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A Mission Written in Their Hearts

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 udayton.edu/blogs/president/2018/02/lackner_awards.php



Friday February 9, 2018

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. 9, 2018, about this year's two recipients: Margaret Pinnell, associate dean for faculty and staff development in the School of Engineering, and Paul Vanderburgh, associate provost of graduate academic affairs.

I love everything about this evening — the warmth and hospitality, the delicious meal we share together, and the storytelling.

I'm especially touched by the stories, the ones spoken from the heart. The ones that speak to the essence of what makes UD so special.

Our enduring character as a Catholic, Marianist university depends upon the dedication and faith of faculty and staff who ensure that we are always true to who we say we are. That's why the Lackner Awards are among the highest awards we give.

Every day on campus — from the classrooms and laboratories to the residence halls and student neighborhoods — I witness committed people who live our mission with quiet faith, using their diverse gifts and talent to serve others.

Few live that mission more deeply than tonight's award recipients, Margie and Paul.

They lead with their heads. They lead with their hands. They lead with their hearts.

They're thoughtful, carefully consider what they do, and articulately express it.

They don't give orders, but are willing to roll up their sleeves and do what must be done.

But more than anything else, they lead with their HEARTS. They're caring and empathetic for others, understand the impact of their work on people, and want to make a difference for individuals who need a difference to be made. Our mission as a university is written in their hearts.

Margie, thank you for using your engineering knowledge to help others, for viewing your life's work as a vocation.

You are a leader who serves. I admire the way you champion social justice, diversity, and inclusivity. I value the way you model our commitment to the Catholic and Marianist philosophy of education.

Through your involvement in the ETHOS Center in the School of Engineering, you have helped students learn how to use their skills to help others around the world. These students return to campus forever changed, with a greater appreciation for the dignity of all people, the resiliency and hope of all people.

Closer to home, you've collaborated with other departments to expand STEM literacy in local K-12 schools. That's forward-thinking.

And, Margie, there is no one on campus who is a stronger, more articulate, and more committed advocate for diversity and inclusion — whether supporting the Minority Engineering Program, leading programs for female engineers, or standing up when any part of our inclusive campus is threatened.

At every step of your journey — three times at Dayton as a student, then a research engineer, faculty member, and now an administrator — you have made (and are making) a real difference on our campus. You are an extraordinary servant-leader.

Paul, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade told us, "New times call for new methods." The best leaders, in the Marianist style, can adapt and change for the times. I think he was talking about you.

Thank you, Paul, for leading UD's bold — and successful — entry into the world of high-touch online education through a partnership with 2U.

The new digital MBA program, which has exceeded every expectation we had, is already transforming graduate education on campus. The School of Education and Health Sciences will launch an online master's degree in educational leadership this spring, and there's more to come.

I also appreciate how you quietly helped to shepherd the development of two of our most highly sought-after graduate programs — a doctor of physical therapy and a master's of physician assistant practice program.

Great universities stay true to their mission — even while courageously embracing change. Along with Brother Ray Fitz, you co-chaired the Mission and Identity Task Force, an important campus-wide initiative that led to recommendations for strengthening our Catholic, Marianist identity.

Some of the common themes that emerged from that study — building community across diversity and partnering for the common good — are the cornerstones of our aspirational strategic vision.

Paul, I'm grateful for your humility, your collaborative leadership style, and, above all, your willingness to embrace and lead change.

Thank you, Margie and Paul, for modeling for all of us what it means to be transformative leaders in the Marianist tradition. You inspire me and I dare say, all of us, by your example every day.