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Our Man from Rome

11.07.2012 | Hot Topics, Catholic, Culture and Society, Students, Faculty

Miguel H. Díaz, United States Ambassador to the Holy See since 2009, has been named University Professor of Faith and Culture at the University of Dayton.

He will assume the endowed professorship on Nov. 16.

"As ambassador, I know first hand the role of American culture and leadership in international relations as well as the growing importance of religion on the world stage," he said in a phone interview from Rome. "I look forward to building bridges between faith and culture, and to facilitating inclusive, scholarly and constructive conversations that advance the common good."

A prominent Catholic theologian, Díaz was the first Hispanic to represent the United States at the Vatican. Last fall he helped launch the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group of the Secretary of State's Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society. This groundbreaking initiative facilitates regular engagement with communities of faith.

"Miguel Díaz finds common ground in discourses that too often divide. He has been an influential Catholic leader in areas as far ranging as human trafficking to inter-religious dialogue," said Daniel J. Curran, president of the University of Dayton. "He brings a wealth of experience and a thoughtful theological approach to issues of faith and culture. We're delighted that he's accepted this important, highly visible position at the University of Dayton."

Michael Galligan-Stierle, president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, welcomed Díaz's return to Catholic higher education.

"As a world-class scholar who has spent the last three years in service to our country and the world community, Miguel Díaz brings a valuable perspective to Catholic higher education," Galligan-Stierle said. "The wisdom and insights he gained while serving as ambassador to the Holy See will significantly enhance not only the University of Dayton, but also the broader Catholic higher education community."

This is not Díaz's first stint at the University of Dayton. He served as an assistant professor of religious studies from 1996-1998.

"I am delighted to assume this endowed professorship at the University of Dayton at a time when the Catholic church remembers the 1700th anniversary of Constantine's conversion, commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and celebrates the Year of Faith. Whether we consider the profound impact of Constantine's conversion on Christian traditions or the refreshing invitation of the Council to read the signs of the time and to interpret these signs in light of Christian faith and revelation, we stand squarely at the bridging of faith and culture," Díaz said. "This coming year, which Pope Benedict XVI has proclaimed as the Year of Faith, provides a wonderful opportunity for Catholic universities to reflect upon the development of Catholic intellectual traditions and contribute to the ongoing weaving of faith and the cultural realities that surround us."

Before being named U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, Diaz taught theology at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., and Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minn. He was a board member of the Catholic Theological Society of America and is former president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States.

Díaz was previously a member of "Voices for the Common Good," a speaker's bureau of prominent experts on Catholic social thought. In recent years, he has participated in various ecumenical conversations and forums with prominent Catholic leaders. He also organized a theological conversation among African-American and Latino/Latina Catholic theologians around the theme of human identity. During his tenure as ambassador in Rome, Diaz led various bridge-building initiatives among diverse cultural and religious communities.

Díaz's books include On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives (Orbis Books, 2002), for which he received the Hispanic Theological Initiative's 2002 Book of the Year award from Princeton Theological Seminary. He also co-edited From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology (Orbis Books, 1999).
Fluent in Italian, Spanish and French, Díaz also reads Greek, Latin and German. His academic interests include theological anthropology, Latino/Latina theologies and Trinitarian theology.

"Miguel's expertise in Hispanic and Latino/a theology will help the University reach out to Hispanic populations for both faculty and student recruiting," said Paul Benson, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In addition, his experience at the level of international relations will help link the University to populations abroad. "It's all part of a strategic effort to further diversify and internationalize our campus and to move the University to a position of leadership in global Catholic conversations."

Born in Havana, Cuba, Díaz moved as a child to the United States, where his father worked as a waiter and his mother did data entry work. The first member of his family to go to college, Díaz earned a bachelor's degree in history from Saint Thomas University and a master's and doctor of philosophy in theology from the University of Notre Dame. Besides the University of Dayton, he previously taught at Barry University, Saint Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary and University of Notre Dame.

Díaz and his wife, Marian, have four children. Marian, also a theologian, has joined the University of Dayton's faculty as a lecturer. She is teaching courses in scripture.

Díaz succeeds historian David O'Brien, who retired as University Professor of Faith and Culture this summer.

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