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A Difference Maker

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Monday July 30, 2018

By Eric F. Spina

A small statue of Our Lady of Wisdom sculpted by sisters in Southern France graces my desk, a quiet reminder to pray for wisdom as I serve the University of Dayton.

It's a recent gift from Father Martin Solma, S.M. '71. I will treasure it always — as I treasure him.

Father Marty's eight-year tenure as provincial will — sadly — come to an end in August. We intended to surprise him with a short tribute video at the spring board of trustees' meeting, his final one as vice chair, but he missed the meeting after tearing his quadriceps tendon and undergoing surgery.

Each one of us who knows Father Marty could regale you with our own stories of his wisdom, his kindness, his goodness, his strength, his courage, his work ethic, and his deep, genuine concern for others. He cares so very deeply.

We could each tell you about the difference we see that he has made at the University of Dayton — and the difference he has quietly made in some individual's life. In Kenya, where the Marianists bring education and skills training programs to some of the world's poorest children, he's a rock star.

We can also tell you how much he loves life, how much fun he is, how he makes us laugh. Indeed, Father Marty's joyful laugh is contagious.

Like Mary, he has spent his life saying "Yes" — whether it's building a school in East Africa or championing the trustees' decision to divest our investment portfolio from fossil fuels. More than anything, he is a champion for the common good.

That's why he encouraged the Provincial Council to make a bold statement about the Marianists' commitment to social justice by fully endowing the Father Ferree Chair of Social Justice with a generous, new \$1.5 million gift.

This is a transformative gift made by a group of brothers and priests who have taken a vow of poverty. Think about that sacrifice for a moment. That's how deeply committed Father Marty and the Marianists are to advancing social justice issues and helping the University of Dayton become more fully The University for the Common Good.

In dedicating his life to God in the name of Mary, Father Marty has given all who encounter him a special gift: the gift of love. The University of Dayton is forever a better institution because of that love.