

5-10-2020

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eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "Even Apart, We Are One" (2020). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 220.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina/220

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Even Apart, We Are One

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By Eric F. Spina

"We are ONE UD. We are one human community." That's the message I delivered at virtual spring degree conferral ceremonies May 9-10, 2020. Watch the undergraduate ceremony [here](#) and the graduate and doctoral one [here](#). Here is the text of my remarks for the 1,490 graduating seniors.

Good morning, Class of 2020! And welcome to your degree conferral ceremony, or what might be called 'The-Almost-But-Not-Yet Commencement Ceremony.'

I dearly wish that I were looking out over a sea of your beautiful faces at UD Arena right now, but I feel your presence deep in my heart. Even apart, we are one. We are ONE UD. We are one human community.

I celebrate your many accomplishments. I pay tribute to your families, particularly your mothers on their special day. And I promise — I *promise* — that we will come together again for a proper commencement with all the traditional pomp and circumstance, a chance

to recognize each of you individually, and an opportunity to thank you for your contributions to our beloved UD.

Just as the tulips seemingly blossom overnight outside the chapel every spring, you will return to your alma mater time and again in the years to come even more deeply committed to this special community we have built and nurtured together.

That sense of community *lives* in you. And it always will, no matter where you are.

Our lives have been turned upside down, literally overnight. I know you're heartbroken about missing the final weeks of your senior year, the opportunity to celebrate with friends who've become like family, the chance to thank professors for shaping your view of the world while preparing you to succeed in it. We are all making sacrifices for the greater good, so that we can save lives — and, it's not an understatement — change the world for the better.

I've thought about how UD educates for adaptation and change — it's one of the pillars of our Catholic, Marianist philosophy of education — yet no class or experiential learning opportunity could have prepared you for this moment. Could have prepared any of us.

Still, you are resilient. We are resilient. And, together, we are facing these difficult days with the tenacity and faith of UD's founders and the can-do, imaginative spirit of those who believe in what's possible. All of life's possibilities unfold when we collectively work together, across differences, to create solutions to seemingly impossible problems.

The past is littered with conquered diseases — tuberculosis, smallpox, polio. They were all horrible, but the human race conquered them and became stronger. It would not surprise me — and would bring me great joy — if graduates of your class helped develop a vaccine to combat a future infectious disease. Or a way to help society's most vulnerable during a public health crisis. Because even now, I know of many alumni *and students* who are doing whatever they can — visible and invisible, big and small — to help their neighbors and our human community during this current pandemic.

Every University of Dayton graduating class has its story to tell. Your story is powerful, poignant, courageous. And how you continue to rise above the times will determine not just your character, but your destiny.

My heart swells with pride when I see how we have pulled together during your final semester and embraced the call of our Marianist founder, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, who said, "New times call for new methods."

The ways we've been in community with each other — and in service to the world — are inspiring. Even apart, we are one.

These images will stay with me always:

- Professors, erasing the line between the classroom and home, taught economics, English literature and other online classes from their living rooms. Some of you undoubtedly showed up in your pajamas.
- Some of you presented research from your family's front porch as part of the annual Stander Symposium, which drew an amazing 500 faculty-mentored presentations. From Zoom room discussions to virtual poster sessions, you showed us what it means to be intellectually engaged in research, creative endeavors and innovative thinking. Bravo!
- After seeing news reports of nurses making face masks from makeshift supplies, faculty donated boxes of gloves, masks and other personal protective equipment to healthcare workers on the frontlines. On the day UD Arena would have hosted the First Four, our staff turned the parking lot into a drive-up COVID-19 testing site. This is what commitment to community means.
- Our faith sustains us. The residents in Founders Hall created an online faith sharing group, while the Marianists on Chambers Street live streamed Mass from their home.
- The arts uplift us. Music students shared “porch concerts” on Facebook. The Pride of Dayton serenaded students with the fight song as remote classes started.
- We are a community of support, now — and always. The Career Services office offered Zoom appointments with career advisers and the Multi-Ethnic Education and Engagement Center had daily “MEC Lounge hours” to build solidarity and extend support.
- In a shortened basketball season, the men and women carried the red and blue proudly and prominently. The women were showered with confetti when they won the A-10 tournament in our own incredible UD Arena. The men joyfully cut down the nets after going undefeated in league play — the best finish in school history. The #3 nationally ranked Flyers can boast of player and coach of the year in Obi Toppin and Anthony Grant.
- All over the country students and alumni posted messages of support using the hashtag WeAreOne, on “sheets of solidarity.”

Today, we join in solidarity over the miles, to celebrate the conferral of your hard-earned degrees. Even apart, we are one.

As your president — and as a representative of the UD faculty, staff, vowed religious, Board of Trustees, and all of Flyer Nation — I salute you and your accomplishments in this moment of human need and across your time as a University of Dayton student.

Congratulations, Class of 2020! Be well, stay safe, come back for Commencement — and go Flyers!

