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## Sharing a Common Purpose

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# Sharing a Common Purpose

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Friday September 22, 2017

By Eric F. Spina

## **“We Share a Common Purpose, a Common Joy”**

**Eric F. Spina**

**Opening Faculty and Staff Meetings**

**September 2017**

Good afternoon!

It is wonderful to be with you today, almost exactly a year since I first had the opportunity to share some remarks and my initial thoughts about the challenges and opportunities ahead for our University.

For me, personally, this has been a remarkable and rewarding year on campus working with faculty and staff as true colleagues. I have met and learned so much from so many of you as you live the Marianist charism on a day-to-day basis. I have learned about our history, the reasons that you either sought to come here or have joyfully remained, the hopes — as well as the concerns — that you have for the University and our mission, and the great joy that you derive from the difference you make through teaching, engagement, and research or discovery.

I have felt every day that I am at a values-driven institution, values that are deeply held, broadly lived, and give form to our excellence as a university. I truly feel the “soul” and the beating heart of this great University.

It is due to this “soul,” your selflessness and deep devotion to UD, as well as your hard work that so much has been accomplished this year, and so well. As a community, we engaged in meaningful, candid conversations about our future, imagined what that future could be, and developed a bold 20-year aspirational vision. We set new records in sponsored research and first-year enrollment, most rewardingly enrolling the most racially and socio-economically diverse class in the history of the University. We developed new academic programs — including online programs — hired outstanding new faculty and staff, implemented efficient new enterprise business processes, worked hard to enhance the student culture on campus, began to formulate a strategic plan for diversity and inclusion, enhanced our relationships with alumni and friends, and continued to modernize and maintain our physical plant. We partnered locally to begin the revitalization of the Montgomery County Fairgrounds and plan

for a dynamic new future for the historic Dayton Arcade. But just as importantly — albeit away from the headlines — faculty, staff, and students partnered quietly and effectively with local communities to improve the quality of life while providing an extraordinary education for our students.

The sense of shared purpose at the University of Dayton is strong and brings such joy to our work. That shared purpose is our foundation for moving the University forward; it is a shared purpose that calls on us to serve the common good. Given the complex challenges in our city, nation, and world, we *\*need\** more institutions to act more selflessly even while ensuring their sustainability. As a Catholic, Marianist educational institution, we hear this call and recognize that we must step forward courageously in support of our core values, step forward to make a difference: there is no better way to educate our students to be leaders, no better way to orient our research, no better way to fulfill our mission.

Through the strategic visioning process last spring and in my installation speech, the notion of “the common good” — long an essential part of our Catholic University — became **elevated** as a way of orienting our teaching, research, scholarship, and community engagement. We challenged ourselves to design an integrated education to prepare students for leadership roles in building socially just communities and pursuing a research agenda that fulfills societal needs and grows the Dayton economy. We expressed a desire for deeper mutually beneficial partnerships that can build upon community assets and elevate the education of our students as community builders.

Why was I moved last April to suggest this future path, a path where we might be known as The University for the Common Good? More than 3,000 people — faculty, staff, students, alumni, friends, and community partners — weighed in on our strategic vision during a highly inclusive, yearlong process. We heard time and again that building community is in our DNA as a Catholic, Marianist university. We heard that Catholic social teaching and social justice concerns must be cornerstones of our future. I heard and I believed...but I also saw this philosophy in the actions of our students, who use their talents and gifts in a very visible way to serve others — whether it’s launching a fair trade campaign on campus, transforming a former Dayton Public School site into an urban farm, or traveling to India to work on a solar refrigeration project to keep vaccines cool during electricity blackouts.

As I’ve pointed out to numerous groups, University of Dayton students really are different. They are not here solely to get a degree so that they can become rich or achieve personal fame or glory. They are here to become educated so that they can make a difference. Sometimes they frame this as giving back to their local communities, sometimes as addressing a critical societal ill, sometimes as supporting those less fortunate than them. But they are focused on others, not self.

I see this same outward, selfless focus in the lives of so many of our alumni, who inspire me with their passion, professionalism, and deep faith in making the world a better place for all. When I met this year's Alumni Award winners last weekend, I was moved by their stories. John Gravier **and** Molly MacCready, both 2008 graduates, heard a call to serve and answered it. Both are dedicated to educating children — whether in under-resourced communities in our country or Uganda, where former street children receive scholarships. John and Molly, who graduated from UD less than 10 years ago, stand out for their imagination and their belief in the possible.

Our students and alumni have learned these servant-leadership skills from you, their gifted teachers, who have inspired and cultivated their commitment to others. You have dedicated yourselves to teaching, research, and scholarship that serves humanity, that educates the mind *and the heart*, that surely gives you joy and gives us purpose

Thus, our Marianist brothers and sisters and all of you have us ideally positioned to prepare generations of servant-leaders with the ability to partner for the common good. This is what truly can differentiate us in higher education, what can attract students and faculty to UD, what can be the true value-add to a University of Dayton diploma, and \*how\* we can contribute meaningfully to advancing social justice and making a difference in society.

As we begin localized planning and broader realization of our strategic vision to be The University for the Common Good, we need to make sure that we share a common language as well as stories and symbols to express what the "common good" means at UD. I know that we have both scholars and practitioners here on our campus who can help us refine our understanding of the origins and meaning of "the common good" and develop approaches to our work.

It is important to note that much work has already been done both at the level of the global Catholic Church and here at UD to explicate the notion of "the common good," one that extends beyond the points I made in my inaugural address.

In his historic encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII defined the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."

The focus must be on what we can achieve as a human community, and, as later noted by John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*, "not simply the sum total of particular interests; rather... an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person."

The common good, then, is focused on what social conditions are authentically good for individuals in community, individuals who respect each other, care for each other, and are in a dialogue with God such that core values are shared.

From a campus perspective, five years ago, the Mission and Identity Task Force, co-chaired by Brother Ray Fitz and Paul Vanderburgh, prepared an excellent report, *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton*. “Partnering for the Common Good” emerged as one of the overriding themes.

That report reaffirmed our commitment to be a “partnership university” and singled out two principles of Catholic social tradition — solidarity and subsidiarity — as guides for partnering for the common good.

In the words of the task force, *“Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. Solidarity demands a commitment to go beyond self interest and to love one’s neighbor within the social networks in which one participates (local, national, and international) with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to lose oneself for the sake of the other.”*

The second principle, subsidiarity, reflects Catholic social thought that decisions are to be made at the lowest level possible and the highest level necessary. It is an invitation and a call to participation.

Subsidiarity requires that decisions are made by the people closest to and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community. It often calls for us to work at the grassroots level with individuals, families, and neighborhoods to address the critical issues of society and advance justice for all. Although there are issues that can only be addressed at higher levels — state, national and international — building community often starts at home.

We cannot, as an institution or individually, serve the common good unless we respect others and honor the dignity of all people. That’s the cornerstone of our mission — a historical touchstone for who we are and will continue to be as we evolve and adapt for the times.

In light of recent violent demonstrations nationally that serve as the antithesis of respecting difference and building community, I believe that we must be a beacon for the way we celebrate difference and welcome free speech, yet reject bigotry and hate speech unequivocally.

This is more important than ever before because through the efforts of so many of you, we are becoming a more diverse campus. This places important responsibilities on each of us for strengthening the University’s inclusive spirit and valuing the talents of each member of our community.

***It’s up to all of us*** to understand and be able to articulate why diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical for the quality of our learning environment, why they are inextricably linked to excellence. Improved diversity, equity, and inclusion expand our institutional ability,

intelligence, and creativity. This, in turn, makes us a stronger, more creative, more innovative campus community.

***It's up to all of us*** to avoid language and actions that are hostile to others. Serious intellectual disagreement and critique do not, by themselves, constitute disrespect or hostility. However, hate speech is not free speech — and should never find a home on our campus, especially as we are committed to community, a community that is for all. Words matter. Actions matter. Civil, meaningful discourse matters. What we do individually and as a community can make a difference in whether people of difference of any sort feel that this is *\*their\** community, too...and whether their gifts and talents can be part of what drives us to greater intelligence, greater creativity, greater excellence.

***It's up to all of us*** to make a concerted effort to learn from people different from ourselves to ensure that all feel at home on our campus. We are made in God's image and likeness, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. A diverse campus models our common humanity. A diverse campus prepares our students for working and living in a global society that requires working across differences with empathy, respect, cooperation, and understanding.

I'm not naïve about the tumultuous times we're navigating. At times, we'll be challenged to live up to our Marianist ideals.

The complex, often polarizing issues of our day can divide us if we don't do the hard work of cultivating respect for each other and listening — intently listening — to diverse points of view. Even on our campus, where we pride ourselves on our sense of community, we must be vigilant against hate.

Let's commit ourselves to encouraging respectful dialogue, rejecting hate speech, and building community. We can model the difference we want to see in the world. We can be a beacon.

On my phone, I have two photos that I have been showing a lot of people lately — one of last fall's Office of Multicultural Affairs reception for new students of color and one of this year's event. In this year's gathering, students spilled out into the hallway. We want to see that representation grow every year, and to do so, we simply must create a more diverse, welcoming, and interculturally inclusive campus to thrive in the future.

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Society of Mary and still an inspiration for our times, brought diverse people together in a common mission.

Today, we must do the same. We are builders of community — across and through all differences. If we do this well, we will be on the path to be The University for the Common Good.

Thank you for all you do to model the very best of the University of Dayton to our students and to the world. Have a great semester.