

OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUE

March 22, 2012

The President's Perspective – A Brief Essay

How do we find God in Lent? How do we meet God when the words of liturgy step away from the discovery of Epiphany, and now center on penitence and suffering before they restore the alleluia of resurrection?

Or, how do we find God in the busy-ness of the second half of a spring semester? How do we see God in our work when warm weather distracts, priorities for the year extend beyond our reach, and a class long taught with a certain ease no longer reflects the passion we once brought to the discipline?

Or, where do we individually meet God, in the normalness of each day and in the complexity which crops into each of our particular lives? Just yesterday, on sidewalk conversations across our campus, I heard the questions of a young father perplexed by the behavior of his three-year-old son, the challenge by a staff member in moving his mother to a retirement home, the joy of another who had just received great news from their family physician, the puzzle of family budget from two new to married life, the hope of yet someone else who is determined to learn what is "justice" in this week's summit.

How do we find God?

My reading of scripture this week led me to Psalm 66. Here is the answer of the psalmist: we find God in each step we take, each challenge we face, each moment of joy; we find God in our very life.

Bless our God, O Peoples!
Give him a thunderous welcome!
Didn't he set us on the road to Life?
Didn't he keep us out of the ditch?
He trained us first,
passed us like silver through refining fires,
Brought us into the hardscrabble country,
pushed us to our very limit,
Road-tested us inside and out,
took us to hell and back;
Finally he brought us
to this well-watered place.

All believers, come here and listen,
let me tell you what God did for me.

I called out to him with my mouth,
my tongue shaped the sounds of music.
If I had been cozy with evil
the Lord would never have listened.
But he most surely did listen,
he came on the double when he heard my prayer.
Blessed be God: he didn't turn a deaf ear,
he stayed with me, loyal in his love.

(The Message, selections from Psalm 66)

As we journey through the last few weeks of the spring semester we each anticipate the coming of summer, the change of pace this brings, moments of leisure and periods with family that this time of year encourages. This seems to be especially true this year as a mild winter has transitioned into a hot spring.

Yet, we shouldn't rush by too quickly the many good occasions for community celebration which occur during the weeks leading to the end of the spring semester. I call our collective attention to a number of these (and know for sure that there are many others not included in my listing and which merit our attention as well).

Easter Monday Professional Development Day (April 9)

No classes are scheduled on this day so this provides a wonderful opportunity for faculty and staff to gather for sessions which advance our personal and professional well-being. A specific schedule for the day will be distributed soon, but here are a few program highlights:

- The day will begin with a plenary session on "Understanding Today's College Student." The session will include suggestions for how we can best support students in their intellectual, social, and spiritual development.
- A number of elective workshops will cover an array of topics: from advising students to staying physically fit, from teaching through Moodle to respecting author copyright, from general education to advancing our commitment to diversity.

Spring Honors Convocation (April 16)

This morning gathering in Anderson Chapel offers an occasion to recognize students who have achieved departmental honors, and to identify several students selected for the Distinguished Senior Award.

Downtown Business Breakfast (April 17)

Held at the University Club, this breakfast event will feature a panel discussion on private equity, led by North Park graduate Thomas Bagley who is the founder and senior partner of Pflingsten Partners.

Undergraduate Research Symposium (April 17)

The symposium offers an opportunity for a number of graduating students to present research they have advanced during their senior year, and perhaps more than this it offers each of us a great opportunity to learn from our students even as we encourage them in their intellectual development.

Multicultural Awards Dinner (April 20)

This dinner provides an occasion to celebrate North Park's commitment to be "purposefully multicultural," and to do so in ways which recognize this ideal through the lives of our students.

Baccalaureate Service (May 11)

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.

Commencement Convocations (May 12)

Three celebrations in one day: morning for undergraduates, afternoon for adult learners and graduate students, and evening for seminarians. It doesn't get better than this at North Park!

Gathering Day 3.0 (May 15)

Here's something new! All faculty and staff are encouraged to join for lunch in Hamming Hall as a way to celebrate the completion of another good year together. 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 within their particular work units, but Gathering Day 3.0 provides an opportunity for all of us at North Park to thank them for their service to our students and to celebrate with them as they meet life's next adventure in retirement. (You'll not want to miss this celebration!)

Axelson Symposium (June 5)

Held again this year at a downtown location the symposium brings together several hundred leaders from nonprofit organizations throughout Chicagoland and beyond for a day of professional development and encouragement. This program is a great gift North Park offers to the people of Chicago.

Pulling together, let's finish strong through the end of the academic year.