

OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUE

April 17, 2013

The President's Perspective – A Brief Reflection

A number of weeks ago Mel Soderstrom came by my office. He does this occasionally, and nearly always he carries a large envelop with him. He brings a gift in the envelop. We talk for a while, and as he is leaving my office he lifts the envelop toward me and says, "I came across this recently. I think you might be interested in it."

This time the envelop held a single page torn from a 1955 campus publication—something Mel had come across while looking through an old file in his office. The short article featured Betty Nelson who recently had returned to North Park. This school had been her home a decade earlier when she was a student here from 1942-1944. From here she went off to finish college and complete graduate studies.

She returned not as a student but as a teacher. And in returning she quickly realized that more than her role had changed. The name of the school was still the same. It was still in its same location along Foster Avenue. The faculty still included many of the same people. But so much had changed.

Here's how Betty described the change in the campus publication Mel brought to me:

The fact that I now have my office where I used to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner is enough to make me realize that North park is quite a bit different now than in [my student days].

The article tells us that at first it was hard for Betty to get accustomed to all the "new" in this place. She had come back to teach at her alma mater, but was it really the same school as it had been when she was a student here? Did students still learn and grow here as she had done? Could she still love the school the way she had loved it as a student?

Sure enough, she could. Here's more of what Betty wrote in 1955:

Perhaps it's because so many times a person has to return to a place to discover what's been there all the time, that I have felt a change in my own feeling toward North Park during these years. All of North Park is a growing experience. It is a growth exemplified not just by numbers of students and building, but by a rich movement in the understanding of Christian education on the North Park campus!

The same, she says, yet also different. The same, yet better—and always a growing experience.

Betty and I, along with all of us who are part of North Park today, hold to a common philosophy of life at North Park—we build on the past by embracing the future.

Some parts of the past ought never to change. We loved God in the past; we will love God in the future. We loved our neighbors in the past; we will love our neighbors in the future.

Yet, how we love God and how we love our neighbors tomorrow will be different from how we loved God and how we loved our neighbors yesterday. The same, yet also new.

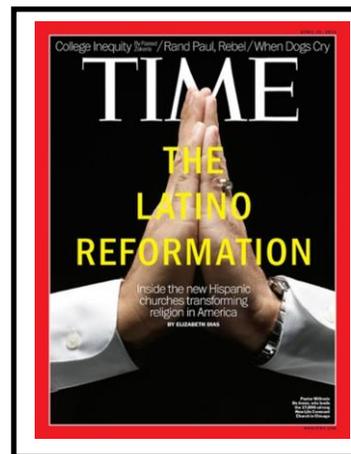
So it is with North Park University, as Betty pointed out so well. In 1955 North Park was enough like it was in 1942 for Betty still to recognize it and love it for what it had been. Yet in 1955 North Park was different enough from what it had been in 1942 for Betty to know it had moved forward in the intervening years.

During my seven years as president at North Park I've discovered this is how we all feel about the university today.

North Park today is enough like it was when we studied here (if we are alums), or when we first came to work here (one, or two, or three decades ago), to recognize it and love it for what it has always been.

And North Park is different enough today from what it had been for us to know it has moved forward. The same, yet different.

I discovered an interesting illustration of this in recent weeks. On two occasions in history a graduate from North Park has been featured on the cover of Time, the weekly news magazine.



On December 4, 1964 the Time cover story was titled: “The Congo Massacre.” The cover featured a portrait of Dr. Paul Carlson who received his associate’s degree from North Park in 1949, and later completed his undergraduate studies at Stanford University and a medical degree from the George Washington University School of Medicine.

On April 15 of this year the Time cover story was titled: “The Latino Reformation.” The cover featured the praying hands of Wilfredo (Choco) de Jesus who received a master’s degree in Christian ministry from North Park in 2006.

The same, yet different.

Paul’s father had immigrated to America from Sweden at the age of ten with his parents and thirteen siblings. Choco’s parents also immigrated to America’s mainland, settling in Chicago’s Humboldt neighborhood. The same, yet different.

Paul’s parents spoke Swedish at home; Choco’s parents spoke Spanish at home; when forming their own families both Paul and Choco spoke English with their children. The same, yet different.

Paul traveled to Africa after completing his education, establishing a network of hospitals and clinics in Congo. Choco stayed in Chicago after completing his education, establishing a multi-campus church within and beyond the city limits—at 17,000 members the largest congregation in America with the Assemblies of God denomination. The same, yet different.

Paul lived a life of significance and service. Choco lives a life of significance and service. The same, yet different.

In 1949 and again in 2006 the faculty and staff of North Park congratulated Paul and Choco on completing their studies. In this same manner, in four week’s we’ll gather with family and friends of our students to celebrate the completion of their studies at North Park.

We can’t imagine where these graduates will lead and serve in the coming years, any more than we could imagine the future for Paul or Choco on their day of graduation. Nonetheless, through the coming years we’ll discover more of significance and more of service in the life of each graduate.

The same, yet different.