of art made out of scrap-iron," he said. After mentioning that Father Dorn was known, too, as a great teacher who gave practical advice, Father Travers said: "Of course, he'd be completely against this eulogy! He'd rather be doing than hearing people talk about what he was doing."

After 33 years in the San Juan missions, Father Dorn asked to return to the mainland to serve in the Vice Province of Richmond. He served in Tampa, FL; Orangeburg, SC; and Wauchula, FL. In 1996, he was named rector of St. Alphonsus Villa in New Smyrna Beach, FL, an office to which he was appointed again in 1999.

Father James Burke, who served with Father Dorn in Wauchula, said that "one of the finest things he did there was a weekly bulletin, in English and in Spanish; it was practically a newspaper. He'd inform people of everything going on at the church." Father Dorn's first priority, though, was helping the poor. "He'd give you the shirt off his back," Father Burke said. "People would come in day and night for help and he never turned anyone away. He was the soul of charity." Although Father Dorn had a hard time getting around because of problems with his knees, he had no hesitation in driving anywhere to help people or to pick up donations for the parish's food pantry or clothing center, Father Burke added.

Father Michael Koncik, who also knew Father Dorn from his work in the South, described his confrere as having "a heart as big as he was." Although the two men could not be together without kidding each other, Father Koncik said that he really appreciated Father Dorn's goodness to the poor, kindness to his confreres and generosity to the Vincentian Sisters of Charity who served with him in Wauchula. When Father Koncik began his prison ministry, Father Dorn would save and pass on calendars and magazines to share with the prisoners, he added.

By the time he went to New Smyrna Beach, Father Dorn was having increasing problems with mobility, but whether leaning on a walker or sitting in a wheelchair, he led the community in prayer and enlivened their meals with his good humor. "Although not always well himself, it didn't hinder him from doing good for the men," said Father Edward Gray, former Richmond Vice Provincial.

Nine months ago, Father Dorn was transferred to St. John Neumann Residence, where tests revealed that he was suffering from cancer. Sister Serafina, director of nursing services at the residence, said: "He didn't complain even though he was suffering and when he came to meals, the table would be shaking with laughter because of his special gift of joy." When he had to be hospitalized for a while for radiation, "the nurses all loved him," she said because he was concerned with their well-being rather than his own pain. "He was even joking with the men who were taking him home here on a stretcher," she added. "The house is different without him, but now we have another intercessor on the other side."