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## It's Not All About Me

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Saturday December 19, 2020

By Eric F. Spina

Good morning, Class of 2020! And welcome to your commencement ceremony — not exactly how you envisioned it the past few years, but **STILL** a moment of celebration and great pride.

I do 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.

I admire how you've persevered since last spring to reach this pinnacle of achievement and joy.

I pay tribute to your families and your faculty mentors who have believed in you and believe you have the power to use your education to shape a better future.

You may feel that you will always be known as the “pandemic class,” but this uncertain time will not last forever. You will not be defined by this moment — you are too talented, too focused, too intent on making a difference. Instead, you will define the days ahead. You are

our future scientists, engineers, educators, poets, artists, humanitarians — and changemakers. I can't wait to see how you will use your world-class UD education to change the world.

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, in all honesty. Yet you have met this moment with persistence, resilience, creativity — and selflessness. And you will always be united by this experience.

Babyboomers have been called the “Me” generation, defined largely by self-absorption. Just think of any episode from the popular sitcom “Seinfeld.”

That got me thinking: What would your moniker be?

As you juggled classes, both online and in person, since March, you have struck me as the “It's Not All About Me” generation.

By wearing masks and following social distancing, you have said to each other, “I protect you. You protect me.” You understand more fully the meaning of community, even in our socially distanced world. You have modeled what it means to work for the greater good. Long after the pandemic ends, these lessons will carry you throughout your lives.

Isn't that what a Catholic, Marianist education is all about? It has prepared you to meet the moment in three important ways.

**First of all, your education has prepared you to be selfless, to work in community with others to do great things together.**

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 like the one we're facing today.

**Secondly, your education has prepared you to shape the future with a moral compass as your guide.**

Without a doubt, today's challenges are daunting. Racism and religious intolerance. Poverty and its effects on education and health. Violence. Divisiveness. Incivility. The deterioration of our environment, what Pope Francis calls “our common home.”

I urge the Class of 2020 to use your education to serve others in ways that will change the narrative of our times. Work together to build socially just communities. Work across differences to find solutions for the world's most pressing problems. And when the

challenges look insurmountable, never lose faith that you can help create a better and more just future for all, particularly the most vulnerable.

**And finally, your education has prepared you to be flexible and able to transform for the times.**

Albert Einstein got it right when he said, “the measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” The early Marianists showed us what it meant to transform when they turned a farm into a school for boys, then into a major Catholic university. Talk about a bold move!

Because you have navigated the headwinds of change, you know you can adapt to any Plan B the future throws at you. You have come to understand that flexibility is the watchword no matter what profession you enter.

As you enter an uncertain future at this inflection point in history, I urge you to dream boldly, act with conviction, and lean into the moment. Keep moving forward, without fear, toward a life of great purpose and service.

Today, we join in solidarity over the miles with your families and friends, to celebrate the conferral of your hard-earned degrees. While I’ve described you as the “It’s Not All About Me” class, today it is all about you.

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 — and go Flyers!

*(Click [here](#) to view any of the December commencement events.)*