

# DEAN'S LETTER TO FRIENDS IN MINISTRY

SPRING 2010

Dear Friends,

We are unaccustomed to weather this warm in Chicago at this time of year. While writing this, the sun is shining, it is approaching 60 degrees, and students are walking around campus in t-shirts and shorts. The Seminary will hold graduation this year on the same day as the undergraduates—May 8th. During the ceremony, we will award an honorary doctorate to Dr. Glenn Palmberg, the former president of the Evangelical Covenant Church. During his very successful tenure as president, Glenn was extremely supportive of the Seminary. The Presidential Scholarship program began with his support and encouragement. Over the years, scores of outstanding students who are now serving as Covenant pastors benefited from this program. We will honor Glenn and the program at a reception just before the graduation ceremony. The speaker at Commencement will be the Reverend Efrem Smith, superintendent designate for the Pacific Southwest Conference. You are welcome to take part in the activities of the day!

Last year, faculty, staff, and administrators participated in a listening tour. We went to churches all over the United States and Canada, asking pastors, lay persons, and denominational leaders what they were looking for in the next generation of pastors. They consistently told us that pastors need to be culturally competent—that is, able to preach, teach, and lead in an increasingly diverse world. They wanted pastors of authenticity, integrity, and spiritual depth. They looked for a deep knowledge of the Bible and Christian traditions. They expected professional competency and a willingness to reach out into the community for evangelism, service, and ministries of compassion, mercy, and justice. This year, our faculty has been discussing these findings and considering how to restructure our curriculum to reflect these concerns. We have been in the process of rewriting our mission statement and crafting a vision statement to reflect what we learned. We have also had, and will continue to have, conversations about refocusing not just what but how we teach. You will hear more about this in the coming year.

The Listening Tours were supported by the Making Connections Initiative (MCI), funded by the Lilly Endowment. This grant has, over the last four years, enabled the Seminary to pursue closer relationships with the wider church. Under the leadership of Dr. Mary Miller, MCI has funded the development of resources like the video series “Exploring Covenant

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**NORTH PARK  
THEOLOGICAL  
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Affirmations” and a book on the six affirmations by members of the Seminary faculty. The volume is scheduled for publication next year. It has funded Youth Nexus, a week-long urban immersion program for high school students and their youth pastors. This program intends to expose the participants to ministry and the Seminary, as well as the city. MCI has funded programs in connection with University Ministries (UMin) at North Park University, including internships for Seminary students to work with college students, Sankofa and Mosaic trips for seminarians and university undergrads, spiritual direction retreats, and staff development for UMin staff. MCI has also sent professors to churches and conferences as “Professors in Residence,” and brought pastors, conference superintendents, and others to the Seminary as “Pastors in Residence.” We are very thankful to the Lilly Endowment and Dr. Miller for this program and its positive outcomes. We are hoping to sustain Youth Nexus, Seminary internships with UMin, and the Sankofa and Mosaic trips. There are still another few months to get in on the professor in residence program, so contact Mary if your church is interested in having a visit from a Seminary professor.

Our faculty continues to publish works of scholarship. This winter, Dr. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom published her first book. It has the intriguing title *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*. The focus of the volume is the Christian ethic of Pietism, the renewal movement that gave rise to the Evangelical Covenant Church. It is published by Cascade Books in Eugene, Oregon, in their “Cascade Companions” series. You can find a copy by going to the Covenant Church’s online bookstore, or to [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com). The book was given to all pastors at the Covenant Church’s midwinter conference. Congratulations to Michelle!

This is the last letter of this sort that I will write as the president and dean of the Seminary. It has been a joy and a challenge to serve at this post for the last 14 years. I am thankful for support from faculty, staff, students, and administrators of North Park Theological Seminary and North Park University. I am thankful for the support of the three Covenant presidents I served under: Paul Larsen, Glenn Palmberg, and Gary Walter. And I am especially thankful for all of you. Your gifts, your words of encouragement, and your prayers have meant the world to me. I am going on a sabbatical on July 1 and will return to teach Bible and Theology at the Seminary in the winter term of 2011. I have some writing to do and courses to prepare. I am very much looking forward to this new phase of my life and ministry. I trust you will give your support and encouragement to the next president and dean. I also trust that you will consider giving a generous gift before the end of our fiscal year in June. I would like to be sent off with a bang! May God’s grace and blessings be with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John E. Phelan, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John E. Phelan, Jr.  
President and Dean