

January 23, 2008

Formation and Transformation. These two words are part of our history at North Park. They were used most recently as the tagline for the capital campaign completed just two years ago. These words describe our objective – to *form* student lives in ways which serve the general purposes of an educated citizenry, and then to *transform* student lives through particular commitments.

To think we can form students to be good citizens is a bold assumption. This is not easy work, nor is the outcome easy to accomplish.

To think we can transform students into individuals of deep commitment is an audacious assumption. To think we can prepare students “for lives of significance and service” is to dream of accomplishing the nearly impossible. Yet this is what we claim to do.

How might we best approach such a bold and audacious task? Together. This is the simple answer. Together. We can be bold and audacious because we work together. Each of us is an educator, regardless of what specific tasks and responsibilities are assigned to us, regardless of which students we meet.

The secret of working together is to know what we ourselves can contribute to this task and to rely on each other to fill in the rest. None of us can do it all well, but each of us can do something well. The secret lies in knowing what we do well and honoring what others bring as a complement to our work.

Parker Palmer says it this way in his book, *Let Your Life Speak* (p. 27).

I am less gifted at building on other people’s discoveries than at tinkering in my own garage; less gifted at stepping slowly into a subject than at jumping into the deep end to see if I can swim; less gifted at making outlines than at writing myself into a corner and trying to find a way out; less gifted at tracking a tight chain of logic than at leaping from one metaphor to another.

We need both – those who tinker and those who build on what others have started, those who step in cautiously and those who jump in wildly, those who follow outlines and those who look for a way out, those who carefully study a map and those who discover their own way.

We've now started a new semester. Students are once again on our campus. We've agreed to help them form their lives, and then transform them. Do we have what it takes to fulfill this promise? The courage it takes to shape lives? If we venture alone we will fail. If we venture together we may well succeed.

HOLIDAYS – Welcome back to campus! The semester break, along with the celebration of Christmas and New Year's Day, and the time between spent with family and friends, is highly regarded as one of the best benefits of being part of the Academy. I trust that through these holy-days we each found rest and refreshment for our life journey.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT – With the beginning of a new semester we've welcomed a group of new students to North Park. Nonetheless, the work of recruiting students continues. The spring semester is an important time in our recruitment cycle and each of us has a part to play in this task.

Our part is especially evident at those times when prospective students and parents visit the campus. Some of us will open our classroom to visiting students. Some of us will give tours on campus and answer questions. All of us will be expected to be friendly—to greet campus visitors with a smile.

This is a good example of what it means to work together to achieve a campus-wide task.

OPEN OFFICE DAYS – As is my tradition, a few days each semester are reserved on my calendar for informal visiting with faculty and staff as well as students. Please take advantage of this opportunity and encourage students to do so as well. The scheduled days for the spring semester are as follows:

Faculty and Staff

- Monday, February 18
- Wednesday, March 26
- Monday, April 21

Students

- Thursday, February 14
- Wednesday, March 5
- Monday, April 7

ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN – As part of our goal to increase North Park's name recognition in the Chicago area, the Office of External Relations has launched a 2008 Advertising Campaign. This effort visually and verbally highlights the University's identity.

The campaign includes a common visual design with three messages:

- Campus to Community
- Knowledge to Wisdom
- Word to Deed

The artwork is posted on various billboards, bridge bulletins, bus shelters and the CTA buses and EL (Red and Brown lines). Our expectation is that the campaign will contribute to the strategic positioning of the University in the city and beyond.

STRATEGIC PLANNING – Over the past several months we have begun to conceive of a new strategic plan for the University. Last academic year a number of "focus groups" were organized around the theme of NPU@125. In my State of the University address early in the fall semester I outlined several areas of interest for our future. The University Council has used two

book discussions, over several sessions for each book, to sharpen our reflection on the mission and place of North Park. The senior administrative team has dedicated several day-long retreats to planning for the future. The Board of Trustees engaged this topic at two of its meetings last year. The University Council and the Deans' Council met recently to complete a SWOT analysis. And other work continues.

As we move through the spring semester the broader campus community will have opportunity to review a draft document which outlines a new strategic plan for North Park. This document will be presented during February to the University Council, Deans' Council, Board of Trustees, and the Council of Administrators of the Covenant Church.

Additionally, during March and April all others on campus will receive a copy of a draft strategic plan and will be invited to participate in discussions of this document. These opportunities will extend over the two months, but will receive special focus in a campus-wide gathering of faculty and staff on the Monday following Easter Sunday.

As president of the University I appreciate the involvement of many people in this project. This takes extra effort from each of us and requires additional time commitment. But we have opportunity to shape the future of the University so this is a good and worthwhile project. I look forward to our discussions together.