PRESIDENT'S OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUÉ

March 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 "encourages dialogue as a means of learning where open inquiry, integrity, and civility guide our life together." This is the fifth of our seven educational ideals.

If North Park were a homogeneous community we would not need to worry much about dialogue . . . it would come to us rather naturally, most often we would easily understand each other's perspective (because it would be much like our own), and consequently we wouldn't hear much from each other that we didn't already know. As a result, this would not be a rich learning community.

By contrast, however, the North Park University community is characterized by difference and diversity, and throughout the school's history we have agreed that learning in this academic community is enriched by the inclusion of a wide array of individuals. This is evident especially in our student body.

As a university we enroll students from all walks of life. Our students come from America and around the world, from the midwest and the south, from cities and small towns. The majority of North Park students are Christians representing a breadth of denominations and churches from Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions; other students are Muslim, Jewish, and from other faiths. North Park enrolls both women and men and our students identify with a variety of sexual orientations. Some North Park students drift to the left politically, others to the right; some are richer and others are poorer; some are first-generation college students and others come from a long family line of college attendance. North Park students are African American and Caucasian, Asian and Latino; all North Park students speak English, but many also communicate in other languages.

Within such an environment we need to give deliberate and careful attention to dialogue. Conversation in a community of difference doesn't always come easily and often we misunderstand each other. But when we listen to each other in this community of difference we hear much that is new, and in turn this becomes a very rich learning community.

Such a learning community requires wide-spread embrace of a common expectation: that all students who enroll at North Park will be welcomed, accepted, and respected as valued and contributing members of this learning community. Each student (as well as each member of the University's faculty and staff) brings to North Park an anthology of

life experiences, a personal story. Each story is true, a story to be shared, a story through which others can learn.

Our embrace of difference—of each student's story—makes the University a special place; this diversity shapes our learning community. But this medley of personal stories can also be a challenge to each of us. Disagreement is inevitable in our University community; yet this very difference contributes positively to our learning environment. The assortment of individual perspectives on any topic favorably fosters, informs, and shapes a dynamic learning community. We wouldn't be much of a University were it not for the difference we embrace.

Yet difference can often lead to misunderstanding; misunderstanding can lead to bias; and bias can sometimes give rise to hate-filled responses. Interaction in our community which is based on hate has no place at North Park, whether the interaction is in person or through email, named or anonymous, public or private.

Because we embrace difference as a University it is essential that we each learn to live lovingly in this community. As fellow learners we must daily try to give each other a fair hearing and we must uphold the dignity of others allowing each person to speak for himor herself. Our community life must be characterized by *civility*. We must each be committed to *dialogue* with the other for we cannot learn from those with whom we do not converse. We must commit to mutual *respect* for there is no hope for education if we refuse to listen to and learn from the other. We must extend *hospitality* across our lines of difference for only in doing so will we witness the image of God revealed in the other. These principles must guide learning in our community both in the classroom and beyond.

The differences between us—regarding how we express faith, our relative position on a political continuum, our sexual orientation, our ethnic and cultural norms, and a host of other topics, questions, and points of conversation—are real. The question simply is how far apart should these differences keep us from each other? Should our diversity separate us or unite us? At North Park we don't seek to eliminate difference and disagreement within the campus community, but we do seek to draw people closer together—through inclusion, civility, dialogue, respect, hospitality, and a mutual love for God and all people.

EASTER WEEKEND

We gather this month, with family and friends as well as with members of the North Park community, to celebrate Holy Week and Easter. Much of our individual observation of this special season in the Church year is linked to our church families. And it is for this reason that North Park grants an extended weekend as the campus is closed on Friday April 10, as well as the following Saturday and Sunday. Christ is risen!

EASTER MONDAY FACULTY AND STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

On Monday, April 13, all members of our faculty and staff will gather for our 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, we have opportunity to meet with colleagues 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 day's activities is distributed electronically to all faculty and staff.

A NEW LOOK ON THE WEB

After months of careful work and extensive preparation we have unveiled the University's redesigned web site. This gives a "new look" to how we communicate in this medium with both internal and external audiences. Equally important, the web site is now facilitated by a new content management system which allows wider participation from campus offices in maintaining the web content. A number of people have already been trained to participate in this new feature.

Preparing and launching the new web site has been a cross-team project in the very real sense. Out external relations staff and information technology team have led the way. Kudos to everyone included in these groups!

HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENTS

Two individuals will be recognized at the spring commencement ceremonies with the presentation of honorary doctorates. On Saturday, May 9, at the undergraduate ceremony renowned author and speaker, Phyllis Tickle, will be recognized. And on Saturday, May 23, at the seminary commencement ceremony North Park will present an honorary degree to Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

PRESIDENT'S OPEN OFFICE DAY

Members of the faculty and staff are invited to drop in to visit with the president between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31. No appointment is necessary . . . the topic of conversation is yours to choose . . . on the second floor of Old Main.

SPECIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Jim Bruckner has been awarded a Lilly Theological Research Grant for 2009-2010. The award will provide summer research support for Jim's continuing work on a book-length project "Human Health and Ancient Narrative: The Old Testament as a Shaping Resource for Health Care Vocations."
- We recently received the good news that the University's Athletic Training Education Program has been re-accredited by CAATE, the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education. Andrew Lundgren leads this program and much of the credit for the very positive review rests on his shoulders.

THE NEXT TEN DAYS ON CAMPUS

Published electronically each week, "The Next Ten Days on Campus" provides a convenient summary of the lectures, music and theater performances, chapel services, and other public events scheduled during the coming days. As the academic year comes to an end, the month of April is filled with a large number of such activities. Members of the University faculty and staff are encouraged to attend programs which interest you, and in which students you know may be participating. This is a great way to continue learning, and a wonderful way to support students.

Additionally, to make sure events which are sponsored by your program unit are included in the weekly publication, please send the relevant information to Karen Mears in the President's Office for posting during the appropriate week.