

## **Educating Faith-Filled Leaders in the Midst of Adaptation and Change:**

### **A Short History of the University of Dayton <sup>1</sup>**

Revised: December 20, 2011

1. This brief narrative recounts the history of the University of Dayton, from its founding as a small elementary school for Catholic boys on a farm on the outskirts of the city of Dayton through its transition to a national Catholic university with a strong Marianist educational tradition, a reputation for outstanding learning and scholarship, and strong partnerships with its communities and the Catholic Church. The founding Marianist religious community had a vision of creating an institution that educated young men grounded in faith, well prepared for careers in emerging society of the Midwest, and able to be leaders in both society and the Church. As the University grew and developed, it strove creatively and faithfully to realize the founding vision of the University as it addressed new issues that were presented in each new period of its history.

#### **Establishing the Core of Campus in the Midst of Crisis: 1850 to 1900**

2. In the summer of 1849, Father Leo Meyer, S.M., and Brother Charles Schultz, S.M., the first Marianist missionaries to America, journeyed from Alsace in France to Cincinnati, Ohio, where they intended to establish a base for the religious order in this country. They arrived during a cholera epidemic, and Father Meyer was dispatched to Dayton to minister to the sick of Emmanuel Catholic Parish. Here, he met John Stuart, whose young daughter died of cholera the year before. Mr. Stuart wanted to sell his Dayton property and return with his wife to Europe.
3. On March 19, 1850, the feast of St. Joseph, Father Meyer, now joined by Brothers Maximin Zehler, a teacher, Charles Shultz, a cook, and Andrew Edel, a gardener, purchased Dewberry Farm from John Stuart and renamed it Nazareth. Mr. Stuart accepted a medal of St. Joseph and a promise of \$12,000 at six percent interest in return for 125 acres, including vineyards, orchards, a mansion and various farm buildings. The Marianists paid off the debt in 12 years.
4. On July 1, 1850, St. Mary's School for Boys, a frame building that not long before had housed farmhands, opened its doors to 14 primary students from Dayton. The vision of this founding group of Marianists was to operate a school established in the Catholic and Marianist tradition of education to prepare young Catholic men to be part of the emerging Midwest of the United States and to be faith filled leaders in both society and the Church. Over the years the founding vision has given coherence to the development of the University of Dayton. The Marianist tradition of educating within a community of support and challenge shaped this early educational venture. The students not only spent time in class and in study but were also engaged in the enterprise of running the farm and providing food for their meals.
5. Five years later, fire destroyed Stuart Mansion, the original school. During this era the historic core of campus began to take shape. Zehler Hall, the oldest building on campus, was constructed in 1865 and named after Brother Max Zehler, S.M., as the first president.

## **A Short History of the University of Dayton**

---

Four years later, the Most Rev. Archbishop John Purcell and several other Catholic prelates from the Midwest, consecrated the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. In 1870, the Marianist community undertook a risk, at a cost of \$85,000, and constructed St Mary's Hall, then the tallest building in Dayton. Some in the community called the building "Zehler's folly." Today, after several renovations, St Mary's Hall is the administrative center of the University.

6. Soon after its founding, the Marianist religious community saw the importance of higher education as an important prerequisite for leadership in society and in the Church. St. Mary's School for Boys added college preparatory classes in 1861 and began its transformation toward becoming a college. In 1882, the school was incorporated as St. Mary's College and empowered to offer collegiate degrees.

### **Reaching Out to the Community and Establishing Professional Education: 1901-1950**

7. The school's historic role in community service was evident in 1913 when the Marianists offered St. Mary's Hall as a refuge for flood victims. Known at various times as St. Mary's School, St. Mary's Institute and St. Mary's College, the school assumed its present name, University of Dayton in 1920, cementing an enduring bond between itself and the city it served. In 1923, the University adopted the "Dayton Flyers" moniker for its athletic teams. In the 1920s, amid strong anti-Catholic sentiment in the Midwest, Ku Klux Klan members demonstrated against the University. In the midst of this turmoil the University adopted a University seal with the motto, "Pro Deo et Patria," Latin for "For God and Country." With this motto, the University stated publicly that its mission was to serve both God and country and that it was possible to meld Catholic faith with public service to the nation. The University declared its intent to have its learning and scholarship play both a creative and critical role in shaping society and the Church.
8. At the turn of the century, the Marianist community realized that science and engineering was going to be an important force in shaping society. In 1904, Brother William Wohlleben, S.M., was sent to the University of Fribourg in Switzerland as the first American Marianist to pursue a Ph.D. in science. In 1909 he joined the University and began programs in chemistry and chemical engineering. He established the first chemistry labs in the upper level of the Playhouse (a combination theater and gym that is now the Rike Center). "Doc" Wohlleben, as he became known to his students, began a tradition of excellence in science and engineering. Charles Pedersen, a 1926 graduate of Doc's program, went on to become a Dupont chemist and was named a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry in 1987.
9. The first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw growth not only in science, but also an expansion into professional fields. The School of Engineering was established in 1915; the Schools of Education and Law were established in 1920 and 1921 respectively. In 1924, the University of Dayton was the first institution of higher education accepted into the National Aeronautical Association. In the late 1930s the University began its graduate programs and established a B.S. in Business Administration. With the rising importance of science and the professions, the University expanded the scope of its programs and modestly and pragmatically developed the facilities to prepare future leaders in the emerging fields of science and the professions.

## A Short History of the University of Dayton

---

10. In the 1930s, local business leaders and University officials worked together to confront the Great Depression. As one small gesture, the University donated garden plots behind Alumni Hall to the unemployed. The Depression had a severe impact on the University. The School of Law was forced to close its doors, and the University weathered a very difficult financial period as students and families had trouble finding resources for tuition. The Brothers helped many students during this difficult period.
11. During the 1930s and '40s the University underwent many changes. In the 1930s, the University of Dayton admitted women students on an equal basis with men — 40 years before other Catholic institutions of higher learning. The high school on campus moved downtown in 1936 and became Chaminade High School, a Catholic school for boys. The University, largely a commuter school, began offering scholarships to every high school in the Dayton area. In the 1940s, the campus welcomed a new kind of student — older, experienced World War II veterans, whose influx spearheaded the University of Dayton's growth into a modern university. In the 1950s, responding to a need in the community, the University of Dayton began its sponsored research program, which grew into the University of Dayton Research Institute.

### **Becoming a Modern University and Moving Toward Integrated Education: 1950-2002**

12. Enrollment boomed at the University in the post-World War II years, growing from approximately 1,000 undergraduates to 5,000 as the University entered the 1960s. In 1959, Father Raymond A. Roesch, S.M., became the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the University. Father Roesch was one of the authors of *Making Leaders*, a publication celebrating the Centenary of the Society of Mary's presence in the United States. This publication reaffirmed and adapted the founding vision of the University of Dayton to educate leaders who were grounded in faith and able to address new world problems by new types of leadership. With this renewal of the founding vision Father Roesch ushered the University through several crises and important transitions. With the growth of Sinclair Community College and Wright State University, the University of Dayton faced a loss of local enrollment. It responded with characteristic resilience by aggressively recruiting students regionally and nationally, building a new library, establishing the School of Business Administration, reopening the School of Law, building new residence halls and apartments, and beginning to buy houses in the neighborhood for student use. In late 1960's Father William J. Ferree, S.M., the Provincial of the Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary and Father Roesch guided the Marianist community in creating a new partnership of lay and religious leadership for the ownership, direction and operation of the University by the creating the University Board of Trustees.
13. In the late 1960s, the rapidly changing culture and the deepening and renewal of Catholic tradition during the Second Vatican Council caused both excitement and controversy on campus. In 1967, a controversy erupted, sparked by the assertion that some philosophy faculty members misrepresented Catholic doctrine in their teaching. Archbishop Alter of Cincinnati organized a fact-finding commission to investigate these assertions. Father Roesch guided the University through this critical period by crafting academic policies that were both responsive to academic freedom and respectful of the Catholic Magisterium's teaching authority. For many this was a time that established the University as a true Catholic university.

## A Short History of the University of Dayton

---

14. Following this controversy, the University entered into a series of conversations to clarify its mission. The result of this conversation, *The Statement of Purposes*, which was approved by the Board of Trustees in May 1969, stated:

The University of Dayton, by tradition, by legal charter, and by resolute intent, is a Church-related institution of higher learning. As such, it seeks, in an environment of academic freedom, to foster principles and values consonant with Catholicism and with the living traditions of the Society of Mary. Operating in a pluralistic environment, it deliberately chooses the Christian world-view as its distinctive orientation in carrying out what it regards as four essential tasks: teaching, research, serving as a critic of society, and rendering public service.<sup>2</sup>

15. Introducing the purpose of serving as a critic of society was an innovation in higher education at that time; it stressed the importance of social justice in the University's mission. The University was to create "an environment in which faculty and students were free to evaluate, in a scholarly manner, the strengths and weaknesses found in the institutions of man... to propose and actively to promote improvements when these are deemed necessary... It strives to inspire a person with a sense of community and to encourage men (and women) who can and will participate effectively in the quest of a more perfect society."<sup>3</sup>
16. In 1979, Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M., became the 17<sup>th</sup> president of the University and provided leadership for renewing the undergraduate and graduate curriculum around a focus on mission captured in the words "Learn, Lead, and Serve" and the theme of connected learning. In the early 1980s, the University began a renewal of its undergraduate curriculum. Building on the Catholic tradition of education, the University adopted in 1983 a general education plan that was grounded in the humanities and fostered integration of the liberal arts into professional education. In 1990, the Academic Senate approved a revision of the general education requirements, calling for an integrated humanities base of courses for undergraduates — an unparalleled effort among universities of the school's size. Regardless of their majors, all undergraduates read, studied, and made connections across disciplines, drawing from the same books in English, history, religion, and philosophy courses. The University hired additional faculty in the humanities fields and built the Jesse Philips Humanities Center. Faculty emphasized connected learning and scholarship — connections across the disciplines, connections between liberal arts and professional studies, connections of theory and practice, and connections to the community. Connected learning was taken into the greater Dayton community with the Center of Social Concerns and the Center for Leadership in Community. Many Catholic dioceses throughout the United States were able to utilize the resources of the University through Institute for Pastoral Initiatives' Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation.
17. Connected learning called for integrating learning into the residence halls and student neighborhoods. The University continued buying houses, eventually owning about 85 percent of the houses in the neighborhoods surrounding campus. This transformation into a residential campus, with more than 90 percent of its students living on campus, called for expanding staff and services that would allow

## A Short History of the University of Dayton

---

the University to extend learning beyond the classroom into residential life. When the University instituted a computer requirement, it completely wired the residence halls and the student neighborhood with high-speed Internet connections and earned recognition as one of the most-wired campuses in the country.

18. At Christmas time in 1987, there was a fire St. Joseph's Hall that destroyed most of the interior of the building. Originally a building built by the Marianist in 1884 as a residence hall, at the site of a previous fire, St Joseph's Hall over time was converted into an academic building. While no lives were lost, faculty lost valuable resources for the teaching and scholarly work. In order to help address the grief and loss of this tragic event, the University community gathered to share the sorrow and also tell the story of how the University recovered from other fires at the core of the campus. Under the leadership of the Board of Trustees, St. Joseph's Hall was reconstructed by maintaining its architecturally-stunning facade and converting the interior of the building into a modern social science complex with state of the art master classrooms and modern seminar rooms.
19. Under the leadership of Brother Fitz, the University's academic reputation, selectivity, endowment, research volume, and philanthropic support reached new heights. As one of six Catholic college presidents, he worked with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Vatican in the development of an Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities called *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.
20. As the University celebrated its sesquicentennial in 2000, it neared the end of the largest fund-raising effort in its history. The "Call to Lead" campaign raised \$158 million, placing the University of Dayton among the top Catholic universities in the country for alumni giving.

### **Gaining Recognition as a Catholic Leader in Higher Education: 2002-2012**

21. In 2002, the Board of Trustees named Daniel J. Curran president, the school's first lay president. He presided over a decade of remarkable growth, including the largest land expansion in the University's history. With the downsizing of the NCR Corp. and relocation of its world headquarters, the University made two large land acquisitions in 2005 and 2010, to nearly double the size of campus.
22. A new strategic plan focused the campus community on educating students for a changing world and preparing a new generation of servant-leaders; cultivating outstanding scholarship, research and artistic creation; strengthening and promoting the University's distinctive Catholic and Marianist identity; advancing intercultural citizenship and engagement; and practicing responsible stewardship.
23. As part of a national marketing effort, the University invested nearly \$175 million in student housing construction, renovation and amenities, including a new recreation and fitness center, and refocused its student recruitment efforts outside Ohio in response to demographic trends. In 2010, the University welcomed the largest, most geographically diverse first-year class since the Vietnam War era.
24. During this decade, the University launched the nation's first accelerated law curriculum, started a doctor of physical therapy program, introduced one of the first bachelor's degrees in human rights studies and offered Ohio's first master's program in clean and renewable energy.

## A Short History of the University of Dayton

---

25. As the school continued to expand doctoral programs in engineering, theology and education, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education reclassified the University of Dayton as a research university. Cumulative sponsored research topped \$1.5 billion, as the University gained recognition for leading all Catholic universities in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) research and ranking consistently in the top two in the nation in federally sponsored materials research. New research fields included alternative fuels, sensors and nanotechnology.
26. The University of Dayton continued to make its mark in the community — and the world. In 2009, the University earned national recognition for its community revitalization initiatives, topping all Catholic universities and ranking second overall, in the “Saviors of Our Cities” survey. The University’s global partnerships expanded to nearly 30 universities and colleges in countries such as China, India, France, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, South Korea, Spain and Thailand, and the number of students studying abroad increased by more than 100 percent during this decade.

### Some Lessons from Our History

27. Several important lessons can be drawn from this narrative of the University’s history. First, throughout its history, we see the University community developing an educational enterprise that educates faith-filled leaders for engagement in society and the Church. At the same time the University has critically read the signs of times that required adaptation and change. In designing these changes, both small and large, the University community used its Catholic and Marianist traditions of education to reorient its strategy so that it was responsive to these signs of the times. Both sustaining its commitment to education faith-filled leaders and undertaking necessary adaptations and changes was a human enterprise with many insights and innovations as well as missteps and setbacks. At the same time, the lens of faith tells us that the Provident God guided the University as it survived through difficult crises and thrived in a more resilient manner with a more thoughtful focus on its being an educational enterprise that seeks to educate people of faith to be leaders in society and the Church. The University community must continue creative fidelity to its founding vision of educating faith-filled leaders through a process of thoughtful and faith-filled adaptation and change.
28. A second lesson is a lesson from our success. Over its history the University, like many other Catholic universities, assisted its students, who came from largely immigrant and Catholic backgrounds, to make the passage from the margins of society into the mainstream. At the same time, the University has grown from a small elementary school for boys into a respected institution of higher education well placed within the greater Dayton region, nationally, and internationally. This history of success places several critical questions before the University community as it continues to shape its fidelity to its founding vision:
  - Who are those persons and groups that are now at margins of society and how will the University assist them in more fully participating in our contemporary society?
  - How will the University, now at the center of higher education, through its learning, scholarship, service to the community, and as critic of society, partner with groups that are on the margins so that they are able to more fully participate in all facets of society?

## A Short History of the University of Dayton

---

- How do we help our students today, who come mostly from middle and upper middle class families, to appreciate the plight of those at the margins of both our national and international communities and to develop the skills to be partners in building communities of inclusion, justice, peace, and reconciliation locally and globally?
- As a major Catholic university, how do we partner with many others to develop the intellectual and practical resources that the Catholic Church will need to be more faithfully proclaim and witness to Gospel into today's world.

Success of the University brings with it new challenges of creative fidelity to the University's founding vision.

29. The third lesson drawn from this history of education faith-filled leaders through adaptation and change is that the University community must continually find occasions to retell, celebrate and extend the story of this commitment. This history, as narrative, provides a collective understanding of how the University community sees its mission and identity. Through retelling of its history and by connecting on-going changes, the University community can reinforce and enrich its mission and identity. This history has a way of capturing not only the rational purpose of the University but also capturing its heart, thereby inspiring participants to commit strongly to the University and its mission and identity.

### Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> This short history of the University has been developed by University Communications and the Mission and Identity Task Force and, when revised, will be present on the Mission and Identity section of the University Website. Please send suggested additions, deletions, and revisions to Bro. Raymond Fitz, S.M. at [rfitz1@udayton.edu](mailto:rfitz1@udayton.edu).

<sup>2</sup> *Statement of Purposes* Approved by the Board of Trustees, May 14, 1969, <http://www2.udayton.edu/rector/documents/PurposeNature.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Statement of Purposes*, 1969