

OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUE

April 25, 2012

The President's Perspective – A Brief Essay

I've missed North Park in recent days.

As you know, a few weeks ago I needed to give attention to my personal well-being through preventative surgery and then take some time away from work responsibilities for physical recuperation. There's good news in this. First, reports from my physicians are all exactly as I would want them, with a prognosis which includes no areas of concern. And second, I'm now back to work on campus, perhaps not at a 100% energy-level but approaching this.

I deeply appreciate the interest, concern, and wishes for good health you've expressed in so many ways over recent weeks. Your prayers on my behalf and your love for Linda and me are meaningful expressions of community at North Park.

While I was away from campus our horticultural partners—who care so well for the beauty of our outdoor spaces—transplanted a few trees from our temporary nursery alongside the central campus green to a sparsely planted area on the west side of Christiana Avenue between Brandel Library and Sohlberg Hall. We had anticipated having this work done a few weeks from now, but this year's early spring weather pressed the schedule for transplanting these trees.

Throughout North Park's history there have been a number of individuals who have cared for our outdoor campus spaces. Over the past ten to fifteen years we have advanced this care and in doing so have been able to "bring the park back to North Park," as some of our students like to say.

Trees are important to our outdoor spaces. Over the past fifteen years we've planted perhaps several hundred trees and other large plants on our small campus. This serves us well today, but it will serve the campus even better in the future as these relatively young trees mature, grow larger, and spread their branches and leaves to form a canopy over the campus.

Trees offer an interesting metaphor for our educational mission. Note the reference to trees along the banks of a river in Psalm 1. The early verses of this psalm describe individuals who are faithful to God, whose "delight is in the law of the Lord." And these people are then described as trees:

They are like trees
Planted by streams of water,

Which yield their fruit in its season,
And their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

We can imagine students to be young trees planted in the nursery of the college campus, soon to be transplanted to a new venue for the next season of their life. But while on campus, these students are planted by a stream of water—a place of nourishment, a place to establish their root system, a place to bear their first fruit. In this context, the North Branch of the Chicago River takes on a sacred educational mission.

This speaks also to us, of course, as educators at North Park. If our students are young trees we might see ourselves as maturing trees. We model for these young trees what it is like to yield fruit in season, to sustain leaves that do not wither.

On a recent Sunday afternoon I took a walk as part of an effort to restore my strength. My walk brought me to the campus—filled with the sun's light and warmth, with a soft breeze rustling the leaves, and the almost silent water flowing through the stream. As I rested on a bench under the canopy of our campus forest, along the banks of the river, I remembered words from a recent poem by Mary Oliver.

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.

I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."

The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple,"
they say, "and you, too, have come
into the world to do this, to go easy,
to be filled with light, and to shine."

The marker near the entrance doors to Old Main reminds us, from Psalm 36:9, that "in your light we see light." Mary Oliver takes this a step further, reminding us that God's light is best seen when that light shines through us, trees planted along the river, bearing fruit in season.

We're rapidly approaching the end of the school year. The semester concludes in a thousand different ways as each student, and each of us who work at North Park, cares for the particulars of our individual responsibilities.

But the end of the school year is also marked by important community-wide events. These offer moments of special celebration, and this celebration is made most joyful when we each participate. So let's join in!

Baccalaureate Service, Friday, May 11, 8:00 p.m.

This year we will host this annual downtown event in the sanctuary of Holy Name Cathedral, which is a wonderful center of worship for the Chicagoland Roman Catholic Church. Graduates from all academic programs are invited to participate—traditional undergraduates, students in the School of Adult Learning, soon-to-be alumni in our graduate programs, and seminarians. And of course family members and friends of the graduates come along for this wonderful occasion of worship, prayer, and reflection.

The Baccalaureate Service also offers a great opportunity for each of us as educators to greet those graduates who we have come to know well. Our participation in this service marks the evening as a distinctively North Park event—one long-remembered by each graduate and family member.

Commencement Convocations, throughout the day on Saturday, May 12

Here's the schedule:

- 10:00 a.m. – undergraduate convocation, in the gymnasium
- 3:00 p.m. – graduate and School of Adult Learning convocation, in the gymnasium
- 7:00 p.m. – seminary convocation in Anderson Chapel

Receptions follow each event.

It doesn't get better than this at North Park!

Gathering Day 3.0, Tuesday, May 15, in Hamming Hall, beginning at 11:30 a.m.

Here's something new! All faculty and staff are encouraged to join for lunch as a way to celebrate together the completion of another good year. We'll enjoy a refreshing lunch, and afterwards be introduced to a couple of key announcements regarding future developments at North Park. (You'll not want to miss these announcements!)

Additionally, we will together recognize several individuals who are retiring this year from full-time work at North Park. These individuals will be honored during the last

weeks of the semester by their colleagues in their particular work units, but Gathering Day 3.0 provides an opportunity for all of us at North Park to recognize this year's retirees for their service to our students and to celebrate with them as they meet life's next adventure in retirement. These colleagues include:

Ann-Helen Anderson
Arleen Jean Bassie
Richard Carlson
Robert Hubbard
Leon Nelson
Norma Sutton

Even as we bid farewell to these six colleagues we rejoice in our life together at North Park. Blessings to each of us as we bring the school year to an end, celebrate with those who graduate, and step into the months of summer before our next year begins.