

12-17-2016

A Heartfelt Charge

Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina

eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "A Heartfelt Charge" (2016). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 33.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina/33

This Blog is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in President's Blog: From the Heart by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlange1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

A Heartfelt Charge

 udayton.edu/blogs/president/2016/12/a_heartfelt_charge.php



Saturday December 17, 2016

By Eric Spina

Good morning!

Class of 2016. Class of 2016. Class of 2016! Roll that around your mind a little bit. ...It has been out there for a while now, hasn't it? And now: Here. We. Are. ...This is indeed YOUR 2016, this is YOUR day, and an extraordinary one it is! Congratulations to all new University of Dayton graduates — all 680 of you.

I'd like to start by recognizing, in a special way, first-generation college graduates. You personify the American dream, and you will continue to open doors of opportunity — not just for yourselves, but for future generations of your family. We're so proud of you AND so proud of the family members who made your dream — and theirs — come true. Let's have a special round of applause for these first-generation college graduates and their families!

I offer a special welcome to the families of our all of our graduates, who are filled with pride and joy over all you've accomplished. Savor this moment. And please, graduates, rise, face your family members and give them a rousing round of applause for their support and love

that made this day possible!

Members of the faculty and staff: Thank *you* for creating an environment that has allowed these students to stretch themselves academically, to see the world as their classroom, to learn what it means to be a servant-leader in the Marianist tradition. You have prepared these graduates to dare to be great. You have prepared them to use their education and faith to serve others.

Today marks the end of one grand journey and the beginning of a new one — one that's filled with endless possibilities if you continue to face each day with an open mind and an open heart. Our hopes for the future lie with you.

I'd like to offer one simple, yet candid, reflection today, then turn the day over to you to be recognized and honored.

There's no denying that we are living during an age of divisiveness and polarization that is fraying the bonds of our shared humanity and putting the common good at peril. As you enter your professions, graduate school or, for some, a year of service, you will encounter a sharply divided nation on so many issues, from race relations and immigration to health care and the environment.

Too many people have become intolerant of those perceived to be different, or who think differently — largely out of fear of that difference. In an age when we need *more* dialogue, *more* empathy, *more* civility and *more* respect, the public square has instead become a battleground of heated rhetoric.

Unfortunately, we're seeing little dialogue across these differences — and very little willingness to engage productively with those who think differently. This is deeply troubling and a dangerous trend. Left unchecked, this type of behavior is highly damaging to our society and, indeed, to the great American Experiment.

We cannot live in an insular bubble or allow our social discourse to become an echo chamber. We cannot ignore those in need, or dismiss those who are angry. We cannot become intolerant or lose empathy. We must always choose love over hate, hope over fear, tolerance over intolerance, dialogue over silence.

This is where your holistic Catholic, Marianist education at the University of Dayton comes into play. Your education — consisting of both classroom and lived experiences — has prepared you to be leaders who can serve as a beacon of responsible and productive citizenship.

I'm not naïve. I know that some of the same divides that plague our society have been visible from time to time on our campus. But at the University of Dayton, faculty, staff and students worked hard to turn these uncomfortable moments into opportunities to foster dialogue

across differences, to try to understand the other side, to work to achieve common ground and find a way forward. That's what building community is all about.

From this newcomer's perspective, this approach — this Marianist way of life — has made the University of Dayton a reason for hope and optimism during a turbulent time.

As soon-to-be graduates, I charge you to take your invaluable UD education and your ability — your ability to work across difference, to engage in difficult conversations, to learn about different viewpoints — out into the world, into our cities, into your workplaces, into your faith communities. Model this responsible behavior for others. Help others to be good citizens who can contribute to solutions. Help others understand how we can build a better society through engagement and dialogue and that they, too, have an obligation to work on improving our world.

After six months as the University of Dayton's president, I continue to be struck by the selflessness of our students and alumni. Most of you didn't come here thinking about how you're going to get rich or famous. You came here to gain an education to become a good and productive member of the human race. You came here to make the world a better place with your passion and expertise. You came here to learn to be community builders — a skill needed more today than ever before.

Today, I know, is bittersweet for many of you. I understand your deep affection for the University of Dayton, built over years and solidified by interactions with great instructors, nurtured by the Marianist spirit of hospitality, supported by a range of exciting and invaluable experiential learning opportunities, and cemented by the community you've built. This is home. In just a few months, I've grown to love UD, too, and know that it's never easy leaving a place you love.

But the University of Dayton will always be your home. I invite you — urge you — to stay connected to UD. Help us become better, more relevant, more distinctive. Help us stay true to our Catholic, Marianist mission of educating students who can make a real difference in the world.

Congratulations on your accomplishments. We are so proud of you! And GO FLYERS for life!

Thank you!