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The Hope of Your Generation

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The Hope of Your Generation

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Saturday August 22, 2020

By Eric F. Spina

(University of Dayton President Eric F. Spina's welcome to the Class of 2024 at the New Student Convocation on Aug. 22, 2020).

Good morning, Class of 2024! I joyfully welcome you to the University of Dayton. *Your* University of Dayton. *Our* University of Dayton.

This is an extraordinary moment in history. But you are an extraordinary class, too. You're not only one of the largest, the most diverse and most academically qualified classes in University history, but you've also faced adversity, the kind that determines your character and your moral compass.

You've already been tested in ways impossible to envision just six short months ago, and I recognize these days have not been easy for you. The pandemic cut short the swan song of your senior year in high school. In response to these uncommon times, you gave up prom, performances on the field and on the stage, and the pomp and circumstances of a traditional

graduation celebration. By any estimation, you, your classmates, and your generation is already making a mark with your selfless sacrifice, giving up all these important milestones in service to the common good.

Your presence here today speaks volumes about your tenacity, your resiliency — and your heart. And, as you’ve discovered during this long, strange journey, for all that’s lost, *much* is gained.

You have learned the **power of sacrifice** because you’ve made necessary ones to keep you and your families safe. You have courageously embarked on your college journey, knowing the sacrifices you will continue to make over the next months to promote safety on campus.

You understand more fully the **meaning of community**, even in our socially distanced world. Your social connections may be fewer, but I imagine, like mine, they’ve become deeper. They’re more meaningful. They’re less to be taken for granted, more to be cherished — particularly with family, loved ones and, in the days ahead, your roommate, a new favorite professor, or the friendly cashier at Marycrest dining hall. On a campus where “community” is our calling card as part of our Catholic, Marianist heritage, I know you will embrace the commitment to care for one another.

You’ve also become more comfortable with **navigating the unknown** on this journey of faith we find ourselves on together. The ability to work with ambiguity means you’ll be able to face uncertainties, adapt to change, and be flexible as the mysteries of life unfold. Flexibility is our watchword in the days ahead and a prized trait in whatever profession you pursue.

Finally, as you look at the state of the world around you, one that’s been upturned by a global pandemic, racial unrest, inequity, and violence, many of you are **finding your voice**, perhaps for the first time. At first, it might be quiet. Then, more resolute. I clearly hear the echo of the voice of the Class of 2024 on this day. The one that says, “We can do better. We can imagine a better future, then we can create a more just and equitable society — together.”

Along with your faculty and families, I have full confidence that you can. Today is the first step on that journey toward stretching the frontiers of knowledge, toward becoming the best version of yourself, of dreaming what is possible, then engaging in the hard intellectual work necessary to realize those dreams. Why *can’t* this class discover cures for future infectious diseases, create a more sustainable planet, restore civility in the public square, embrace diversity, celebrate difference, and shape a more just future for those who are marginalized by society?

Indeed, why not? You have met adversity — one of life’s greatest teachers — and it has made you more resilient. You have shown up, ready and willing to open your minds and hearts and to discover what brings you joy, purpose, and fulfillment. Theologian Carl

Frederick Buechner says that this your calling, or “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

As we start this unusual academic year, remember how blessed we are to be here together at the University of Dayton. Please don’t think about what you are missing, but rather, revel in the incredible opportunities that you *do* have. I ask you to look toward the future with the same optimism and faith that I feel.

I have tremendous faith in you. Your parents and loved ones have faith in you. And our world has faith in you.

You may always feel that you are the “pandemic class,” but this shall pass in the next year and you will STILL be the hope of your generation and our world. You are our future scientists, engineers, educators, poets, artists, humanitarians — and changemakers.

May God’s grace be with you as you start your academic journey. Please, follow the University’s expectations during this pandemic, make good choices, and stay safe — our continued presence on campus depends upon each and every one of you.

Oh, and one more thing: Go, Flyers!