

# DEAN'S LETTER TO FRIENDS IN MINISTRY

FALL 2010

As most of you know, Jay Phelan has stepped down from the office of President and Dean. Tim Johnson, Deb Auger, and myself are functioning as partial presidents. Each of us would admit that even together we don't knit a whole president! Therefore, in this letter I am going to reflect on North Park Theological Seminary (NPTS) through the eyes of my primary role—that of academic dean.

You are already cheerleaders for your Seminary, so what follows is to affirm your commitment, to thank you for it, and to encourage you to continue.

We started this fall with high energy among the new and returning students. Our enrollment has taken a slight and necessary upswing the past two years, and the men and women who are choosing to attend are of high quality. The Student Council is giving mature leadership; students demonstrate practical care for their colleagues and they are constantly on my case to take action on key issues. I love it!

I am writing this letter on the last day of the NPTS Annual Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (one of the few events in the Christian community where academic scholars, pastors, and other ministry leaders think together about how to deal with issues of importance to the mission of the church in the world.) This year the topic is the Atonement. NPTS faculty, among other scholars, presented important work and led thoughtful discussions. One of the scholars from another theological school said in an unsolicited note, "You have a wonderful faculty, and I really like the spirit of the place."

I am now in my third year at NPTS. I have learned a great deal about the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) and the history and traditions that brought NPTS into being. It is a great history! As the faculty and I have come to know one another we are working productively along with key denominational leaders to focus the Seminary's future. It promises to be a great future even with our challenges. One of the major tasks of people who care about kingdom is to discern what God is doing, and to act on our belief that the Spirit of God works in the midst of our organizations.

Everything we do in higher education is the result of decisions made by people across time. As Academic Dean of the Seminary, my role is not to "create" change, but to work *with* students, staff, faculty, alumni, leaders in

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the denomination, colleagues in other seminaries, and with some of you, as we seek to discern direction and then make those decisions that will affect the future.

My preferred leadership habit is to manage out of a sense of opportunity. Those involved in seminary education today know that the opportunities are endless. But, again, I don't need to tell you that there are challenges. Let me share a few of the interesting possibilities that you might help us with in both prayer and financial support.

Deborah Penny, Brent Laytham, Mark Olson, and a few others are preparing a proposal to renew our relationship with the Kern Foundation. If accepted, this will allow up to 12 students a year (ECC and non-ECC) receive full scholarship. However, more scholarship support is needed in addition to the Kern funding. In the next few weeks, the faculty and selected students will be reviewing the procedures for the existing Presidential and Diversity scholarships (it is generally agreed that tuition is nearly as high as it can go in seminaries without a substantial endowment, including NPTS. We lose a few students each year who just can't work enough to support their families and pay for schooling. We need to provide means for students who are already key leaders in their communities, but who will never find the financial support needed to complete their education. You can help.

Under the leadership of Paul Koptak, Associate Dean, pilot projects are underway to offer courses in ECC conference regions. The primary target group is ECC pastors who need to complete courses toward credentialing, but who are unable to uproot to attend seminary in Chicago. Similarly, the two greatest impediments for these women and men are time and funding. By traveling to them, we are helping to solve the time issue; but even with a substantial tuition reduction, some pastors (and their churches) still find it difficult to come up with the necessary tuition. Funds to supplement pastors completing their credentialing would help.

At a recent memorial service, the Frisk Digital Collection of Covenant Literature project was announced. This online digital library collection will honor Donald C. Frisk (1911-2010), Covenant pastor, Professor of Theology (1945-1978) and Dean (1961-1967) of North Park Theological Seminary. As one who taught and served faithfully as a theologian, Professor Frisk wrote in service of the Evangelical Covenant Church. His many writings, and those of so many others through the years (and yet to be), embody a rich legacy. The purpose of the Frisk Collection is to make available, in an accessible online format, both published and unpublished writings central to the core of the literary canon of the Evangelical Covenant Church. In this way, the rich treasury of Covenant scholarly and ecclesial reflection will be made available to students, pastors, lay persons, and scholars for research and edifying purposes.

Our students here at NPTS are developing knowledge, finding resources for ministry, making friends that will last a lifetime, and deepening their understanding of their vocation. We trust that the mission of God through his church will be strengthened by what we do together in partnership. Thank you for being on the team!

For our mutual service,



Linda Cannell  
Academic Dean