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# Inaugural Address

University of Dayton

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*Tuesday April 4, 2017*

## Inaugural Address

Below is text from the inaugural address given by Eric F. Spina, 19th president of the University of Dayton, during his installation ceremony April 4, 2017.

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you all for being here. Your presence and support mean more to me than you can know.

I thank all who helped create this four-day celebration of the University of Dayton community. While there are far too many selfless people to name, I express special gratitude to the chairs of the Inauguration Committee, Molly Wilson and Deb Bickford. Please know that I am deeply appreciative of everyone's creativity, dedication, and hard work to make this such a joyful, meaningful moment.

I'll begin my address with a few personal comments, intended to be short because, as my family knows, I am a bit of a sentimentalist, and if I allow myself to go unchecked, I will wind up fighting back sobs rather than just a few tears.

Karen and I have learned so much about ourselves this year in Dayton, and this year of discovery has revealed for me certain truths about my life. I am now able to see my life through a Marianist lens — a lens that has helped me to understand better the intertwining communities that have nurtured, supported, and shaped me over the course of my life.

I see more clearly than ever the family spirit of my Canisius High School community, the challenge and collegiality provided by my Princeton University community, the examples of care and loving provided by my community of cousins and siblings, the impact of collegiality and mentoring received from half a lifetime of deep friendship in the greater Syracuse community, and now the warmth and caring of a Dayton community that has wrapped its arms around us. I'm especially grateful to the Marianists and trustees for your faith in me to lead this great university. All of these communities have made me who I am, and to my great joy, all are here today. I offer you a too-meager, but deeply felt, "thank you" for your love and support.

I want to end my personal reflections by dedicating my installation to my parents and family.

Mom, Dad, and Julie: thank you for your examples of goodness, integrity, perseverance, and loyalty, and for showing me how to live a love-filled life. A son could ask for no better examples, no better parents.

Beloved Karen, Kaitlyn, and Emery: you are my everything — my sun, my moon, my stars. Thank you for the joy and pride you bring me every single day, for filling my life with unending laughter, for your constant love and support. Very simply, I would not be here without you.

As we saw in the video, I invited the University of Dayton community this year to dream big, to imagine a future of extraordinary possibilities. This “strategic visioning” exercise, led so ably by co-chairs Paul Benson and Michelle Pautz, helped me learn about the University’s proud history and deep values. It also generated a wealth of creative ideas about how to maintain the heart and soul of the University of Dayton while aspiring for greater excellence. I’m deeply grateful to the more than 3,000 people who participated in this highly inclusive process. I have listened carefully and engaged deeply with the steering committee who worked hard to distill the conversations and imagine our future — not just tomorrow, but about where we want to be in 20 years, how we will continue to prepare servant-leaders and make a difference two and three generations in the future.

I hope my framing of our aspirational strategic vision does justice to the work and the hopes of so many.

Before sharing elements of that emerging vision, it is appropriate to pause and reflect on our history as we gaze toward a future of immeasurable opportunity.

### **Our Historic Journey Together**

We are stewards of an extraordinary legacy that began with faith, providence, and a call to serve. In 1849, Father Leo Meyer and three Marianist brothers traveled from France to establish a foothold for the Society of Mary in America. They started a primary school for 14 boys that has blossomed from those humble roots into a pre-eminent Catholic university with worldwide influence.

Our story throughout our 167-year history has been one of both humility and boldness. This is not a paradox for leaders in the Marianist mold, who pair selflessness and unwavering faith with courageous vision.

We lead change in the spirit of the founder of the Society of Mary, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, by bringing diverse people together in a common mission. Together, with God’s grace, we imagine our future and work collaboratively to create it.

The University of Dayton has quietly, yet dramatically, transformed itself by turning big dreams into bold moves — always with the common good at the center. That entrepreneurial spirit has shaped us, time and time again, allowing us to model innovation, creativity, and servant-leadership in service to our students, the Catholic church, the Dayton community, and the world.

My predecessor, Dan Curran, dramatically expanded the University of Dayton’s footprint, enhanced our physical plant, and introduced a groundbreaking four-year fixed-tuition plan in response to calls for greater accessibility.

Dan’s predecessor, Brother Ray Fitz, championed community engagement and had the farsightedness to start purchasing turn-of-the-century homes that once housed former NCR factory workers. We’re now one of the nation’s most residential private universities, with student neighborhoods that have the ambiance of a small town with an unmatched sense of community.

Today, our sponsored research volume is on par with elite research universities. The University of Dayton ranks ninth in the country for external funding among private research universities without medical schools, and among Catholic universities, we top the list for sponsored research in engineering.

The entrepreneurial spirit that drives our work in the research laboratories extends to the classroom and beyond. For example, Flyer Enterprises, the fourth-largest student-run business in the country, breeds a can-do spirit and passion in students destined to lead with the values and integrity gained in a holistic Marianist education. And as we will see tonight at the “Celebration of the Arts,” our arts programs are high quality, richly diverse, and connected to the Dayton community.

We are deeply engaged in the city of Dayton and consider our status as an anchor institution a sacred privilege. From offering high ground and safety to refugees of the devastating 1913 flood to working closely with community leaders to imagine the future of the Fairgrounds property, we build community.

Indeed, we have developed one of the best models in the country for educating students to be community builders. The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community has helped redefine the relationship between universities and their communities in the way it builds and sustains mutually beneficial partnerships.

And through our renowned Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, the University serves our Catholic diocese and more than 70 others worldwide by offering online adult faith formation courses — in English and Spanish.

We’ve come a long way from our simple origins. Yet, we have remained true to our mission: We’re a Catholic university committed to a common search for truth and a respect for the dignity of all people. We’re a Marianist university dedicated to recognizing the diverse gifts and talents of all members of our campus community, where we educate students holistically to be servant-leaders and community builders.

Our Catholic, Marianist philosophy of education is unwavering. That’s the strong foundation upon which we build for the future.

Today, we look to the future with faith, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a renewed commitment to engagement with our community.

### **Our Aspirational Vision**

As we look to the year 2037 and beyond, we make foundational commitments to be true to our Catholic, Marianist values and to respond to the hopes and expectations of our community.

We must ensure that a University of Dayton education is affordable and accessible to all who are qualified, and we must achieve greater diversity from the boardroom to the student body.

As a private University in a hypercompetitive environment, it would be easy for us to become a university only for the wealthy, but that would not be true to the spirit of the Marianists or our legions of alumni from humble means. This is an existential challenge for which there is no panacea. We must contain rising costs, generate new revenue, and secure greater philanthropic support to ensure that a UD diploma remains within reach of middle- and low-income students.

We must also create a more diverse, welcoming, and interculturally inclusive campus. By definition, excellence requires greater diversity, as it enriches our learning environment and expands our institutional intelligence and creativity. While we welcome all forms of diversity, including religious, gender, sexual orientation, geography, country of origin, (dis)ability, and ideology, we recognize a special obligation to embrace socio-economic and racial diversity.

We also proclaim our foundational support for excellent teaching and learning and the agility needed to adopt new models. We renew our commitment to teaching that engages students and prepares them for servant-leadership roles. We recognize the essential role the arts and humanities play for the development of critical thinking and forward-thinking leadership, and we seek to enhance the dialogue between faith and reason, a centerpiece of Catholic intellectual tradition.

### **University for the Common Good**

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.

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."

Our city, country, and world confront seemingly insurmountable challenges — including racism and religious intolerance, poverty and its effects on education and health, economic stagnation, environmental degradation, and violent conflict.

We have a fear of difference that precludes solidarity with our neighbor. As a society, we haven't built adequate structures for creating collective change.

Our Catholic, Marianist values and our faith in our ability to work together to shape a more just future call us to lead in service to the common good. We can no longer afford to have these societal issues as background for our education, research, and engagement. Rather, we need to place them in the foreground, such that they are a compelling motivation for our strategic direction, investments, partnerships, teaching, learning, and research.

As we reflect on our mission to Learn. Lead. Serve., we declare proudly and clearly that we are "a University for the Common Good." We prepare servant-leaders who contribute to solutions through community collaboration (LEARN). We perform research that addresses critical issues and supports economic growth (LEAD). We engage in mutually beneficial partnerships to strengthen our communities (SERVE).

We are not so naïve and self-flattering to think that University of Dayton efforts alone will "solve" the world's ills, but we also understand that we are an influential research enterprise, a powerful economic engine, and a university dedicated to graduating servant-leaders prepared and eager to make a difference.

As we embrace the future, let us design the ideal, integrated education to prepare students for leadership roles in building socially just communities. Let us deepen our reciprocal partnerships in the Dayton community and do our part to enhance its vitality. Let us conduct research that matters, with an impact locally and globally. And finally, let us harness the innovative spirit of faculty, staff, and students and spin out ventures that create jobs and economic value, especially here in Dayton. Let us become known, nationally and globally, as THE University for the Common Good.

While we are not the only university that aims to impact the public good, 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.

What is the path for us to become known as The University for the Common Good?

### **Servant-Leadership Curricular Requirement**

First, we must further develop an integrated, engaged education for our students in the Catholic, Marianist tradition. We must set the expectation for servant-leadership and put in place programs, courses, learning-living environments, and experiences that will prepare our graduates to be innovative leaders ready to build community and advance solutions to complex issues.

I call on the University community to ensure that EVERY student receives an integrated curricular, residential, and experiential education designed to build capacity for leadership in civic engagement, community building, and innovation. I urge the faculty to weave into this initiative shared, thematic first-year experiences, courses in our distinctive Common Academic Program, and disciplinary content in every department and school.

Beyond this integrated curriculum, we must ensure that every student — every student — will leverage classroom learning by engaging in substantive, deeply meaningful experiential learning in one of three overlapping leadership-building areas: 1) Community engagement in Dayton; 2) Innovation, applied creativity, and entrepreneurship for either for-profit ventures or community-focused innovations; or 3) Community-engaged intercultural immersion. I'll touch briefly on each to give a sense of our aspirations.

### **Community Engagement**

Many faculty, staff, and students are already engaged in reciprocal partnerships in the Dayton community, but we envision deeper collaboration and greater impact. We extend our deep gratitude for our partners and seek to work collaboratively to further strengthen Catholic and urban education; help alleviate food insecurity and improve nutrition and health; build community across differences in race, religion and nationality; develop environmentally sustainable neighborhoods; and create alternatives to violence.

We look forward to working with community leaders and neighborhood organizations to identify the most effective ways to extend our partnership for greatest mutual benefit —building upon community assets and elevating the education of our students as community leaders.

To support this initiative, we commit to adding “community geographers,” faculty and staff who will analyze neighborhood-based data and trends to help identify and prioritize the greatest issues for our common mission. Further, as part of our plans to renovate the historic Chaminade Hall, we pledge to create “community co-working space” to bring non-profit community organizations to the heart of campus where they can work closely with each other and our students. We envision Chaminade Hall housing other strategically pivotal, community-based centers and serving as a hub of student and faculty activity.

## **Innovation, Applied Creativity, and Entrepreneurship**

Across the University, we have built a robust and highly regarded set of programs and initiatives in innovation, applied creativity, and entrepreneurship.

The Dayton region — once the cradle for innovation — is coalescing resources and working toward re-centering our regional economy on innovation and the collaborative harnessing of creative ideation.

We seek to capitalize on the entrepreneurial spirit of our campus and the strategic focus of the greater Dayton region with investments and initiatives that will be catalytic for our community and transformational for the University of Dayton.

First, if current development plans proceed, the University of Dayton will become an anchor in the historic Dayton Arcade in the heart of Dayton. We envision locating faculty and staff offices there, offering courses, and partnering in an ideation center intended to fuel economic growth and promote entrepreneurship.

This downtown hub, envisioned as a collaboration among entrepreneurs, higher education, research institutions, and arts and cultural organizations, will be available for students, faculty, and staff pursuing innovation. This will be a place where students from a variety of disciplines engage in experiential learning by innovating or supporting others from across the community who are creating new ventures. It will be a place where our students gain confidence that they can, indeed, work in community to change the world.

We cannot be a driving force of innovation, applied creativity, and entrepreneurship if we do not exhibit these qualities as an institution. Enabling faculty and staff who wish to pursue commercialization and venture creation demands that we step outside of our comfort zones and develop innovative policies, practices, and incentives.

Secondly, we aspire to partner with Dayton neighborhoods, local foundations, banks, economic development organizations, and regional businesses to develop a "community innovation center," an incubation site for neighborhood businesses and non-profit ventures, with a special focus on women- and minority-owned companies. At the community innovation center, students will share their expertise, learn practical lessons by working alongside practitioners, and develop skills in working across differences in a highly collaborative environment.

Finally, because innovation and adaptive leadership are at a premium in our world, we should strive to become the first university in the country in which EVERY STUDENT will take at least one course on innovation, humanity-centered applied creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking. I urge the faculty to develop imaginative ways to support this ambition and extend its academic scope across the entire campus.

## **Intercultural and Global Engagement**

The issues we are addressing in our city resonate across our country and around the world. We believe all students can benefit from a challenging intercultural or international experience.

Here at home, we will increase the racial, ethnic, and cultural composition of our faculty and staff, and enrich the curriculum to expand students' intercultural competencies.

We also see special value in the inclusion of deep international and intercultural living/learning immersion experiences as one of the ways in which students can satisfy the expectation of meaningful experiential learning.

We have been blessed by the Marianist order's global orientation and longstanding educational presence in numerous parts of the world, including East Africa, India, and our own inner cities. We will grow the opportunities available for such immersions and ensure that they are available to all students, no matter their financial circumstances.

## **Graduate Programs**

At the graduate level, we have strengthened STEM education that supports our status as a national research university. The scholarly focus of our distinctive Ph.D. program in theology supports the Catholic church's commitment to social justice and human solidarity. Beyond these offerings, though, is the opportunity to enhance a wide range of other graduate programs so that we further build a reputation as the university for graduate training that prepares professionals for the work of social transformation. We might also explore a capstone requirement in select master's programs to give students the opportunity to serve leadership roles in community engagement and innovation initiatives.

We will provide clear incentives to departments and programs aimed at diversifying our graduate offerings to not only align with our strategic aspirations but also grow revenue and research capacity.

## **Research**

In becoming "The University for the Common Good," we cannot neglect the essential role that research plays in addressing societal problems, driving economic development, and expanding opportunity.

Our research has grown through the extraordinary efforts of faculty and staff and collaboration among the University of Dayton Research Institute and academic units. This collaboration, joined by robust partnerships with corporations, government, and higher education, is essential. We cannot go it alone. We must leverage our greatest strengths and pursue a well-defined research agenda that fulfills societal needs and represents great opportunity. We also must be prepared to make investments in faculty, staff, graduate students, and facilities in three focus areas: sustainability and human rights; autonomous systems; and health and bio-sciences.

### *Research Focus: Sustainability and Human Rights*

In *Laudato Si*, the papal encyclical on environmental stewardship, Pope Francis writes, "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all...The notion of the common good also extends to future generations...We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity." These interlocking needs identified by Pope Francis — sustainability and human rights — present an extraordinary opportunity as a research focus for a Catholic, Marianist university.

We have already invested in and achieved notable progress in renewable energy and energy efficiency, including the establishment of the Hanley Sustainability Institute, specialized energy labs, and new interdisciplinary academic programs. Our Human Rights Center, co-located with the Hanley Institute, presents an unparalleled opportunity to conduct research at the intersection of technology and human rights.



We must build upon our cross-University strengths in energy efficiency, biofuels, batteries, energy integration and management, and energy informatics. Success in these areas cannot be measured by technological achievement alone, but also by the impact that our work will have on the common destiny of all. As we look to expand our energy and environmental research, we will pay special attention to opportunities where sustainable energy and human rights researchers can work together to advance the common good, preparing students to be leaders in improving standards of living and creating a more sustainable environment.

#### *Research Focus: Autonomous Systems*

Autonomous systems will impact every sector of the economy and touch our daily lives — from driverless transportation to banking, education, and medicine. This rapidly growing field emerges as another focus for the University of Dayton because it builds on our research strengths, provides ample opportunity for investment from industry and government, and benefits from regional partnerships. We want our students and researchers involved in this intelligent systems work because they will bring to bear a holistic perspective, including technology, humanities, law, and business.

Our investments in developing an autonomous systems research focus will leverage University strengths, including sensing, controls, machine learning, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence. We have an opportunity to be a leader in this area, but only if we act quickly and boldly. I challenge us to be the first university in the country to develop and deliver a dedicated, interdisciplinary autonomous systems master's program. In the long term, if we select the right research niche and invest deeply in faculty, staff, and quality programs, I believe we can compete for designation as a National Science Foundation Engineering Research Center in the next decade. I look forward to working with University researchers and faculty to shape what will be a signature area of research and graduate education, and what could be a cornerstone of economic development in the region.

#### *Research Focus: Health and Bio-Sciences*

For our final research focus, we should explore the expansion of research and creation of new graduate programs in health and bio-sciences. The increasing demand for better, more accessible, and more affordable health care coupled with the availability of substantial funding in this area present an unparalleled opportunity for us.

While we may not have a medical school, we have expertise in bioengineering, biology, medicinal chemistry, and applied health sciences. These can be building blocks for a competitive, high-impact research program if we perform an honest assessment of how our strengths can be supplemented by key partnerships and aligned with funding opportunities. I challenge our faculty, researchers, and administrators to work together to identify a coherent thrust worthy of University seed investment.

I see challenge and opportunity in these three research initiatives. Given our size and resources, we need to be highly selective and tightly focused with our investments. Given the stakes and the rapid pace at which technology advances, we also must proceed with some urgency to define our distinctive approach. As our research prowess grows, so will our national reputation and our opportunities to build initiatives in other areas of inquiry that today may only be embryonic.

As part of our research strategy, we will aggressively pursue corporate partners who may, like GE Aviation and Emerson, make major investments on campus and work with researchers, faculty, and students to advance these

focused research realms.

At the undergraduate level, we offer excellent opportunities for students to perform research. Faculty and staff truly engage our young scholars, and the quality of students' research is extraordinary, rivaling that at the best research universities. We must invest to create even more opportunities for undergraduate research both in these strategic areas and more broadly.

Strategic investments will not enable greater research success if we do not align faculty policies and practices to support these ambitions. I ask the provost, deans, department chairs, and the academic senate to work together to evaluate tenure and promotion guidelines, release time, differential course load, and mentoring of undergraduate students.

### **Faculty and Staff of the Future**

We cannot realize our aspirations without appropriately supporting the reason for our success — the faculty and staff. Their “family spirit” is the source of our community on campus and among our alumni. Whether it is the deep commitment of a faculty member to a research mentee, or the extra time that a faculty or staff member devotes to advising a social action club, or the way the Academic Senate and the administration work together for the benefit of the entire University — the faculty and staff are the heart of our campus.

During the visioning process, proposals surfaced calling for the creation of new institutes or schools focused on interdisciplinary areas; others called for a move away from departments and schools altogether. I hold that discipline-based education is important. In a world where our graduates need to solve complex, interconnected challenges, it's also critically important to create connections between faculty and students across disciplines. Rather than inventing new units, I propose we maintain the integrity of departments and schools while creating loose-knit, cross-University “transdisciplinary faculties” to provide leadership along the three themes that define our aspiration as a University — community engagement, innovation, and intercultural engagement.

Intended to break down silos, these transdisciplinary faculties would include a faculty member from each unit. In collaboration with their home schools and departments, these faculties would be responsible for the development and oversight of experiential learning opportunities in each of these domains along with the development of relevant curricula.

We will emphasize building critical mass in the research focus areas with faculty and staff hires in each school. We also intend to add individuals who will contribute distinctively to the transdisciplinary faculties that will advance community partnerships, innovation, and intercultural engagement. We will encourage joint hires across departments and schools, and be prepared to create cross-unit structures for mentoring, evaluation, and recommendations on tenure and promotion.

Finally, I call on the provost and the Academic Senate to broaden tenure and promotion criteria to also reward community-engaged scholarship, sponsored research, innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and venture creation/commercialization activities. Ultimately, we need to hire and support faculty who will advance our strategic aspirations and thrive in an environment focused on leadership in community engagement and innovation.

### **Graduates of the Future**

Now, envision the year 2037 and the highly diverse University of Dayton graduating class, born in this very year of our strategic visioning conversations.

As students, the Class of 2037 will be inspired learners focused on a self-transcendent purpose, discerning their vocation and profession, and seeking their passion. They will see the value of their learning within and outside of their disciplines, as it will be anchored in experiential learning.

As innovators, scholars, and builders, they will have learned how to both fail and rebound from failure. They will be culturally nimble, as they will have worked across differences in diverse communities on meaningful issues. They will be prepared for success in life because they will have gained skills in self-learning, problem solving, collaboration, and conflict resolution.

The Class of 2037 will consist of self-aware, socially conscious leaders, and, thus, will be in great demand by employers, here in a revitalized Dayton, across the world in Shanghai where their intercultural excellence will be viewed as essential, and in small rural towns and large inner cities where their community-building skills will be highly valued.

Because of the work we will do together, we will prepare generations of servant-leaders who are known for their community-building skills, practical wisdom, ethical compass, and ability to partner for the common good.

Because of the work we will do together, we will expand scholarship and research in fields that benefit our human community and help build an innovation economy here in Dayton.

Universities have always had a special obligation to society, but in this age of institutions turning inward or abrogating their responsibilities to the greater good, that obligation is heightened and creates a special opportunity for the University of Dayton.

We view serving the community and our world as a fundamental part of our Catholic, Marianist mission, our *raison d'être*, and we find that we are called to be — indeed, we must be— “The University for the Common Good.”