
**Remarks at the Academic Convocation
August 2006**



David L. Parkyn, President

I want to address a very special group of people this afternoon, those students who are new to North Park University. There are others in this room—parents, siblings, returning students, faculty members. They can listen in on what I say, but my words are prepared specifically for those students who are new to this College. And because you are mixed in with the others in this large gathering I'm going to ask that you stand—if you are a student new to North Park University, either a first-year student or a transfer student, please stand and remain standing as I speak a few words prepared specifically for you.

One of the special things about life in college is that we have many occasions to celebrate. These begin and end, perhaps, with two pieces of paper. The first one you received through the mail a few months ago, a letter stating you had been admitted to North Park University. You remember, I'm sure, the excitement of tearing open that envelop to read the good news, and then the moments of celebration which followed: the high fives, the dancing around the kitchen, the call to your grandmother, and the email to your best friend. You might even remember asking your mother why she was crying.

And a few years from now we'll gather with friends and family again. This time when your name is read you'll walk across the platform to receive that second piece of paper, your diploma. On that occasion, I'll also be there to shake your hand and congratulate you on your success. It will be a time of great celebration.

But you don't need to wait until commencement to celebrate. You'll find much to celebrate each day as a student at North Park University.

- A night at the movies with new friends.
- A book assigned for class which turns out to be much to your liking.
- A Viking victory.
- A friend's concert, another friend's theater production, and your own art exhibit.
- A research project with one of your professors.
- An elective course taken just because you're interested in it.
- An afternoon spent tutoring a sixth grade boy, a day landscaping one of our neighborhood parks, a spring break service project somewhere in Chicago or around the world.

Among the best times for celebration are those occasions when we recognize academic achievement. A few of these are formal, but most are informal. You'll find many of these.

- A new idea which you can't seem to get out of your mind.
- A test returned with a grade higher than you thought you could achieve.
- A group project that was very well received.
- A semester filled with learning.

These are the types of things we celebrate at North Park University because we value learning. This place is best described as a learning community. This is, quite simply, a place where people gather to learn. It is a place of discovery and adventure, of challenge and fulfillment; of questioning the old and testing the new.

The goal of this learning community, this university, is to prepare you to live a life of significance and service. We have this as a goal because we truly believe you can make a difference in the world by becoming involved in God's work of restoration, renewal and reconciliation. But it takes work to achieve this—you'll need to develop a disciplined mind and a dedicated spirit.

To achieve this you'll need to participate in many of the opportunities available at and through North Park. These include faculty members who will be your mentors, service opportunities that can enrich your life, leadership roles that can shape your involvement in the lives of others, spiritual direction which can guide your commitments.

You'll also discover that North Park's urban setting will also provide you with life-enriching and profound learning experiences. The obvious examples include the museums you can visit, the concerts and sporting events you can attend, the lakefront you can enjoy. But Chicago is much more than these. Chicago is also place where you can learn by doing as you volunteer in the community and as you embark on internships and field placement assignments in our city's streets, its businesses, and social service organizations, its schools, and its churches. As a student at North Park you should embrace the city of Chicago as both text and context for your learning. What I mean is simply this. Chicago itself will be one of the more important text books you will read. And the city itself will become one of the most important classrooms you will learn in.

At North Park, and in the city of Chicago, many of you will experience a more diverse environment than that to which you have been accustomed. And this is the way it should be. After all, you're in college now. In this setting you will explore new ideas and a wide array of cultures. Most people, even on this campus, will see the world a bit differently than you do. Your personal family and community background will differ from that experienced by your roommates and classmates. Some of this difference will be obvious to you fairly quickly, and other aspects of the difference will take some time to discover.

This is just as we want it to be. This mix of ideas and cultures, of expressions of faith and politics, of values and commitments, is just the right setting to provide you with the challenges and opportunities to discover who you are, and even more importantly, who you want to become. This mix provides, we believe, a great peer learning environment. And as you encounter these new experiences, know that while you are at

North Park you are in the presence of a caring, Christian faculty and staff that will provide perspectives for your thinking and that will be there for dialogue along your personal intellectual and spiritual journey.

So it is that collectively, as members of the faculty, as administrators and staff members, as fellow students, we welcome you to this community of learning. You have been invited to be here because you are a person of talent. And as you bring to this place your varied talents, and as you share in the rich array of talents of all those who gather with you, you will find North Park University to be a lively center of sound learning, a place of new discovery, and a venue for the pursuit of wisdom.

You are now a student at North Park University. And this community of learning is now a richer place than it has ever been before because you are here. We are simply delighted that you have joined us. We are proud to recognize you as members of this academic community, committed to living and learning together in the habit of educated people. Welcome to North Park University.

You may be seated.