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It Was a Godsend'

Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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'It Was a Godsend' : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Friday April 17, 2020

'It Was a Godsend'

By Eric F. Spina

When a member of our family is struggling, we quickly offer a helping hand.

That's the spirit behind the Student Crisis Fund. Established a decade ago, the fund has seen an influx of donations from alumni, faculty, and staff who are responding generously and with open hearts to help our students. My heart overflows with gratitude for their care during these difficult times.

In any given year, a half dozen students will apply for funds for emergencies, such as a plane ticket home after an unexpected death in the family or crutches for a broken leg. In 2019, after the Memorial Day tornadoes, 15 students requested help, largely for temporary housing

and food. Today, we have fielded 290 requests because of hardships created by the pandemic — and the need will only grow.

Here's one such story from Donise Walker, who inspires me with her compassion and dedication to her family and our community's youth. She's a first-grade teacher, single mother of two sons, mentor for her goddaughter, caregiver for her aging mother — and soon-to-be a newly minted UD graduate with a master's degree in educational leadership. She puts a face to the crisis facing some of our students:

"I had just paid all the bills when I learned that schools had shut down indefinitely because of coronavirus. What was I going to do? I didn't qualify for assistance, yet I needed to buy groceries to feed the kids, who were suddenly home. I hadn't planned on this.

After the tornadoes destroyed large parts of Dayton last year, we lost power in our Vandalia apartment building and were without a home for a week. I applied for funds through UD's Student Crisis Fund, and we lived in a hotel temporarily. Less than a year later, we found ourselves facing this new, unexpected crisis. I filled out the application online and requested help with groceries and just hours later money was direct deposited in my bank account. It wasn't even a day later.

It was a Godsend. That's the only way I can describe it. It was definitely an answer to a prayer, and I'm so grateful for that support.

I turned in my last paper for my online master's degree program on Friday night and will graduate in May. Over the last 18 months, the students in my cohort and I have bonded. We literally watched each other grow through this program. One even had a baby, who just turned one. My previous supervisor at Head Start told me about UD's program, and it was perfect for me as a working mother. I'm now finishing my application for UD's doctoral program in education for leadership for organizations.

This Bible verse from Jeremiah 29 guides my life: 'For I know the plans I have for you...plans to give you hope and a future.'"