Occasional Campus Communiqué David L. Parkyn, President



February 28, 2008

Most of us know that it isn't easy to raise children. Parenting brings joy in abundance, along with a share of distress, uncertainty, and even hurt. Now that my two children are young adults I remember both the joys and sorrows of parenting, though memory of the joys seems to grow even as memory of the sorrows diminishes.

A few days ago, however, I recalled the worst of parenting—having my children endure pain and sorrow of their own when there is nothing I can do to relieve their anguish.

Linda's mother died very early in the morning on February 13. In the dark of night, when all was quiet outside our home on Spaulding Avenue, I phoned each of our children to tell them of their Nana's death. Her passing came as no surprise to us, and yet we were unprepared. Most of all, I was unprepared to hear the sobs of my young adult children and know there was nothing I could do to take this grief from them. I grieved her death, but even more my heart throbbed from the deep sorrow of my children.

We're healing, of course. Part of the healing for me came with the privilege of speaking at Mom's funeral. What a brave woman she was to trust her son-in-law to speak at her funeral! In preparing my words for that divine occasion, I thought much about the calling which guided her life. She was, in many ways, just one of us, no different from most around her. Yet her life had purpose, a purpose drawn from a commitment to God lived out in relation to those around her.

At Mom's funeral I ended my reflections with these words:

These three—compassion, celebration, and hospitality—are rooted in Mom's fundamental love for God. She took seriously the commandment that we love our neighbor. And it was Mom's life-long ambition to be neighbor to others—by extending compassion, by inviting celebration, and by offering hospitality.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." I'm sure there were times in Mom's life when she asked, searched, and knocked. But I'm convinced that a far greater portion of her life was dedicated to being Jesus among us. That is, rather than asking, seeking, and knocking for herself, she became Christ in our life to compassionately

give and satisfy our need when we asked, to reveal life and invite us to celebrate it when we searched for its meaning, and to open the door in hospitality when we knocked.

Her novel is now complete. The blank pages given at her birth have been fully written upon—one chapter, one page, one sentence, one word at a time. This was her sacred obligation, an obligation she embraced with gusto. Well done, good and faithful servant, enter now into the joy of your Lord.

Early in life Mom had asked, "What shall I do with my life?" I'm uncertain how she reached the answer, but her life consistently gave testimony to her answer and the dedication with which she approached it in each of her 81 years.

What shall I do with my life? We hear this question over and over in our vocation—not only because we ask it of ourselves but because our students ask it of themselves, often in our presence. Our vocation is to help each student wrestle with this question. This is our sacred obligation, an obligation we must embrace with gusto.

How might we do this? Howard Thurman was born into poverty in Florida and grew up in a family of two—he and his grandmother, a former slave. A first generation college student he studied at Morehouse, Columbia, and Rochester Seminary. Late in his career he became Dean of the Chapel at Boston University where Martin Luther King, Jr., was deeply influenced by Thurman's commitment to non-violence.

Over several years at Boston University Thurman repeatedly preached to student audiences a sermon titled with this question. Based on Matthew 4:1-11 the sermon ends with this intriguing sentence: "I love Jesus for the shaft of light that he throws across the pathway of those who seek to answer the question, What shall I do with my life?"

Herein is our vocation: to be instruments of Christ to throw a shaft of light—even Jesus himself—across the pathway of our students.

A CCREDITATION SUCCESS – Within the past few days we've received official notice from the Association of Theological Schools of a positive review of the seminary's review for reaccreditation. This means that the seminary remains in good standing for the next ten years – through 2017 which is one year past the 125th anniversary of this institution!

In the report of the visiting team, commendation was offered for three "distinctive strengths:" (a) a vibrant, effective field education program, (b) intentional efforts towards diversity of the Board, faculty, and students, and (c) the close relationship to the sponsoring denomination.

Congratulations to all involved in bringing this review to a grand success.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES – As is our usual custom, the Board of Trustees met this past week for its mid-year session. As part of the meeting the Board hosted a reception on Friday afternoon for members of the University staff.

The meeting included several activities and action items, summarized as follows:

- a presentation from recently selected consultants from Ter Molen Watkins & Brandt of Chicago who will assist in preliminary planning for the University's next fund-raising campaign. Through the spring semester the consultants will evaluate the readiness of our development office to launch a campaign and they will test the level of interest in a campaign on the part of our major donors. The consultants will report to the Board at the May meeting.
- The Finance Committee received reports from Johnson and Counsel and UBS on the University's investment portfolio.
- The Board approved a revised investment policy.
- The Board noted a credit enhancement renewal offered to the University by Chase Bank, reflecting the school's positive financial performance.
- The Development Committee received a report on recent changes in the organizational structure of the Development Office and selective personnel reassignments in this area.
- The Student Development Committee considered a report on focus groups organized to provide student perspectives on campus housing.
- The Enrollment Management and Integrated Marketing Committee commented positively on the regional ad campaign launched in Chicagoland in January.
- The Academic Committee received a report on the proposal for establishing a

- faculty senate, and also reviewed a working draft of updates to the faculty by-laws.
- The Academic Committee also heard a presentation on the accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission which North Park will undertake through 2011.
- The Board approved tuition fees for graduate programs and students in the School of Adult Learning for 2008-2009.
- The Board heard a report on emergency preparedness and campus security.
- The Board received an interim report from a Governance Task Force recently appointed to review the Board's organizational structure.

The President's Report to the Board of Trustees is distributed to the campus community as an attachment to this communiqué. As you have questions or comments please direct these to me.

PAST? – Our collective hope is that spring break 2008 will usher in an end to winter! The past two months have given us an abundance of snow and more gray skies than blue. Some of us like winter, others wish we didn't live in this climate...I imagine all of us are ready for warmer weather.

I'm sure the University's physical plant crew will be ready to put away their shovels and salt buckets. What a job they've performed this year! On so many days they came in early, stayed late, and work hard in between, all so we could enjoy the safety of a well-cleared sidewalk.

Here, then, is my closing invitation: between now and spring break, every time you meet a member of the physical plant crew, be sure to say "Thanks" and give them a highfive.