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**Reflections on North Park University in 2014**  
**Donor Dinner**  
**Festival of Lessons and Carols**  
**December 7, 2014**



**David L. Parkyn, President**

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One hundred and twenty years ago this fall, on September 18, 1894 to be exact, a small group of people, certainly a group smaller than we in this room tonight, gathered here at the corner of Foster and Kedzie Avenues, on the steps of Old Main, to dedicate the first building of our school.

They came together on that Monday morning—a band comprised of a few students who had just registered for classes, a small cadre of faculty ready to teach, leaders of the church, and a small but significant group of dedicated volunteers—to get things started, to give birth to a school.

Leland Carlson who wrote a history of North Park on the school's fiftieth anniversary tells us that on this memorable morning that small band of people read from scripture, sang a hymn, and preached not one but two sermons—all in Swedish. And then they prayed this school into its first day of classes on this campus.

In his history Carlson describes all of this with a single, intriguing phrase. He proclaims North Park to be “a work just beginning.”

What did he mean by this? Well, I imagine he was reflecting on that day from his own perspective in the early 1940's. When he compared North Park on that first day at the corner of Foster and Kedzie with what this school had become over the ensuing 50 years, in 1894 North Park was “a work just beginning.”

As true as this phrase was for North Park in 1894 I think it is also true for North Park today—a work still beginning. Ponder this with me for a minute or two tonight.

Consider this:

- Each semester students enter into classrooms to enroll in courses on topics and areas of learning they've never before considered—a work still beginning.
- Each year nearly 1000 students enroll in their first undergraduate, graduate, or seminary class at North Park—a work still beginning.
- This year more undergraduates are enrolled at North Park than ever before in our history—a work still beginning.
- This year, for the first time in our history, the largest number of students enrolled at North Park from outside of Illinois come from the states of Washington and California, and they sit in our classrooms next to the 27% of our new undergraduates of Latino descent—a work still beginning.

- This year, for the first time in our history, students in anatomy and physiology learn not just through textbooks but through the intimate touch of their hands on the bodies of two donors in a new cadaver lab in the Johnson Center—a work still beginning.
- This year, for the first time in our history, graduate students study toward master degrees counseling and collaborative piano, undergraduates major in conflict transformation, health science, and sports management, just as next year for the first time they may study biostatistics and community health education—a work still beginning.
- This year, though perhaps not for the first time in our history, students are discerning what it means to be children of the prince of peace in a society of discord and injustice, considering how to light the flame of Christ's love in a nation where some have so much and others so little, where some feel so well-protected and others encounter danger with nearly every turn, discovering how to be peacemakers, how to "seek the welfare of the city" for God's glory and neighbor's good—a work still beginning.
- This year the music of Advent is performed at North Park in a number of languages, by students from around the world, in a church dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, together proclaiming the birth of Jesus by reaching across lines that for so long have divided the body of Christ so that tonight we proclaim our oneness in Christ, a oneness comprised in "a great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne"—a work still beginning.

I know you believe this about North Park tonight as much as I do. Why do you support North Park so generously? Do you love North Park today because you see the sun setting on the history of our school, or because you recognize the sun still rising on our eastern horizon? Because of your faithfulness, for which we are so deeply grateful, North Park today, in its 123<sup>rd</sup> year, is a work still beginning.

We gather tonight because today is the second Sunday of Advent, the second Sunday in the beginning of a new church year. We gather tonight because we believe today is the second Sunday in North Park's life which one day will encompass a full 52 Sundays. Though much has already taken place at North Park, far more is yet to come. We're in the Advent of North Park, this is a time of preparing for the coming of far greater days, because North Park is a work still beginning.

No one knows this better than Campus Pastor Judy Peterson. Judy knows first-hand the great promise for the future of North Park because she knows the enormous potential evident in the blossoming dedication of students at North Park today, each one finding his and her way—sometimes stumbling and at other times leaping forward—toward a life lived with significance and in service.

Judy is with us tonight to guide our reflection on how to prepare this Advent, here on our campus where there is a work still beginning, for the coming of the Christ-child.

Please join me, first in welcoming Judy, and then in listening closely so that in the tradition of shepherds and magi we too can discover and meet and know the newborn child.