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Champion for UD and the Church

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Champion for UD and the Church

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Wednesday February 15, 2017

By Eric F. Spina

As I strolled around the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives' new home on River Campus, I admired how its fabulous religious art blends in seamlessly with flat screens and other modern-day technology.

I felt as though I had walked into an innovation center, but not the kind you might imagine on a college campus. This is a place where faith meets culture, where new ways to communicate about our Catholic faith in the digital age are piloted.

It is no surprise that it's the brainchild of Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS, a woman of endless ideas, boundless energy, unwavering faith — and a welcoming spirit.

Sister Angela Ann stands out for her entrepreneurial courage. Some people ask, "Why?" She asks, "Why not?"

Long before Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, under her leadership, the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives has pushed the traditional boundaries of communication.

I'm amazed by the global reach of the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation, which offers dozens of online courses — from church history to the Bible and social justice — in more than 70 Catholic dioceses in some 40 countries. Every year, 7,000 students enroll in courses to support catechist, lay leadership/ministry and adult faith formation. More than 100 courses are offered in English and Spanish, absolutely critical for us to engage the world's growing Hispanic population.

Sister Angela Ann co-wrote the book *The Gospel in Cyberspace*, and she co-directs the Caribbean School for Catholic Communication. Pope John Paul II awarded her the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Medal, bestowed to lay people and clergy who have given zealous and outstanding service to the Catholic church.

Every summer, she takes a group of Chaminade Scholars on a 10-day pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome as part of a "Vocation and Arts" course. Although she's spent more than 40 years pioneering new technology, she asks her students on these trips to skip tweeting and posting in order to experience the sacred in everyday life. It's a great lesson: Technology, for all its benefits, can disconnect us from each other.

When I started thinking about seeking out a presidency, I looked at “fit.” Did I want to be president of an Ivory Tower institution or one that engages with the world to create the best possible opportunities for students?

The University of Dayton is truly a model in Catholic higher education for collaboration and engagement. Champions like Sister Angela Ann and her staff are shining the University of Dayton’s light throughout the world with programs that make us truer to our mission.