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For the Common Good

University of Dayton

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NEWS



Tuesday April 4, 2017

For the Common Good

Using the University of Dayton's Catholic, Marianist heritage as a foundation, President Eric F. Spina today called on the school to help "shape a more just future" by preparing all students to advance the common good.

In far-ranging and visionary inauguration remarks, Spina envisioned the University of Dayton building a global reputation as "The University for the Common Good" over the next two decades.

"Our Marianist commitment to building community and our history of adapting to the needs of a changing world compel us to ask how we will educate students to confront the tests facing humanity," said Spina during a high-spirited presidential installation at the University of Dayton Arena featuring traditional pomp and a few theatrical flairs, including song, dance and a procession of oversized, handcrafted puppets.

Spina touched on proposed research focus areas, curricular revisions and expanded community engagement initiatives — including a highly visible center dedicated to innovation and venture creation in the Dayton Arcade downtown under a proposed new collaboration with a broad spectrum of partners.

As a backdrop for the University of Dayton's aspirations, Spina reflected on the challenges of the day. "Forty-nine years ago today, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and I still hear the echo of his words, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,'" he said, noting that the world is confronting a litany of "seemingly insurmountable" issues — from racism and religious intolerance to poverty and environmental stewardship.

These challenges provide an opportunity for the University of Dayton to expand community engagement, learning, scholarship and research in fields that benefit humanity, according to Spina, a Buffalo native who was installed as the 19th president and only the second lay leader in the school's 167-year history.

Spina, a mechanical and aerospace engineer who previously served as vice chancellor and provost at Syracuse University, started his presidency last summer by asking faculty, staff, students, Marianists, alumni, trustees and friends to think boldly and imagine the University of Dayton in the year 2037.

More than 3,000 people joined the visioning process, which was designed to spark transformational ideas, provide strategic direction, help prioritize University investments and lay the groundwork for a major fundraising campaign. Spina wove many of those ideas into his installation address. At the core: a blurring of the lines between the University of Dayton, the city and the world and an emphasis on developing students' intercultural, applied creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities, preparing them to be "socially conscious leaders" and "innovators, scholars and builders."

The highlights of the University of Dayton's aspirational vision:

- Continued focus on improving affordability, accessibility and diversity as well as enhancing the dialogue between faith and reason, "a centerpiece of Catholic intellectual tradition." Spina described these as foundational commitments for the University.
- Creation of an "ideation center" at the historic Dayton Arcade in the heart of downtown with community, higher education, research and corporate partners.
- Inclusion of community co-working space in Chaminade Hall for nonprofit organizations, who will collaborate with faculty, staff and students on issues ranging from alleviating food insecurity to creating alternatives to violence. The building, once renovated, is expected to house other interdisciplinary UD centers and programs devoted to addressing urgent human challenges through community-based education and scholarship.

- Enhancements to the curriculum that ensure students graduate with hands-on experiences in community engagement in Dayton; intercultural immersion; or innovation, **applied creativity** and entrepreneurship, of which every student will be required to take at least one course. At the graduate level, the University will strengthen its curricula to “prepare professionals for the work of social transformation.”
- Growth in research in three multidisciplinary areas: sustainability and human rights; autonomous systems; and health and bio-sciences. Spina challenged faculty to develop the country’s first dedicated, interdisciplinary autonomous systems master’s program and compete for designation as a National Science Foundation Engineering Research Center in the next decade. He invited high-tech companies to consider building research centers on campus, modeled after the GE Aviation and Emerson partnerships.
- Expansion of intercultural and international immersions for all students, no matter their financial circumstances.
- Hiring and development of faculty who can work across disciplines to create experiential learning opportunities and curricula to support the school’s vision to “prepare students for leadership roles in building socially just communities,” expand partnerships and harness innovation.

“I call on all of us to work together to make the University of Dayton *the* destination for students who want to be innovators and leaders; *the* destination for faculty and staff who relish forging partnerships and leading community-engaged teaching, learning, and scholarship; and *the* destination for pragmatic dreamers who see the development of community as essential in our world and are willing to work hard to achieve it,” Spina said.

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