

PRESIDENT'S OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUÉ

November 20, 2008

THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – A BRIEF ESSAY

We claim at North Park that students who study with us will experience an education that **“engages Chicago as a dynamic context for learning and service.”** This is the second of our seven educational ideals.

In my inauguration address I recalled words a friend taught me some time ago when I worked with him in an urban-centered program. He stated: “The city is both text and context for learning.” Frequently when I’m with students I paraphrase this by saying, “Chicago is the most important book you will read while at North Park and Chicago is the most important classroom you’ll study in.” Or, stated yet another way, “Chicago is our classroom and all Chicagoans are our teachers.”

North Park has not always been in the city. When Old Main was built in 1893 this was a very “sparsely settled community.” In his history of the first 50 years of North Park Leland Carlson described our immediate context this way:

Within the North Park community were nine homes established by 1894—less than one house per square block. . . . Old Main stood like a lone sentinel surveying the surrounding territory of onion fields, cabbage patches, and cornfields. . . . Provincial and rustic, lonely and deserted—these were characteristic adjectives applied to the community by the casual observer. . . . There were no water mains or sewers, no sidewalks or parking lots, no schools or cafes . . . and hardly any people.

This was not a city! But all this changed over the ensuing decades, such that some 80 years after the school was established our institutional fathers wondered whether the college should remain at Foster and Kedzie. Free land was offered in the countryside; should we sell our buildings and construct a new campus further away? The answer, in 1979, was “No.” And with that single word, the place of North Park College was confirmed as a place in the city.

This place we call home, this city of Chicago, is a sanctuary, it is a holy place. It is a place in which millions of people interact each day. It is a place of music and the arts, of work and manufacturing, of trade and retailing, of healing and learning, of

technological advance and growing families. People engage the city, and the city engages people.

There was a day when North Park College was an important signpost in this city. One of the stories we like to tell comes from the 1920s when pilots used the cupola atop Old Main as a landmark to find Orley Field (today's O'Hare International Airport). Today we're pleased more sophisticated methods guide our pilots. But this symbolically poses a challenge for us: the Old Main cupola is no longer the tallest point on the city's north side. The University remains in the city, but what is its place in this city? Does the city know North Park, and does North Park know Chicago, even if our cupola no longer guides the pilots? Does North Park still make a difference in the city of Chicago? Does Chicago still make a difference in the education of our students?

Do we embrace Chicago to leaven what our students learn in our classrooms and residence halls? Do our graduates remain in Chicago to leaven the life of this place—its places of business and finance, its churches and neighborhoods, its schools and hospitals? Do we offer programs of study which effectively address the needs of Chicago residents and thereby leaven the city itself? Do we tell our prospective students that in coming to North Park they will be leavened by the city and will be expected to leaven the city as well?

Earlier this month *Foreign Policy Magazine* rated Chicago as the second best global city for getting an undergraduate degree...the second best place in the world to attend college. In this ranking, Chicago is second only to London.

This city certainly must be numbered among the greatest resources North Park University possesses for shaping the education of our students. Certainly our faculty is important to the educational process. But members of our faculty can only be as effective as their supporting resources. And in the case of North Park, the resources of this global city are at the disposal of our faculty and students.

Chicago is our classroom, and all Chicagoans are our teachers.

FLOOD AND FIRE

We all know about the flood. The rainfall was steady over several days in mid-September, the river rose to an unexpected level and as the water flowed over the riverbank it surrounded Anderson Hall and filled the basement of the Magnuson Campus Center. We evacuated both Burgh and Anderson Residences for two nights. And more importantly we were forced to close the Magnuson Center for several weeks, moving a number of classes and relocating our dining service operation to Hamming Hall.

Responding to the flood, both in terms of caring for student needs and repairing or replacing damaged equipment in Magnuson, Anderson, and Burgh has been a

challenge. And it has been costly. I imagine that for years to come we'll all talk about the "year the river flooded."

We haven't been alone, however, in facing emergencies this fall. Just weeks ago, Hope College in Holland, Michigan was forced to shut down its campus and send all students home for several days to bring under control a virus which was spreading rapidly among a large number of students in residence on their campus. And just last week, on November 14, a wild fire, fed by hurricane-force winds, ripped through the campus of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Around 6:00 p.m. all students and other residents on this campus were rushed to the school's gymnasium as an emergency shelter. Within 15 minutes parts of the campus were ablaze. 14 faculty homes were completely burned, two student residence halls were destroyed, along with six other "lesser" buildings on the campus. The school is closed through December 1.

Others prayed for North Park in our time of need. We now can pray for these sister colleges in their time of deep need.

STAFF DIVERSITY DISCUSSIONS

The Office of Diversity and Intercultural Programs is sponsoring several sessions for staff to gather with Dean Terry Lindsay to discuss the present context and future programs for diversity at North Park University. Please join the discussion:

- Tuesday, November 25, 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Both sessions will be held in Brorson Lounge.

STAFF BREAKFAST GATHERING

On Tuesday of next week, November 25, all members of the staff are invited to gather for a continental breakfast and conversation with the president and senior administrative team. We'll meet from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. in Hamming Hall. Please notify the Human Resources Office of any questions or topics you'd like to be addressed during the conversation.

CHRISTMAS GATHERINGS

With December comes the end of the fall semester, but it also brings many occasions to gather with colleagues from across the campus to celebrate Advent and Christmas. We all should note the following, and participate in as many of these events as we are able.

- All Campus Open House
Brandel Library – Thursday, December 4, 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.
- Festival of Lessons and Carols

Our Lady of Mercy Church – Friday, December 5, 8:00 p.m.

- Santa Lucia Festival
Anderson Chapel, Saturday, December 6, 3:00 p.m.
- Faculty and Staff Christmas Lunch (with employee service recognition)
Hamming Hall, Tuesday, December 9, 11:30 a.m.
- Christmas Open House
President's Residence, Wednesday & Thursday, December 10 & 11, 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. All full-time and retired faculty and staff are invited, with spouse or guest. Please reserve your choice of nights with Karen Mears at kmears@northpark.edu or x5710.

A PRAYER FOR CITIES

Next week we celebrate the American holiday of Thanksgiving Day. This is a good time to gather with family and friends, to catch up on a little rest, and to be renewed for the final weeks of the semester. It is also a good time to pray for our cities – and especially our city-home, Chicago. Let's join together with these words:

Lord Christ, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City to which the nations of the world bring their glory: Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth, and our city-home, Chicago. Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and justice with order, and that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.