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Friday September 14, 2018

By Eric F. Spina

Good afternoon!

It is a privilege for me to be with you, my colleagues, as the campus once again hums with the energy, hope, and optimism of another academic year. I hope that your summer was both productive and enjoyable, with time for relaxing with family and friends, and that you enter this year renewed and energized.

I offer an especially warm welcome to the 81 new faculty members and 72 new staff, which includes a number of full-time researchers. Our new faculty hold a place in University of Dayton history as the largest single “class” to join our ranks. Thank you all for bringing your immense talents, your passion, and your energy to UD. Your unique gifts and experience already are making us a much stronger university.

At the University of Dayton, you will discover a sense of shared purpose that calls us collectively, through our teaching, engagement, research, and discovery, to serve the common good as we use our skills to support our students and advance our city and our

world.

You will experience the Marianist charism that animates our campus and calls us to prepare students for their vocations and to be community builders — people of faith, integrity, and compassion who will advance not just their careers, but also justice for the marginalized.

You will develop new approaches to teaching and learning that will prepare students to lead in a rapidly changing world, and you will perform research that pursues fundamental truths and improves society.

I can't wait to see how your new voices, your diverse scholarship, and your passions will complement and strengthen the University of Dayton faculty and staff — and ultimately shape our University for the future.

As for me, I enter my “junior year” as president energized and excited to work with all of the faculty and staff to continue strengthening the University of Dayton. As I recently reflected on the coming academic year, my mind kept returning again and again to three short phrases: Great Joy, Great Purpose, Great Struggle.

Great Joy, Great Purpose, Great — and Worthwhile — Struggle.

Over my two years at UD I have learned a lot about our academic and research programs, and come to deeply appreciate how dedicated all of you are to our students. I have seen how the relationships we cultivate — among us and with our students — give our professional lives great meaning. I can honestly say that this presidency is the greatest professional joy I've experienced in my life because of the deep sense of community that we have built together and that we value. Very simply, you — and all the people of UD — give me great joy. I know you also *take* great joy because of what you invest in each other and the passion you have for the work that you do.

When I think about the work we are all doing — and the societal context in which we do it — I recognize, as I'm sure you do, that we have a great purpose here at the University of Dayton. In these complicated and often challenging times, where else would you rather be, where else could you have a larger impact, than a university, especially a faith-based institution enlivened by the Marianist philosophy of education and our care for both the individual and the community? Here, we can work with bright and eager young people and help them identify their vocation and develop the skills and experience they need to have excellent professional careers and to contribute to stronger, more inclusive, more equitable, and more resilient communities. Here, we are committed to advancing research and discovery that transform lives and pursuing artistic endeavors that remind us of what it means to be human. Indeed, we are blessed to have a great purpose that drives our work.

Now, let's recognize that no great endeavor can be pursued and no meaningful success achieved without challenge, and difficulty, and, yes, struggle. So let's embrace the thorniest problems in our scholarship, bring the most challenging issues into the classroom, pursue the most daunting community issues, be fearless in accepting and optimizing the new business model of higher ed. Let's struggle together, let's help our students grow, let's resolve these important issues, and let's be strengthened as a community through our struggle.

Great joy. Great purpose. Great — and, I feel, deeply worthwhile — struggle. These are my blessings at UD, and I wish the same for you.

We have much to celebrate as we embark on this new year— from dramatic growth of sponsored research to an all-time high of more than \$150 million to the most diverse and academically strong first-year class in our 168-year history. From the wildly successful launch of our online MBA program (more than 300 new enrollments) to a record year in philanthropic giving to UD.

Yet we're not where we want or need to be. For example, for UD to be a better, more creative, more adaptive, more resilient institution, greater diversity across multiple dimensions is absolutely critical as is a truly and deeply inclusive environment. It's not a wanna-be or a should-be: it is an imperative for the University of Dayton to thrive in the future. Both Provost Benson and Vice President Burnley will share with you information today about some very specific diversity and inclusion initiatives that will occur this year and will require all of us to be engaged to ensure that we make progress across the entire institution. I want to be sure, though, that you understand that this is indeed for ALL of us, and that we ALL have room to learn and grow — certainly me and the full University leadership. Indeed, at the President's Council's retreat in early August, we dedicated a day and a half to diversity and inclusion, and specifically to enhancing our own understanding of ways to develop a richer intercultural mindset that can foster our own critical thinking and ability to dialogue effectively across differences.

I will end my remarks today by talking a bit about “change,” but first let me read a PARTIAL list of things that *you* have made happen and — impressively—made happen in just the past two years...

- • The two largest and highest-quality first-year classes in UD history with record enrollments in business and elsewhere
- • Record low percentage increases in growth of tuition rates
- • six new high-volume, high-quality online programs
- • The UDayton Global partnership
- • A joint nursing program with Sinclair Community College
- • ABA approval of a hybrid law degree — one of the first in the country — and multiple new academic and support programs in the School of Law

- • Development of the Arcade Innovation Hub concept
- • The “Runway” procurement system and meaningful savings in purchasing
- • Work to develop a new chart of accounts and associated financial management tools
- • Creation of the UD-Sinclair Academy and more than 30 direct pathways from Sinclair to UD
- • Flyer Promise Scholarship program and the retention of 100 percent of the first cohort
- • Creation of new health and wellness programs for our students
- • New approaches to support the building of community in our residence halls and the student neighborhood
- • New executive directors in the Hanley Sustainability Institute and the Human Rights Center
- • The review of tenure and promotion criteria and potentially their substantive revision
- • Strategic efforts to make our campus more diverse, inclusive, and equitable in every area, from the composition of the campus community to changes in our policies and operations
- • Substantial increase in socioeconomic and racial diversity of the entering undergraduate classes
- • The largest capital project in the University’s history and the largest fundraised project ever in the form of the UD Arena
- • Significant solar cell installations at the Adele Center, Fitz Hall, and Curran Place
- • New brand identity and development of a national reputation campaign
- • Development of new fundraising strategies and movement toward a comprehensive campaign
- • Acquisition of the former Montgomery County Fairgrounds and major progress in planning for its redevelopment
- • Extraordinary growth of the University of Dayton Research Institute and attainment of more than \$150 million in annual R&D expenditures
- • A record number of new full-time faculty hires two years in a row
- • Record-high graduation rates and shorter college careers

And, I could go on and on.

First and foremost, I recognize that I owe all of our faculty, staff, and administrators a huge “THANK YOU” for the hard work of developing and implementing these initiatives and for the very careful thought that went into each to ensure that each was a good fit with our strategic vision. These and other initiatives are important to our future, and while it is easy for me to rattle them off, I understand that they have required significant collaborative planning, detailed analysis, and extraordinary efforts to implement. And you did it.

Second, it makes me realize that I want to spend more time with you, supporting the challenging work of change and adaptation. It’s imperative that everyone understands that this is not simply change for change’s sake. This change is necessary for us to survive, advance, and thrive as we maintain who we are as a Catholic, Marianist university. As you

may already know, Provost Benson and I will be visiting with the faculty and staff in each academic unit this fall to continue the conversations we began two years ago. The need to be agile and to pursue opportunities that you believe make sense strategically are certainly among the challenges we will be prepared to discuss.

Higher education typically is slow to respond to change, but our University's ability to transform ourselves for the times has always been a Marianist hallmark. Please recognize that embracing change marks us as an agile institution at a time when agility is essential.

For instance, we must continue to move away from a financial model that relies solely upon year-over-year growth in net undergraduate tuition revenue at a time when society can't and, frankly, won't accept increases in the cost of college. This is not a challenge just for the budget office. It's a challenge for all of us to become caring financial stewards — financial stewards who think carefully about the necessity of every expense and put fiscal responsibility at the forefront of all decisions for the long-term benefit of the University and our mission.

If progress in changing the racial and ethnic composition of campus continues — and quickens — our initiatives can lead us to be known as a place where diversity has inherent value and inclusion is real at a time when the demographics of college-going students are rapidly changing. These changes will make us more accessible at a time when the country needs to shrink the inequality gap. Some of these new initiatives will enhance our national reputation at a time when the higher-ed landscape is ultra-competitive and is filled with boasts and braggadocio and over-hyped rankings. Our new academic programs will prepare our graduates well at a time when new interdisciplinary fields are developing overnight and employers expect new skill sets.

I could go on and on, but I am sure you understand my point: the changes we have made, and the changes that we need to continue to make, are important changes, changes that will allow us to maintain and even extend our fundamental value while helping us compete in an ever more challenging environment.

TOGETHER, we must continue to recognize where and why change is needed. We must continue to identify the challenge, name the need, wrestle with how we should respond to it together, and be sure to acknowledge and thank those who step up to lead and implement the necessary change. This is as true for the classroom as it is for the laboratory as it is in the finance office as it is in my administrative suite. While we may wish that we could just keep doing what we have been doing, stasis will only harm the University that we love. Stasis will only prevent us from achieving excellence and maximizing our impact. Stasis will only make our aspirational vision impossible to achieve.

This is not a new call, of course. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Marianists, brought diverse people together in a common mission and taught us the importance of connected communities and the need for continual renewal. He imagined a new future.

We should not be afraid to imagine a new future, either.

Please know that I do understand that we are charting a new path together, and you are all being asked to do a lot. Please know that we will throttle back when and where we can — and that we will never lose sight of our Marianist mission and core institutional values that guide all we do. Please know that I will work to support you in these changes and to explain the need when necessary. Most importantly, please know that I am deeply grateful for all of you and for all you do to make us better and more agile and more attuned to our students' and society's needs.

I'll close with Blessed Chaminade's words: "It seems to me that we must not become discouraged if we encounter some obstacle in the way of necessary change. Never has change been done and never will it be done without difficulty."

Through great — and deeply worthwhile — struggle, we will continue to find great purpose — and great joy. There's no one I'd rather be on this journey with than you. I wish you an outstanding year.