

April 3, 2007

There's a rhythm to the school year. Some parts of it I like a great deal; other parts are less satisfying. For example, I'm fond of both the beginning of the year and the end of the year, but April isn't one of my favorite months.

In our home Linda and I have a series of 39 photo albums containing pictures from our life together since our wedding in 1974. A couple of years ago our son and his girlfriend had a dozen of these albums open on the floor of our family room. They had taken an interest in watching Nathaniel grow up and were having a grand time comparing the first-day-of-school photo from each year...kindergarten through college. It was a great retrospective and involved more than seeing how he had grown physically from one year to the next. They laughed over his choice of clothes, how he had his hair cut (or not), and what kind of book bag he had chosen. Though he didn't particularly like to study, Nathaniel thoroughly enjoyed being with his friends so he always anticipated the first day of the school year.

By contrast, I was speaking recently with a member of our faculty who was struggling at home with his son's test-taking anxiety. April was fast approaching and it was bringing more than rain showers. In elementary school April brings standardized tests of achievement. The more the teacher sought to prepare the students for taking these tests, the higher the young boy's anxiety rose about his performance on the test. As a father, I sympathized with this faculty member. Had my son realized in late August that April testing would soon be upon him he would not have been smiling in the first-day-of-school photos. As educators, both of us fathers agreed that in April it is easy to lose sight of our goal of inducing a love of learning in our students.

This contrast between August and April characterizes our experience in elementary school, but it also holds true in college. In August Linda and I visited with new students and their families on move-in day. There was a special energy to the day, and more than a few first-day-of-school photos were taken. We all looked forward to a good year. And for most of us this has been a good year. Learning has gone well; we love what we do; we find fulfillment in our life work; we have grown. But now April is here. We wonder if spring will ever come. We yearn for the change-of-pace which summer will bring. We wonder if we will ever again love learning.

I was thinking about April—and especially about April at North Park University—when I recently re-read some of my favorite lines from Anne Lamott.

- “One secret of life is that the reason life works at all is that not everyone in your tribe is nuts on the same day.”
- “Laughter is carbonated holiness.”
- “Time, and showing up, turn most messes into compost, and something surprising may grow.”
- “You can keep bees in jars without lids, because they’ll walk around on the glass floor, imprisoned by the glass surrounding them, when all they’d have to do is look up and they could fly away.”
- “If you insist on having a destination when you come into a library, you’re shortchanging yourself.”
- “I have a lot of faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything.... The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns. Faith also means reaching deeply within, for the sense one was born with, the sense, for example, to go for a walk.”

Perhaps this is good advice: we should go for a walk, especially in April. And as we do, let’s take this prayer with us:

Eternal God, this April day bless North Park University that we may be a lively center for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom; and grant that those who teach and those who learn may find you to be the source of all truth. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 9 – A tradition at North Park is to reserve the Monday following Easter Sunday for a faculty and staff development day. The program this year is designed primarily to help us consider how better to work with each other, how to improve our campus relationships, how to both respect and learn from each other.

The day’s program will begin with food and beverage—join us at 8:30 a.m. in the Viking Café—followed by a common session at 9:00 a.m. in Hamming Hall. At this opening session Dr. Soong-Chan Rah will help us

consider how to build a healthy community. The rest of the day’s program features two workshops, each repeated three times.

The Diversity Workshop will be held in Hamming Hall (at 9:45 a.m., 12:30 p.m, and 2:30 p.m). This workshop will feature opportunities to think about the many expressions of human diversity, with a focus on cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity.

The Harassment Workshop will be held in Carlson 13 (at 9:45 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 2:30 p.m.). This workshop will help us to better

respect difference among us and to foster appropriate working relationships.

The day's program has been organized to allow all members of the faculty and staff to attend. Participation in the common session and the two workshops is expected for each of us as part of our responsibilities in whatever capacity we work at North Park.

So...on April 9, let's gather together to learn how to make North Park a better workplace, and also to visit with each other and take delight in our participation in this academic community.

PROVOST SEARCH – A small group has been organized to lead the search for a University Provost. I will chair this committee, with members including:

- Rachelle Ankney
- Nancy Arnesen
- Rollo Dilworth
- Elizabeth Gray
- Boaz Johnson
- Andrea Nevels
- Mary Trujillo

The basic responsibility of this group is to advise me in the appointment of a provost. The group will review applications, select applicants for campus visits, solicit input from the campus community, and evaluate the candidates. Advice provided by the search committee will inform my appointment of the provost.

Announcements of this opening at North Park were placed earlier this year in several print and electronic locations, including the following:

- North Park University website
- Chronicle of Higher Education (print and online)
- CCCU website
- Women in Higher Education (print and online)
- Diverse Issues in Higher Education (print and online)
- Hispanic Outlook (print)

The position announcement noted that the university provost will serve “as the chief academic officer for all undergraduate and graduate programs in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Business and Nonprofit Management, Nursing, Education, Music, and Adult Learning.” The announcement further noted that “NPU seeks a candidate who is a capable teacher, an able scholar, and an experienced administrator at the Dean level or higher. The Provost will be an individual of personal integrity and character, a collaborative administrator, a committed Christian, and supportive of multicultural and urban-centered education.”

The search committee is presently reviewing candidates. We hope to schedule campus interviews with a small number of top candidates during the last week of April and first week of May. Campus interviews will include opportunity for faculty and staff to meet and interact with the candidates. Subsequent to the campus interviews the committee will solicit evaluative response from the campus community.

Faculty and staff members who have questions or comments about the search at this time may contact any member of the search committee. We will also apprise the campus community as the work of the committee progresses toward scheduling the campus interviews.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES – Kyle Becchetti, the chair of the Board, was on campus for several days in mid-March. She had opportunity to meet with several senior administrators, the University Council, a small group of faculty, and a small group discussing the University's tagline and the vocabulary currently used in marketing communication.

The full Board will meet on campus during April 19-21. The schedule includes a full-day meeting of the investment subcommittee, meetings of each committee, sessions with the full Board, a reception with graduating seniors, and a special audience with the cast of Kung Fu Suburbia.

Following the Board meeting the campus community will receive copies of my report to the Board, reports to the Board from faculty and student representatives, and a summary of actions taken at the Board meeting.

NPU@125 – During the spring semester we have sponsored several sessions for faculty and staff to comment on the current state of the university and reflect on what NPU might be in 10 years when we celebrate the university's 125th anniversary. Dan Tepke, senior vice president, has provided good leadership for these sessions, and participants included a large cross-section of faculty and staff.

Results from these sessions will inform further work this summer to draft a long-range plan for the university. Thanks to those who elected to participate in these discussions this spring semester.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES – Over the past two months the campus community has commented on the outline I drafted for the senior administrative structure of the university. Your comments have been helpful—both for affirming where the proposal was strong and for suggesting how it could be improved.

I am now completing revisions to the proposal and expect to have a revised, and final, version completed in a few days. As this is ready, I will distribute it to all faculty and staff for your information.

ACCREDITATION REVIEW – During four days last week I visited Concordia College-New York to chair an accreditation review team for the Middle States Association. One might say this was left-over business from my time in Pennsylvania prior to coming to North Park. But the assignment gave me an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from six colleges and universities in the mid-Atlantic region, and to support the work of the faculty, administration, Board of Regents, and students at Concordia College.

Regional peer accreditation is one of the unique aspects of American higher education. North Park University participates in this process as a member of the North Central Association. Accreditation serves to assure students that their education is mission-directed and of appropriate quality to assure attainment of stated learning outcomes. Accreditation reviews also provide colleges and universities a time for self-assessment as well as encouragement and critique from fellow educators.

I'll return to Philadelphia in mid-June to represent the visiting team when our report is presented to the Middle States Commission.