

## **Program for Christian Leadership: Summer Workshop in Leadership & Vocation Focus Group Report**

A focus group was held Tuesday April 11<sup>th</sup> with 6 participants in the Summer Workshop in Leadership & Vocation (SWLV) on the eve of their graduation from University of Dayton. The goal of the focus group was to understand the role the SWLV had played in their life at the University and its role in forming their sense of vocation. In what follows, the discussion proceeds somewhat in the order of the discussion itself, although some remarks are cited out of sequence to illustrate particular subject matter.

The participants were a remarkable group of people who had utilized their workshop experience in a variety of different leadership capacities while on campus. Right from the start, they utilized the knowledge gained in the workshop to impact other people. They discussed mentioning to their friends what they had learned about the tradition. They noted the importance of the contacts they had made in helping them think they could take on particular tasks and knowing who to go to when they wanted to get something started. They utilized specific skills taught in the work shops as they took on leadership positions. They consciously utilized the language of the Marianist Charisms as they dealt with other students, the administration, their employers and the broader community. The impact does not end as they leave UD. All of the participants viewed their post graduate plans through a faith based lens that defined service as an integral part of what they would do.

## II. Detailed Results

### A. Role of SWLV in Understanding of the Religious Tradition at University of Dayton

*Could you describe for me your understanding of the religious tradition here at UD? How did you acquire that understanding? **If not mentioned:** check for role of summer workshop.*

The respondents all demonstrated substantial knowledgeable of the religious tradition at UD and its physical manifestations on campus.

“Marianists sum it up pretty well...Community, Inclusivity, Faith, Mary, and Mission. Those five Charisms are the five pillars that the Marianists are based on. It is the base of how UD is run, especially the community aspect.”

“The school was founded by religion.”

“It’s [UD religious tradition] that the Marianists came into this area. They were looking for some way to build a religious and educational community. It’s a symbol of the whole Marianist spirit of educating oneself physically.”

“The professors at UD have been religious. There are a lot of Marianst Brothers teaching.”

“No matter what you come to study they try to get you to figure out how it relates to Catholicism and the Marianists.”

The respondents credited their first knowledge of UD’s religious tradition to the walking tour done at the beginning of the Summer Workshop. The students said that they probably would not know as much about UD and Dayton’s history if it were not for their participation in the SWLV. They also indicated that they had actively spread to other students their knowledge of the religious tradition at UD. Across a 4 year time frames, their memories were still very fresh:

“I think it started during the workshops...one of the first things we did was take a historical Marianist tour. My understanding has developed... a lot, but that is when I first understood who the Marianists were. After the first four or five days there I could have given you a basic understanding of the Marianists.”

“By the end of the Program for Christian Leadership Workshops, [SWLV] we knew and we would talk to other freshmen and they would have no idea how UD was founded.”

“My experience is a little different because both of my parents worked at UD. I knew a lot before the workshop, but I didn’t know the five pillars until the workshop.”

## **B. Impact of UD Religious Tradition and Summer Workshop Experience on Student's Life at UD**

### **1. Academic Life**

*Has that religious tradition influenced you during your time here? Let's break it down though...by academic, social and faith life. First.....How did it influence your academic life?*

When asked how UD's religious tradition impacted their academic life, the students initially had trouble answering that question. As the conversation developed however, they started to realize that the course of their academic career had been influenced by the SWLV workshop: they would take certain classes so they would have a Marianist Brother teaching or to learn more about this Marianist tradition that has formed the Dayton campus. Or they would speak to a mentor who they knew because of the summer workshop and those contacts influenced what courses and what professors they chose to take. One of those in education pointed out that the Portfolio every student is required to develop explicitly called for a knowledge of how Marianist principles were incorporated in what they did in the classroom.

“[The summer workshop] What classes I would actually choose. My major is English Ed and I took a lot of English classes and I purposely took a lot of classes knowing that it was Marianist professor or a professor who knew more about the Marianist tradition. It was a concrete way that the religious tradition has affected my academic study.”

“I mean a lot of classes were focused on my major, I took a lot of classes that probably would not have been offered at another university. We had Marianist Brothers come in to talk about how they were working with the community. I was able to make connections to my work.”

“Coming to this university is not all about academics. There is something more you learn and experience by going here. It made me aware that learning happens outside of the classroom. You go seek out other things to be involved with.”

“I really learned through the workshop because of our service about the Dakota place where I have volunteered until last semester. UD infuses service and learning together.”

“I took Christian ethics. Your studies have to apply to something, you have to go out and serve with it. For my engineering experience, there were some professors who got it and some who didn't and there was a lost connection.”

“We took a class that was a Marianist class and I would have never have done that without the religious tradition.”

“In education a lot we have gotten a lot of information for the Marianist education. My understand and really in a concrete way apply what I understand to what I’m doing and what I want to do with my life.”

“Your portfolio for education has to have those Marianist standards in it.”

“Mostly no. I made it a point to take classes with some of the Marianists as far as not vowed, I did not run across as many as I would like.”

## 2. Social Life

*Has that religious tradition influenced your social life during your time here?*

The religious tradition and the SWLV had profoundly impacted the participants’ social life. This related both to the enduring friendships formed during the SWLV and the impact the SWLV had on how they chose to spend their social time and what they did with it. Some had consciously chosen particular communities and ways of sharing meals in common that they linked back to the religious tradition and the SWLV.

“Being on the summer workshop, I made so many friends that have kept through the past four years.”

“I am living in a Marianist student community and it shapes my house and our weekends. The religious UD has filtered into every aspect of my life.”

“We have the largest campus ministry program in the nation.”

“We have chosen to live in a Marianist lay community house.”

“To keep the community spirit in all settings.”

“I am an introvert so I’m not sure I would have gotten involved if the campus ministry wasn’t everywhere.”

Others spoke about how even the ways parties developed at UD were influenced by the Marianist view of community. They trace the profound openness and welcoming nature of upper-class students to the Marianist charisms of Community and Inclusivity

“I think I was more conscious as a freshman to live out those Marianist charisms. Another part of it, I think the nature of the ghetto is very Marianist and communal. I connected as a freshman that all the parties were in the front and I could walk up and ask for a beer and get a beer...it was very Marianist.”

“I have been to a lot of schools where it wasn’t very welcoming and we would only go to places of people we know. People expect your party will always be open and you can go up and talk.”

“Even this week, seeing people outside going over and having barbecues and playing Cornhole with them. Sharing meals is a huge part of what UD and Marianist tradition are about.”

“Freshman year everyone had their doors open always.”

“As an introverted person it has been a huge help to be on this campus because it is encouraged to go up and talk to other people.”

### 3. Impact on Faith Life

For some the UD religious tradition and the summer workshop operated to affirm and support a faith they already felt, for others, this encouraged a profound deepening.

“It drew me to the Catholic church... I came to UD and I wasn’t very religious at all and after the first week I was very impressed by the people I met. As a direct result of PCL [SWVL] I had my First Communion and was Confirmed.”

“I think coming into UD I became a stronger Catholic. Coming to UD I want to go to mass myself.”

“I came in a really strong Catholic but I am defiantly less rigid than I was because of the people who I have met learning how to live out my faith and making my faith alive. The Marinaists helped me make it my own faith.”

“I came in with a very individual faith and through the workshop and the Marianists I learned that faith was a communal thing also and something to be shared which is why we go to mass as a community.”

“One thing that stood out was how the Marianists purposely went out to invest relationships with people. I didn’t realize what being Catholic was but I understand better now.”

“My faith has become Marianist since I’ve been here. I feel like its being involved with another community in the church. I try to live out those charisms in my life. Faith as a way of life not as an aspect of it.”

Some participants suggested the SWLV and UD’s religious tradition influenced their faith life because they were not afraid or ashamed of showing off their faith. Their experience of the workshop permitted them to openly discuss their beliefs because it was all right with their peers to discuss this part of their life. They did not feel odd if they went to Mass everyday.

“At one of the talks at the workshop when they came to talk about vocation, I learned that I could be a Catholic and practice my vocation and use my faith through my vocation.”

“I’ve become more open with my faith. It’s not embarrassing for me to be walking into the chapel for mass. It is okay to share and express yourself and share your faith.”

### 4. The Very Specific Influence of the Summer Workshop

*Do you see a particular influence from the Summer Workshop on Leadership & Vocation as part of that process? Specifically did it influence your academic, social and faith life? How did you feel about getting started at UD after the workshop?*

Several impacts of the SWLV were mentioned in the prior discussion. Participants felt that all aspects of their UD experience had been profoundly influenced both because of what they had learned and the contacts and friends they had made. They saw many of

their choices as flowing from the workshops. Asked to indicate any other particular influences of the summer workshop, participants listed several:

First they focused heavily on the enduring friendships and the meaning of those friendships. These friendships were not just with other students but with various of the Marianists (vowed and lay).

“The excitement of the workshop carried through the freshman year and it grew. The workshops have shaped my whole four years here.”

“I am living with one of my roommates who I met from the summer workshop who I didn’t live with my freshman/sophomore year, but now am junior/senior year.”

“I am living with someone who I roomed with on my summer workshop. I feel like there is a connectedness and understanding.”

“I think the dinner we had with the Wagner’s and really had that connection with them in their home and it was that experience that really turned me onto that spirit.”

“There were three different summer workshops and even if we didn’t go on the same workshop we were able to connect with them.”

“Had I not known the Wagner’s my entire UD experience would have been different.”

Second, they noted the connection between the summer workshop and the variety of leadership roles they had taken on.

“I would say that every major organization on campus has someone from leadership workshop involved.”

“I saw that we [students in SWVL] got it...what this whole Marianist thing is so I got involved with student government to spread the Marianists. I learned my first year and then all the conversations coming up with students and administration, how do these conversations respect our Marianist ideals as students. It really helped to have that overtone in all the conversations and just educating the students from that platform...I formed a student position where a student is there to make sure that the Marianist involvement is still involved in conversation.”

“A number of us have been a leader in the tour we got on our first day at the workshop. and we have incorporated them into the ASI 150 courses.”

“We are all really different people and we came together.”

“The workshop gave some leadership skills of how to run a club.”

“I used the dots when organizing meetings.”

“We used it [nominal group process] for our meetings for our service project.”

“I did a bunch in the student government and I had a seat at the table of the people who are forming what UD is.”

### **C. Relationship to Broader Community**

*Have you had an opportunity to become involved in the Dayton Community through UD or outside of UD? How did that happen?*

Participants traced specific connections between the summer work-shop and subsequent community service. They noted the workshop showed them how many service opportunities there were and that service was a large part of the UD community and experience.

“We went to a domestic violence center. Being involved with the workshop and having that service project I found that a lot of people were involved with service on campus.”

“In the School of Education, we had a service learning aspect and freshman/sophomore year I volunteered with kids working after classes.”

“I took a course that was all about Dayton and mapping their assets and working with them to make a community. The workshop showed me that UD really prides itself in being a part of the community.”

“I got involved with choir because of this and the first year and a half I was very involved with Habitat for Humanity.”

“I worked at a company and I don’t think the people at the office understood what was happening with the community. I helped set up sponsoring a soup kitchen with students....I wasn’t saying this [Marianist Charism] is why I’m doing this. I said there are things we can do to get more involved. I got from the workshop helping people see what is out there.”

### **D. Advantages of Attending the Summer Workshop**

Almost everyone in the group listed “networking” as the number one advantage of the workshop. To these participants however, “networking” meant giving them the ability to “get involved” and live an active life of faith in the UD community. In this respect, they noted the importance of the contacts with lay and vowed Marianists and the importance of contacts with other students who had been at the workshops. They noted that the orientation gave them a feel for all the ways they could participate.

“The top would be networking, second getting a feel for the campus, and also the content. The networking really stood out.”

“The people I came into contact with, getting the opportunity to meet people and making friends, coming onto campus not knowing anyone, having those people helped me get involved.”

“Networking, gave me the window of how to get involved.”

“Networking, the Marianist ideals and I would have been scared if it was too Catholic. The aspect of seeing the campus and these people.”

“Meeting the Wagner’s, having the community of friends, faculty, and staff, and also thinking about the next four years of campus and how to be involved.”

“Friendships, outlet workshop gave me a new way of practicing faith and vocation, seeing the ways to get involved locally.”

“We spent an entire morning in downtown Dayton and getting to know the city, I am more willing to go downtown. It was not just an introduction to UD, but to the whole city of Dayton.”

## **E. Relationship to Post Graduate Life**

*Let's talk about after graduation? What are your current plans? What has influenced your choice? How did you decide what to do? What impact, if any, did SWLV have on your decisions on vocation?*

Almost all participants were drawn to service related work as post graduates. While participants did not trace this directly to the summer workshop, it was clear that the paths they had taken at UD (Which they attribute to the summer workshop) had molded their view of the importance of service and the relationship of their faith to that life of service.

“Being an education major, through this whole four years of UD I have learned my vocation which started with the workshop. I am specifically looking for jobs in Marianist high schools that is my goal to find a teaching job at a Marianist high school and then secondary a catholic high school. If I get into a Marianist high school, I want to be a young male teacher and transfer some of the excitement of the Marianist to younger people. I want to infuse those values into my teaching.”

“I might do a year of service before the teaching thing. I am looking for a job, ideally Marianist.”

“I would like to teach catholic theology at a college level, I want it to mean something so that it is not worthless.”

“My goal is to eventually teach, be a mom, and do family counseling. I plan to share meals with my class and my family.”

“I am looking for government positions and get my masters so I can get involved with non-profits. I want to really focus on and involved directly with organizations who can make some sort of change.”

“Next year I'm going to be a year of service with the Marianists abroad and I wouldn't have done that if it weren't for UD.”

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We [speaking of several participants in the room] are taking vows as Lay Marianists which will change the way we live in every aspect of our lives.”