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## Family First

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

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# Family First : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Thursday January 25, 2024

## Family First

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By Eric F. Spina

“You’ll never get that time back.”

That’s how Matt Hoyng, an industrial engineer in the University of Dayton Research Institute, talks about the value of UD’s expanded parental leave policy that allowed him to take six weeks off after his second son, Palmer, was born in July.

“I feel a strong connection to Palmer. He slept through the night in week three, and he’s just been a really happy baby,” he said. “I do thank God for the timing of the policy change. It was divine.”

Matt is one of 33 staff and faculty who have used the parent-friendly policy since it was announced in July 2023, just days before Palmer arrived in the world.

I applaud Vice President Troy Washington and the staff in the Office of Human Resources who developed and implemented the policy, and thank the members of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, the staff of the Women's Center, and faculty and staff across campus who advocated for expanding parental leave from three days to six weeks of paid time for benefits-eligible employees. For birth mothers, this is beyond the six to eight weeks they were already eligible to take for maternity leave. All of the conversations about creating a parental leave policy, and the ultimate decision, centered on the Marianist charism and values inherent to our University that prioritize family and prize community building.

Our policy recognizes that parenting takes a number of forms, including caring for a newly adopted child or a foster placement like Emily Wilkins' 6-year-old foster daughter.

Since new parents can take the time intermittently over six months, Emily was able to stay home with her kindergartener on a recent snow day and use other days to take her to various appointments. "One of my biggest concerns about fostering is that we would have a child who had been through so many changes," said the director of assessment and planning in the Student Development Division. "Just to have a bank of time to use in different ways has been wonderful."

Kiki Parke, an enrollment coordinator in the enrollment services office, recently returned to her job after spending three months at home with her newborn son, Charlie.

"That was the biggest blessing," says the mother of two boys. Those three months allowed me to adjust to his sleep and feeding schedules and establish a routine for breast feeding and pumping. I got to bond with my child longer."

Our paid-leave policy is helping us hire talented people in a competitive job market. "I was attracted to the job because of the benefits," Kiki concedes. "It takes a weight off any mother's shoulders to know that we value family first."

Caleb Monnin, general manager of Marycrest Dining Hall, calls the policy "a breath of fresh air." In September, his son, Cade, joined their growing family, which includes a 6-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son.

"My wife and I feel like we're running a circus," he says with a laugh. It's been great to have the extra time. When you're bringing a new person into the world, that's one less thing to worry about."

Fewer than 40 percent of higher education institutions offer paid parental leave to new parents, according to the 2021 "Benefits in Higher Education Report" from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, but the trend is growing.

This is a significant policy change for UD that affirms our commitment to families and a healthy work-life balance. Importantly, all of us can feel comforted that the children of our UD community are surrounded by their parents in the early weeks of their lives. It's what matters.