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Voices of Courage

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Voices of Courage : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Wednesday March 4, 2020

Voices of Courage

By Eric F. Spina

(During Women's History Month the Women's Center highlights contributions women have made on campus and beyond. The Voices of Courage exhibit honors 15 outstanding women leaders. I was honored to offer remarks about the 2020 honorees, all leaders of great distinction.)

Many thanks to Lisa (Borello) and the talented team in the Women's Center for their continued hard work to highlight women of distinction and champions of courage on our campus and in the community. The annual Women of UD exhibit is so meaningful to me and so important to UD as a university because it illuminates great leadership that deserves to be recognized and to which we all can aspire. Not just to which *women* can aspire, but to which *all of us* can aspire.

I offer special thanks to the committee who reviewed scores of nominations and selected 15 outstanding women — all profiles in courage — for the spotlight.

And to the students in Glenna Jennings and Kathy Kargl's photography and graphic design classes, wow! Thank you for capturing our honorees in such a magnificent way.

A University of Dayton student. A dean. A mayor. A religious sister. A beloved colleague who died in the prime of life. Scholars. Pioneers. As I read through the nominations, I was struck by the common threads that wind throughout the tapestry of these women's lives.

They're extraordinary community builders. They're collaborative leaders with a sense of fairness and justice. They're fierce champions for diversity and inclusion for all. They're comfortable in their own skin — and want others to feel that way, too. They're voices for the voiceless. They're models of Marianist hospitality. They work every day to build a just world — on our campus and beyond.

And perhaps they're a bit like Madeleine Albright, the first female U.S. Secretary of State, who said, "It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."

We don't want you to be silent.

I was struck by the words of honoree Merida Allen, who observed, "I believe the most powerful impact we can have sometimes is to have the courage to advocate in spaces where no one else is looking and to be an ear for those who feel no one is listening."

That's prophetic.

Or Dr. Novea McIntosh, who is preparing teachers to serve in urban classrooms. She said, "I want to be bold and I want to disrupt the status quo. And I hope that I can make my students bold and social justice educators. I want them to be comfortable with their own identities."

That's courageous.

Or Dr. Castel Sweet, whose nominee wrote, "She stands unflinchingly in the corner of the underdog, as there is no question that she has a fight in this game."

That's tenacity.

As I read their names, think about the courage and character of each of these remarkable individuals:

Merida, Laura, Corinne, Neomi, Emily, Beverly, Suki, Melissa, Chloe, Novea, Margaret, Leslie, Sister Kathleen, Castel, and Nan.

They are our role models — and our inspiration as we strive to achieve a truly equitable, diverse, and inclusive University. One where all are welcomed and valued for their gifts. One where courageous voices lead the way.

Congratulations to all!