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Living the Mission

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

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Living the Mission

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Saturday February 25, 2017

By Eric F. Spina

The Marianists each year honor two members of the University of Dayton community who have made a significant contribution to the Catholic and Marianist character of the University over a long period of time. University of Dayton President Eric Spina made these remarks Feb. 24 about this year's two recipients, Kathleen Watters and Donald Pair.

I attended last year's awards dinner — and immediately knew it would become one of my favorite nights on campus. It's more than just a heartwarming evening. It's one that lifts the soul.

The Lackner Awards are among the highest awards given at the University of Dayton for a very important reason.

Our enduring character as a Catholic, Marianist university depends upon the dedication and faith of faculty and staff who carry the torch, who ensure that the flame burns brightly for all to see.

Every day on campus since I've been here — from the classrooms to the residence halls to Kennedy Union — I witness a corps of committed people who live our mission with optimism, faith, a spirit of collaboration and innovation.

Few live that mission more deeply and authentically than tonight's award recipients, Don Pair and Kathy Watters.

Don, thank you for leading with a strong spirit of collaboration.

From your work in helping to develop our Common Academic Program to your leadership in building the Hanley Sustainability Institute, you are a model of servant leadership.

I've heard you call this "leading from the middle." That's way too humble of an assessment. It's leadership by example, by quiet example. It's the kind of leadership that has led to expanded environmental offerings for students, expanded experiential learning opportunities, expanded interdisciplinary research.

Without fanfare and with gentle persistence, you have made a real difference on our campus.

Kathy, I appreciate how, like Mary, you continue to say “yes.”

That’s what transformative leaders in the Marianist tradition do.

Nearly 17 years ago, you led an advisory committee charged with improving conditions for women on campus. Today, you lead the center that emerged from those important conversations.

The center does more than just explore how gender intersects and impacts our lives. It’s committed to building gender equity and inclusivity — and honoring the gifts of all people on campus.

Through your teaching, scholarship and leadership on the University of Dayton Speaker Series, you weave social justice themes in the classroom and bring diverse voices to the podium. Both immensely enrich the education of our students.

Again, without fanfare and gentle persistence, you have made a real difference on our campus.

Thank you, Don and Kathy, for modeling for all of us what it means to be leaders in the Marianist tradition. We celebrate the graceful, humble ways you teach us to serve.