

7-25-2019

## To Teach as Jesus Did

Eric F. Spina  
*University of Dayton*, [efspina@udayton.edu](mailto:efspina@udayton.edu)

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### eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "To Teach as Jesus Did" (2019). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 175.  
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Thursday July 25, 2019

By Eric F. Spina

Pausing from chopping peppers for a made-from-scratch pizza, Travis McAfee reflected on what attracted him to sharing his life, his faith — and enthusiasm for teaching — with other young Catholic school teachers.

Looking around the Fitz Hall food lab where his future housemates rolled out pizza dough, cut vegetables for a salad, and measured ingredients for black bean brownies, he saw more than fellow prep cooks. He saw a ready-made support group.

“What drew me to the Lalanne Program was the opportunity to serve in a Catholic school and earn a master’s degree for free. What sustains me is the community life,” says Travis, who will earn a stipend as a social studies and theology teacher at Springfield Catholic Central this fall while “living in community” in a converted soup kitchen in Troy with five other teachers.

I've heard that sentiment expressed time and again from Lalanne students while they're on campus taking graduate courses during the summers. In the fall, they live together while they teach in 17 under-resourced Catholic urban and rural schools in the dioceses of Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Lansing, Michigan.

For the 22 teachers in this year's program, teaching is more than a calling. It's a ministry.

And in a field with a high turnover rate for young teachers, our Center for Catholic Education program is bucking the national trend, largely by offering two years of mentored teaching experience, a spiritual adviser — and the friendship and support of housemates facing the same challenges in the classroom. When you live in community, you become one.

The approach is working. Of Lalanne's 200 graduates, a remarkable 89 percent are still teachers, mostly in Catholic school classrooms spread all over the country, from Fairbanks to Boston. The program, named after Marianist educator Father Jean Baptiste Lalanne, is part of the University Consortium for Catholic Education, a partnership of 13 Catholic colleges and universities united in the common mission of "recruiting and training faith-filled, energetic teachers" for service in parochial schools. Nearly 5,000 graduates of the consortium have taught more than 27,000 students in 34 states. Yes, the faith and values of 27,000 students touched by these kinds of programs. Now, that is impact!

Jacinta Mergler and Peggy Brun, two former Catholic school teachers who run our program, are passionate about Lalanne's mission of preparing teachers to "serve in areas where they are beacons of hope." Both women of deep faith, they express a zeal for their work that is infectious.

"Principals want our students. They're the cream of the crop," says Jacinta, Lalanne director for 12 years. Adds Peggy, the program's coordinator: "We're constantly kneading the program and sculpting the people God sends us, and they always exceed expectations."

Destiney McIntosh, a graduate of DECA High School with an early childhood education degree from UD, will teach preschool this fall at Immaculate Conception in east Dayton while fellow UD grad and housemate, Shelby Aman, will walk to St. Patrick School in Troy to teach second grade. Both wanted to live in an intentional faith community with other first- and second-year teachers.

"I appreciate that we can live in community with other teachers who are new, too," says Shelby. "These are people who feel the same way you feel about God."

Adds Destiney: "I like the idea of sharing my faith and that I'll be able to come home at the end of the day, and (my housemates) will know what I've been through in the classroom."

As we celebrate Lalanne's 20-year anniversary this summer, I salute these young lay teachers who have embraced teaching as more than just their profession. It's their calling.

