

12-19-2021

## Build a Bigger Table

Eric F. Spina  
*University of Dayton*, [efspina@udayton.edu](mailto:efspina@udayton.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president\\_blog\\_spina](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina)

---

### eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "Build a Bigger Table" (2021). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 289.  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president\\_blog\\_spina/289](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/president_blog_spina/289)

This Blog is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in President's Blog: From the Heart by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlengen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlengen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

# Build a Bigger Table

[u Dayton.edu/blogs/president/2021/12/build\\_a\\_bigger\\_table.php](https://u Dayton.edu/blogs/president/2021/12/build_a_bigger_table.php)



Sunday December 19, 2021

By Eric F. Spina

*(This is the full text of University of Dayton President Eric Spina's remarks at winter commencement on Dec. 18, 2021.)*

Good morning, Class of 2021! And what a joyous morning!

Congratulations, Flyers! Take a deep breath. Pause. Exhale. And let the realization of this moment wash over you. You. Did. It!

I offer a special welcome to all of our families, particularly those who traveled far to share this moment. I can feel your happiness, your pride, and yes, even a little bit of relief. This day is *finally* here! This is a day you'll always remember and cherish.

Graduates, your family members and dear friends have provided their support and love and made this momentous day possible. Will you please rise, face them, and give them a rousing round of applause?!

Some of you are first-generation college graduates. You personify the American dream, and you will continue to open doors of opportunity — not just for yourselves, but for future generations of your family. We're so proud of you AND so proud of the family members who made your dream — and theirs — come true.

Let's have a special round of applause for all the first-generation college graduates and their families!

Members of the faculty and staff: Thank \*you\* for creating an environment that has allowed these about-to-be graduates to stretch themselves academically, to dream big, to dare to be great. You have prepared them to use their education and faith to make a difference — a real difference — in a world hungry for their community-building skills and innovative thinking.

It's always a challenge to find the right words to share at commencement. Words that touch the heart and soul. Words to live by. Words that will matter to you. Words that might resonate years later.

This uncertain time we've lived through together will not last forever. You will not be defined by the complexities of 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. You have met this moment with persistence, resilience, creativity — and selflessness. And you will always be united by this experience. 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 — and future challenging times — in four 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've been facing for the past 21 months.

**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 2021 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.

**Thirdly, your education has prepared you to bridge divides in a divided world.**

The Marianists often talk about "coming to the table." It's a round table, where no one sits at the head, and all share in spirited conversations and listen to one another respectfully. Each voice at this table has equal importance.

The table is a metaphor, representing inclusivity, respect, and acceptance for the dignity of all people, especially those who hold viewpoints different from your own.

As you enter the world outside this campus, I urge you to build a bigger table. Invite others with alternative viewpoints and those who look different from you to join you around your table. And, most importantly, stay at that table when conflicts and tensions arise.

Pope Francis calls us to create a "culture of dialogue" to be active listeners in an authentic, empathetic way — a way that builds bridges instead of burns them. We can disagree in ways that don't denigrate or exclude others while holding firm in our own convictions. We are all made in the image of God, and therefore **\*everyone\*** deserves the same level of respect and dignity.

And while it's easy to live in an echo chamber, engaging only with those who hold your views, it's important to seek out others with divergent beliefs to test the validity of your ideas and to see issues from a different angle. You can hold firm to your values while hearing differing perspectives. This kind of engagement will help you discern your own positions and motivate you to work with others — even others of difference — toward building the future we all desire for our communities and our nation.

Our society needs you to build bigger tables — and to work to bridge divides. I challenge you as Marianist leaders, to always model civility and respect for others in your professions and in your lives.

**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 history!

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 imagine and shape your future, I urge you to dream boldly, act with conviction, and lean into the moment. Keep moving forward, without fear, toward lives of great purpose and service.

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 2021! May God bless you and keep you in his grace.

Go, Flyers!