With faith and tenacity

Dan Curran answers his cell phone even from 12 time zones around the world.

“I would wake him up at 3 a.m. in China, and he would take the call,” says J.P. Nauseef ’88, the former president and CEO of the Dayton Development Coalition. “He has always been almost 100 percent accessible.”

Nauseef’s call to China was a sign of changing times, for the University of Dayton and its president. Curran is more likely than ever to be a player in high-level discussions about Dayton’s regional economic interests, which was on Nauseef’s mind that morning. And there’s a decent chance that when Curran’s cell phone rings, he’s traveling internationally and representing a Catholic university that’s gone global in a big way.

New land. World-class research. Strong enrollment. Rising reputation. Forward thinking and bold moves inspired by our Marianist mission have characterized the presidency of Daniel J. Curran at the University of Dayton. By Paul Fain

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Since Curran’s arrival, the University has been “conspicuously Catholic.” In fact, he spent 23 years as both an administrator and scholar. When he was a search consultant told Curran that the University would be a perfect fit for him, he decided to visit campus. During his first day at UD, a student guide gave him the standard walking tour and the current president, Fitzgerald, asked him, “Do you like the campus?” Curran says he quickly got a sense of the University, that it would indeed be right for him, to become a university president. But doubts about his candidacy lingered. Then came a tough act to follow. He was beloved during his 13 years as president, the longest presidency in the University’s history. Curran would also be UD’s first lay president. While other Catholic universities had hired lay presidents, most notably George- town University, some alumni and others con nected to UD worried that its distinctive Mari anist character might be diminished. During the interview process, Curran de cided to be just himself. At the time he was Saint Joseph’s executive vice president and vice president for academic affairs, as well as a sociology professor at Saint Joseph’s. Bena fides also included research experience in criminal justice and social problems. He also had deep experience as an international affairs par tician, especially with China. Finan and Dave Phillips ’56 were co-presiding judges of the presiden tial search committee. It was an easy deci sion after he and Phillips talked it over with Curran. Curran says, “This is our guy. He know where he wanted to take the University.” He quickly felt comfortable with the Marianists, and that their sense of community and commitment to social justice resonated with him. He also saw a well-managed University that was poised to take on the future.

“Telling UD’s story”

Curran is quick to say that UD’s progress over the last nine years has been the result of change management and the University’s faculty, staff, students and supporters. But the buck stops with the president. A college presidency can be a very lonely job, and presidents don’t keep their jobs long amid controversy, even if the problem is with them. Leadership also sets a tone, even for an organization as large as a national research university. Curran’s approach meshes well with UD’s dominant personality type, which is a blend of friendly and efficient. The Uni versity has the intimate feel of a much smaller college, which is helped by its laid-back, Mid western, academic ability. But don’t underestimate the competitive, serious side of UD, or its president. Universities generally aren’t known as being savvy negotiators and tend to move much more slowly than their peers in the corporate world. UD, however, has bucked this trend with recent growth. A good example is Mararian Hall, the new resi dence hall on campus, which opened in 2009. A construction firm asked for a two-year timeline to finish the building. The University pushed hard for one year, and the firm hit the deadline. During his career, President Curran has traveled numerous times to China, where the University will open the University of Dayton China campus in Shaoxing Industrial Park in 2012. Some people, including several faculty members, alumni and the student news paper, worry that the University is too far away from UD. An example was a student newspaper story that ran under the heading, “The viewbook went too far.” One page asked: “Do you want a Liberal Arts degree, like Lindsay Lehan than DuFour? and included the photo of a student wearing glasses and lipstick. The branding effort was part of a key shift in what UD wanted to be: a larger, more globally oriented University with a much broader spectrum of students. A good example is the Mararian Hall residence hall. The branding effort was part of a key shift in what UD wanted to be: a larger, more globally oriented University with a much broader spectrum of students.
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The largest expansion in its history hardly means the University is ready to sit back and rest on its laurels. Indeed, Curran is on to the next ambitious pursuit: the University of Dayton China Institute.

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