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Learn. Lead. Serve. Pray.

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Thursday July 15, 2021

By Eric F. Spina

“Callings” is billed as an introduction to the heart and soul of UD for incoming first-year students, and there’s truth in that advertising.

When Karen and I visited with our new students in this Campus Ministry program during a picnic at Old River Park, we quickly realized they already are enthusiastic ambassadors for the Marianist mission even though they haven’t started classes yet. Traveling to campus from Chicago, Puerto Rico and spots in between, 40 students gave up part of their summer vacation this week to explore their faith and vocation under the guidance of campus minister Elizabeth Montgomery and 12 student leaders. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, they boldly said “yes” to discovering how they can make a difference on campus — and in the world.

“Callings” welcomed this summer’s students shortly after the campus reached the 70 percent vaccination mark, and the joy, relief, and hopefulness in the air was tangible. “Happy In-Person Day!” said lay Marianist Erla Burnside with a welcoming smile as she stopped by our

table of students, who were enjoying pulled chicken and pork sandwiches and each other's company after visiting the Arcade, Riverscape and other notable downtown spots.

During dinner the students tapped into the knowledge of lay and vowed Marianists at their tables during spirited games of "Marianist Bingo," where they learned about the Three O'Clock Prayer and heard advice about how they can live out the charism as students. Not all are Catholic, but all are committed to exploring the special religious tradition that animates UD. All are student leaders in the making.

When Andrew Marshah heard about the program, he texted his friend and UD roommate Joe McLampy: "Sounds fun. We're going." They told us they traveled from the Detroit area to meet new people, get the lay of the land of campus before New Student Orientation, play Spikeball — and deepen their faith.

Kate Sebastian, a junior dietetics and nutrition major, came in from Cincinnati to help lead students through three days of prayer, service, and reflection. Her group spent a morning on clean-up detail at the Great Miami River and created their own artwork while reflecting on the ways creative expression helps them understand God.

Kate will never forget her introduction to the University through participation in "Callings" as an incoming first-year student. "I remember the minute we rolled up to the school. People were holding 'Welcome to UD' signs, and I immediately felt that energy," she said. "This program not only helps with faith formation and leadership, it also helped me make connections."

As Karen and I reluctantly departed, we felt energized and inspired after meeting UD's future servant-leaders — students who understand our Marianist values and want to put them into action.