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8-20-2018

Great Joy, Great Blessing

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Spina, Eric F., "Great Joy, Great Blessing" (2018). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 123. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina/123

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Great Joy, Great Blessing

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Monday August 20, 2018

By Eric F. Spina

One by one, members of the President's Council placed an artifact representing either a favorite part of their job or their philosophy of leadership into the center of the room at the Spiritual Center of Maria Stein.

My colleagues spoke of their faith, their aspirations, and their deep love for the University of Dayton and our mission as they explained the significance of their artifact. This early-evening "fireside chat" has become a meaningful part of the end-of-summer President's Council retreat during my time at UD. Once again this year it served to remind me how fortunate I am to have such incredible colleagues who work so hard, care so much, and truly inspire me to become the best person and the best president that I can be.

Provost Paul Benson shared a gift from India that his wife had given to him — a wooden owl of Athena, representing wisdom.

"It's easy to be smart, but it's hard to be wise," he observed. "As it sits on my desk, it is a constant reminder to me to try to look and listen carefully as owls do before reacting."

Crystal Sullivan, executive director of campus ministry, shared an icon of Jesus and a Samaritan woman meeting at the well, reminding her to be who Jesus calls her to be. "I am at my best when I go to the well with Him," she said.

Lisa Rismiller, secretary of the Board of Trustees, also brought a religious image — a photo of the statue of *Mary, Seat of Wisdom*. "From Serenity Pines, you see her outstretched hand. It's a symbol of community," she said. "Mary says, 'Join me."

Paul Vanderburgh, associate provost for graduate academic affairs, drew a laugh with his contribution, a single sheet of paper. "It's a one-pager. If you can't say it in one page, you shouldn't say it," he joked, pointedly noting that some of us on the President's Council write loooooong memos (not me, of course!).

Larry Burnley, vice president for diversity and inclusion, carefully placed a South African flag in the ring. It's symbolic of the work of his office and others across campus who are creating the space for our campus community to candidly share their stories, even the most difficult ones, in the hope of achieving a greater appreciation of the gifts of all.

A print hangs in Corinne Daprano's office of an ocean's wave with these prophetic words, "If you're not riding the wave of change, you're beneath it." That's a fitting philosophy for the president of the Academic Senate, who is helping to navigate curricular changes for our shared future.

I share this behind-the-scenes look because this is a group of people who are working tirelessly to support the University's faculty, staff, and students as they strive for excellence and impact. On campus, the members of the President's Council are highly visible and widely known as *individuals:* "my dean," "our provost," "my vice president" — leaders who are responsible for accomplishing certain functions and advocating for their unit. But where they really make their mark, and what truly makes a difference for UD, is how these smart, savvy, accomplished, Type-A individuals **work together** for the benefit of the entire University.

And I see it. I see it every day: President's Council members consulting each other, sharing information, considering differing perspectives, debating and discussing what's best for the University of Dayton, our people, and our future. While each member of the President's Council represents a different part of the University, each is drawn to a greater purpose. In the Marianist spirit, they understand that much more is accomplished together than ever could be alone.

When I contemplated the possible pursuit of a presidency, I imagined working with a group of selfless, committed, excellent senior leaders, but I had no idea that I would be so blessed as to work with *these* colleagues and *this* President's Council. These are extraordinary citizens of the University who truly love UD and will do whatever it takes to ensure that we continue

to thrive as a Catholic, Marianist university that helps students discover their vocations and become leaders, conducts research that has an impact in the world, and engages our various communities in mutually beneficial ways.

Being able to work with these extraordinary people brings me great joy. They are a great blessing to me — and all touched by their work.