

# PRESIDENT'S OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUÉ

February 27, 2009

## THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – A BRIEF ESSAY

We claim at North Park that students who study with us will experience an education that **“affirms learning in all its forms—in the classroom and beyond—as a gift, a joy, and a sacred obligation.”** This is the fourth of our seven educational ideals.

Learning is life-long. We begin to learn at the moment of birth, when we fill our lungs with that first breath of air, open our eyes to the world around us, taste the sweetness of nourishment, hear the sounds of life, and sense the fragrance of living. Learning ends only at the moment of death, when breathing stops, our eyes are closed, the need to sup is satisfied, the clatter of life is silenced, and the enjoyment of living has past.

Learning is life-embracing. We learn through every experience, every moment of breath, sight, taste, sound, and smell. Learning is shaped by the place into which we are born, the choices we make each day from the rising to the setting of the sun and beyond. Consequently, learning is individual and intensely personal. No two people learn the same things, nor do we learn at the same pace, in the same place, or in the same ways.

Like life itself, much of learning is chaotic. Both formal learning in a classroom and informal learning in all parts of life take on the unpredictable nature of a tee-ball game. The players are strategically located across the ball field, each with a glove too big for the hand. The batter, gripping a bat and trying to balance a helmet, stands at the plate. The first swing connects only with the air. The second swing is a solid hit, but the batter has struck the tee rather than the ball. On the third swing, the batter tops the ball and it rolls four feet in front of home plate. The play is on; the action starts. The batter looks at the coach for instruction on what to do next and the coach explains again that it is now time to run to first base. The infield players awaken, with neither the pitcher nor the catcher sure whose responsibility it is to retrieve a ball that rests motionless on the ground between them. The player positioned at third base takes charge, runs for the ball, and mistakenly throws it toward second base. As the thrown ball bounces into the outfield the runner advances. . . . And soon, before our very eyes, a topped ball becomes a home run.

Learning is the game of life. It's exhilarating when all goes well, a bit depressing when it does not. The innings roll on, errors turn into runs, occasionally a victory is won, and we celebrate, sometimes! Regardless of the win-loss record, players at the end of the season are more skilled, understand the game better, and know more of what it means to play on a team, than was the case some weeks earlier.

Though experienced uniquely by each individual, learning takes place best in the company of others. Sometimes by purpose, at other times by accident, in each moment of life we join our neighbors—at home, at school, at work, on the subway, in the gym, walking down the sidewalk—to form discourse communities. As we speak to one another, as we listen to those in our company, we collaborate in learning. We learn by telling our life-stories and hearing the stories of others. Part of what my neighbor has becomes mine, just as I share with others from what I have. Learning in the company of others is a gift exchange.

The privilege of learning—of gift exchange—requires something of us; learning mandates an obligation—a sacred obligation—to serve others. To learn is noble, but learning is most noble when used to benefit others. Whatever we are privileged to learn is not meant to be hoarded, to be kept to ourselves in isolation from all others. Whatever we learn must soon be shared, it must become a gift to others. A gift which helps others learn. A gift which shapes the world around us for the better. A gift which lifts others up even as we have been lifted up by the gifts of others.

Life's journey is long; we travel together exchanging gifts, learning.

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## Special Achievement

Members of our University community continue to receive recognition from near and far. Among these we note the following:

- Trustee **Ann Alvarez** received the “Beacon of Light” Award from the Latino Advisory Committee at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. A few months ago Ann and her work at Casa Central were the subject of a feature article in the alumni magazine of the School of Social Services Administration at the University of Chicago. The article also mentioned Ann’s work with the North Park University Board of Trustees.
- Books by several faculty members are fresh off the presses, including:
  - **Brent Laytham** (seminary), *God Does Not . . . Entertain, Play “Matchmaker,” Hurry, Demand Blood, Cure Every Illness* (Brazos Press)
  - **Kristy Odelius** (English), *Strange Trades* (Shearsman Books)
  - **Kurt W. Peterson** (history), *Lincoln’s Land: The History of Abraham Lincoln’s Coles County Farm* (Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Historical Farm LLC)
- The book *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, published this past year by **Klyne Snodgrass** (seminary), was recognized for the 2009 Christianity Today Book Award in the category of biblical studies. The judges commented: “This is a superb culmination of career-long reflection on one of the most important genres in biblical literature. Readers will be deeply impressed by

Snodgrass's exposition, his command of the relevant scholarship in the field, and the lucid quality of his analysis." His colleagues at North Park are also impressed!

- **David G. Horner**, former president of North Park University from 1987 to 2004, will be inaugurated on Saturday, March 7, as the new president of the American College of Greece. The ceremony will take place on the college's main campus in Athens. Carl Balsam will represent North Park at this ceremony and will greet President Horner on our behalf. Angelyn Balodimas-Bartolomei from our faculty in the School of Education will also attend the ceremony. Dr. Bartolomei received her undergraduate degree from the American College of Greece and recently published a guide to the city of Athens.
- The Fulbright Commission recently named **Linda Parkyn** as a Fulbright Senior Specialist. In this capacity, Linda will lead a project in applied linguistics at the *Universidad Nacional de Agricultura* in Catacamas, Honduras. For four weeks in late April and May she will join the UNA faculty to design and implement a four-year second language curriculum in English to be required of all students as part of the requirements for their undergraduate degree. Linda previously served as a Senior Specialist at the *Universidad Autónoma de Vera Cruz* in Xalapa, Mexico in 2003, and was a Fulbright Scholar at the *Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes*, Mexico in 2001-2002.
- Through the efforts of **Anne Jenner** (library) North Park has received a \$15,000 grant from the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation to digitize the *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, a scholarly journal published by the Swedish-American Historical Society since 1950.

## Spring Break

By mid-March the North Park community is usually ready for spring break. This brings with it the chance for many to change the pace of day-to-day responsibilities. Students, especially, will travel during this time. Many will return home, but others will travel with classmates—to Oregon and Washington with the Gospel Choir, to Florida with the softball team, to Arizona with the baseball team, to Appalachia, the Gulf Coast, and Mexico on Global Partnership teams, and to many other locations. We pray for safe travel for all, whether near or far from campus, and expect a return to campus life at week's end, ready to speed our way toward the end of the academic year.

## Easter Monday Faculty and Staff Professional Development Day

Monday, April 13, should be marked on each of our calendars to participate in the University's annual post-Easter professional development day. With no classes scheduled on this day, and with most students still away from campus for the long Easter weekend, faculty and staff will gather to refresh and refuel in our work together.

The day will begin with a community-wide continental breakfast during which we'll also gather for a short welcome and orientation to the day's activities. Subsequently, the schedule for the rest of the day will feature a series of elective workshops. Topics in the workshops will vary from teaching to mentoring, advising to recruiting, supporting diversity to fostering spiritual well-being. Additional information on the full schedule soon be posted, along with opportunities to elect the workshops each of us will attend.

## **February Meeting of the Board of Trustees**

As is our custom, the Board of Trustees gathered last week for their mid-year session. This meeting often provides opportunity for trustees to reflect on topics of importance to the University without the need to reach closure or make operational decisions. This characterized the February meeting as well. Most discussion took place in each of the Board's committee sessions where trustees focused on important topics of discussion.

- The Academic Committee received a summary report regarding the on-going faculty discussions on general education and heard presentations from the School of Music and the School of Nursing. The committee also recommended approval of one faculty sabbatical proposal.
- The Advancement Committee heard an update and discussed continuing work on the prospective campaign. The group also visited the new campus location for the offices of development and alumni relations.
- The Committee on Trustees considered structures for recruiting new trustees and expectations for trustee service.
- The Finance Committee met for an extended session with the University's financial advisors and investment managers to review the current fiscal environment. The committee also reviewed the current level of property and liability insurance secured by the University.
- The Committee on University Mission and Identity (formerly the Multicultural Committee) brought focused discussion to the current campus engagement of our institutional mission, in preparation for the accreditation review in 2010. The committee also heard reports from University Ministries and the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Programs.
- The Seminary Committee considered the current working-draft of a strategic plan for the seminary's academic programs.
- The Student Recruitment and Retention Committee received a report on admissions activities for the fall 2009, and reserved most of its meeting for a report and discussion on student retention.

At each of the three annual meetings, the Board of Trustees includes a 60-90 minute session designed to foster its own “professional development.” This occasionally features one or more of the Board’s specific governance responsibilities. More often, it allows the Board to become more familiar with selective parts of the University’s work. In the session this February, the Board was introduced to faculty and staff, as well as program, from three departments: Biblical and Theological Studies, Youth Ministries, and University Ministries. Nearly all members of these three departments participated in this presentation and discussion.

Finally, the Board also reserved time on Friday afternoon to host a reception for staff members from Admissions, Athletics, and External Relations. The reception was hosted in the library so Board members could view the 60625 photography exhibit on the second and third floors.

As is my tradition, I will distribute to all faculty and staff an electronic copy of my full written report to the Board of Trustees. I am happy to discuss any part of this report with you as you have interest.