

Oakland University confers honorary degree to local philanthropist, 2019 CNN Hero

July 22, 2020

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A 2019 CNN Hero who has helped more than 2 million families globally through a nonprofit she started in a minivan has been conferred with an Oakland University honorary doctorate degree.

Najah Bazy, RN, Ph.D., received the degree during a special ceremony held via video conference on July 17. Participants included Oakland University President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D., Oakland University Interim Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Michelle Piskulich, and Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine Stephan Sharf Interim Dean Duane Mezwa, M.D.



Najah Bazy, RN, Ph.D., received an honorary doctorate from OU during a special ceremony held via video conference on July 17. Photo: Zaman International

Mezwa identified Bazy as “a gifted transcultural clinical nurse and diversity specialist leader who promotes cross-cultural understanding between clinicians and patients.”

Bazy’s accomplishments include starting a nonprofit called Zaman International from the back of a minivan in 1996. Today, Zaman has a 40,000-square-foot warehouse in Inkster, Michigan — part of an overall mission to provide crisis assistance and vocational training to marginalized women with children.

“My favorite medical ethic is ‘to do good, and do no harm,’” said Bazy. “I pledge and promise Oakland University that this gift will be in that realm of thinking — to do good, and do no harm.”

During the ceremony, Pescovitz said that OU confers honorary degrees “to people whose noteworthy accomplishments have a major impact on their communities, industries, and in making the world a better place.”

Pescovitz said the conferral of the honoris causa degree is Oakland University’s recognition of truly distinguished achievements beyond the classroom and campus and is a testament of the power of education, initiative, and vision.

“I want to take a moment to express my own admiration to Najah for her compassion and her selflessness as a practicing nurse and extraordinary entrepreneur,” she said. “Her sense of purpose inspired her to find resourceful ways to provide much-needed supplies for patients living in poverty.

“Her health care expertise has led to the creation of a transcultural clinical care model that fosters better understanding among both clinicians and patients,” added Pescovitz.

‘A truly kind person’

Born and raised in southeast Michigan, Bazy earned her nursing degree from Madonna University and specialized over the past three decades in critical care and transcultural nursing, which promotes cultural and spiritual competency within health care.

She has practiced at Detroit Medical Center’s Sinai Grace Hospital and Harper-Hutzel Hospital, and with Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn, for which she developed a national model of transcultural clinical care.

As head of Diversity Specialists, she has conducted countless workshops for health care administrators, practitioners, educators and policymakers on important cultural and spiritual considerations for service delivery, ethical decision making, staff training, and end-of-life care.

She has also consulted and taught for the International Red Cross and the American Red Cross.

According to Bazy, the extreme poverty she witnessed during post-discharge house calls to hospital patients she nursed led her to found Zaman International, a grassroots network of southeast Michigan donors providing food, furniture, clothing and utility assistance to marginalized women and children throughout the region.

The organization was incorporated in 2004 and now offers comprehensive crisis assistance, infant burial, and vocational training and life skills programs at the Hope for Humanity center.

Mezwa said that he visited Zaman last November with Robert Noiva, Ph.D., associate dean for Graduate Studies and Community Integration and associate professor of Foundational Medical Studies, OUWB.

“Perhaps the most enlightening part of the visit occurred when we witnessed a young woman come in off the street and simply ask Najah: ‘How can I help?’” said Mezwa, adding “she is a truly kind person who cares deeply about the community and others.”

“More than anything, she wants to make each person’s life better than it was the day before,” he said.

In 2019, Bazy was named a CNN Hero for helping to break the cycle of poverty.

Lessons learned

In accepting the degree, Bazy teared up when thanking her family and mentors. She also touched on several insights gained throughout her career.

“I believe that humility is the foundation,” she said. “If we can attain humility and retain it, then ego has no place at the table.”

Bazzy said that “the best leaders know what they don’t know and they also know how to find people to fill those gaps and create synergy.”

She also stressed the importance of asking questions.

“I relish in the question of ‘Why?’” she said. “It’s something I’ve had in me since I was a child, since kindergarten. I remember asking my teachers, ‘Why? Why this? Why that?’ The exploration of this question really motivates me.”

Specifically, she said, it motivates her to think about issues such as why human suffering and hunger, why systems of rejection, oppression, and deprivation exist, and what one person might be able to do in addressing those issues.

“I’ve learned that courage is required to ask the question ‘Why?’” she said. “I’ve learned that introspection is required to hear the answer. I’ve learned that passion is required to embark on that answer’s journey. And I’ve learned that determination and grit is really required to attain the competency that any leader needs to fix anything in life.”