



PRESIDENT'S  
INAUGURAL ADDRESS

NOVEMBER 12, 2006

DAVID LEE PARKYN

NINTH PRESIDENT OF  
NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY





## NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY

Located in Chicago, North Park University is a Christian liberal arts university that serves 3,200 undergraduate and graduate students from around the country and the world. Within a diverse, close-knit urban community, North Park offers a values-based education to students with more than 50 undergraduate majors, certificates and pre-professional programs, as well as graduate and continuing education in business, nonprofit management, nursing, education, community development, and theology. By integrating faith with learning—as it has done since its founding in 1891 by the Evangelical Covenant Church—North Park continues its strong commitment to changing lives and serving others.



## DAVID L. PARKYN

David Lee Parkyn has dedicated his professional career to higher education. A graduate of Messiah College, Dr. Parkyn has a master of divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a doctor of philosophy from Boston College. His 27-year career has given him broad experience as both teacher and administrator. Before his call to North Park University in 2006, Dr. Parkyn was provost and senior vice president at Elizabethtown College.

Dr. Parkyn was raised in Guatemala, the son of church workers, and has maintained his ties to Latin America through a scholarly interest in religion of that area. He is married to Dr. Linda Parkyn, a teacher and scholar who serves as professor of Spanish at North Park. Married for 32 years, the Parkyns have two children.

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When I was three years old my parents packed up our home in southwestern Wisconsin, loaded my brother and me into our car, and drove south to Texas. There we crossed the border, leaving behind our country and journeying through Mexico to Guatemala. We lived for a dozen years in two small villages where people spoke some Spanish but most conversation in the market, on the streets, and in the homes was through indigenous dialects.

My skin had a lighter hue than the people of these villages, my family spoke a language different from theirs, and though we lived in a simple home it was still the best house in the village. Yet, it was here, among these good people, that my early view of the world was shaped. My friends were Antonio and Manuel, I was apprenticed in the use of hand tools by a carpenter named Jesus, our pastors were Arnoldo and Saturnino, and we purchased goods in the Sunday market from Chico, Marta, José, and Carlota.

It was here, in the villages of Uspantán and Nebaj, and under the tutelage of the indigenous people of Guatemala, that my early perspective of life was formed. And it is to this context that I have returned in thought and life from time to time in my journey as an educator. It is through these people that I hear the voices which help to re-center my thoughts about learning, about life, about living.

I hear the voice of the Amerindian of days past:

Let the streams of life flow in peace.

Turn from violence.

Learn to think for a long time how to change the world.

Learn how to make it better to live in.

I hear the voice of Oscar Romero, contemporary martyr for faith:

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.... This is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capability.

I hear the voice of the Hebrew prophet, Miqueas, whose words have been translated around the world:

*Él te ha declarado... lo que pide Jehová de tí:  
solamente hacer justicia,  
amar misericordia,  
y humillarte ante tu Dios.*

What does the Lord require of you?  
To do justice and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.

These are the voices of the Amerindian, the martyr, the prophet. These are the voices I heard when I crossed the border to a new land and a new people. These are the voices that shaped my early perception of life. These are the voices that have molded my vocation as an educator.

Voice. Voice is the cry young parents eagerly wait to hear when their infant is first born. Voice is the spoken word, our means of communication as rational beings. But voice is also the style of the writer, the fingerprint of the author. It is syntax and diction; it is punctuation and dialogue.

Voice communicates. Voice connects us to others. Voice shapes community. Voice tells story. Voice makes meaning. Voice gives identity. And in moments of idealism we call our

careers, our professions, a vocation, a calling, a voice speaking from within us to those around us.

Voice belongs to each of us. It is uniquely mine, uniquely yours. Psychologist and author, Mary Pipher, in her recent book *Writing to Change the World*, tells us that

Voice is everything we are, all that we have observed, the emotional chords that are uniquely ours—all our flaws and all our strengths, expressed in the words that best reflect us. Voice is like a snowflake—complicated, beautiful, and individual. It is the essence of self, distilled, and offered in service to the world.

Pipher continues,

Individual voices can be quiet or noisy, wry or schmaltzy, self-disclosing or guarded, kind or angry. Voice comes from genetics, gender, relationships, place; from ethnic background and emotional experience. Voice resonates with our sorrows and fears, but also our joys and it sings out all of who we are.

Voice. It is mine; uniquely mine. Voice. It is yours; uniquely yours.

I wonder today whether a university might also have a voice. Might North Park University have a voice? Might North Park University have syntax and diction, punctuation and grammar? Might North Park University have a fingerprint?

When that small band of Swedish Covenanters gathered in Moses Hill, Nebraska in 1891 and decided to start a college, what voice did they envision? Two years later, did the voice change—perhaps to a higher or lower pitch—when the college was moved from Minneapolis to Chicago? When the language of classroom instruction shifted from Swedish to English did the voice of North Park change? Was the voice modified yet again in 1979 when our institutional fathers intentionally

chose to keep the college in the urban context?

This voice of yesterday at North Park—has it been predominantly quiet or noisy, wry or schmaltzy, self-disclosing or guarded, kind or angry? How might this voice of yesterday influence the university's voice of tomorrow? Might we applaud our past and still look to our future?

In an essay of some time ago I described higher education as a borderland. It is a place where adolescence meets adulthood, a place where home touches independence, a place where we develop ourselves even while we learn to give of ourselves, a place where questions meet answers and then greet more questions, a place where the familiar contrasts with the unfamiliar, a place where my traditions of faith encounter your traditions of faith, a place where science brushes up to art, a place where we step from our past into our future.

Borders frequently refer to geographic boundaries. In today's world these boundaries are clearly marked and are not to be crossed without permission. Borders today are controlled and often closed. Our tendency is to seek to restrict and to limit the movement of people and goods, and too often to restrict and limit the movement of ideas, and thereby voice as well. This fear of the other is unfortunate at its best and life-threatening at its worst. Such a border which reflects a fear of the other is not what I have in mind when I speak of the university as borderland, though the academy is not inherently free from close-mindedness.

Whether we seek to make them open or closed, borders are dynamic; borders are ever changing places. Mary Pipher explains:

Everything really interesting and powerful happens at borders. Borders team with life, color, and complexity. In nature we find most diversity where different ecosystems merge. We call these places "edge habitats." Think about the borders between things—between the U.S. and

Mexico, between history and geography, between science and art, between childhood and adulthood, between men and women.

It is in the “edge habitats” of life that our voice is discovered, and then nurtured.

North Park University is an edge habitat. This is a place where many communities meet. This is a place where borders touch and where people are free to stand with legs crossing the boundaries, the left foot planted on one side and the right foot planted on another side. Because so many borders meet at North Park this is a place which teams with life, color, and complexity. And it is this life, this color, and this complexity which shape and give character to the voice of North Park University.

### LIFE: NURTURED BY FAITH

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Life. In this borderland of North Park University our voice, our life, is nurtured by faith. Chiseled into the wall of Old Main are words taken from Psalm 111: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” These are good words, but like all words of scripture the challenge comes in how they are interpreted. Is wisdom found as we take what we believe and circle the wagons keeping in all that we think is good and keeping out all that we think is evil? Is wisdom found in exclusion? Or is wisdom found as divine light enlightens our encounter with all that is around us, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the certain and the uncertain? Is wisdom found through inclusion?

The Covenanters who gathered in Moses Hill in 1891 preferred inclusion. The college they established would be a school for Christians but also for students of other faiths. The college they founded would be a school for Swedes, but also for other immigrants. The college they opened would teach a curriculum of faith and scripture, but it would also embrace a curriculum in

the arts, in business, in language, and in the sciences.

More substantially, our early leaders assured that because this is a school nurtured in faith it must be a school which gives voice to both theological and intellectual freedom. For those who come together in this place belief and understanding, faith and learning are known to enrich one another. The voice of learning and the voice of faith center on this creative dialectic.

One somewhat humorous expression of this conviction is found in the diary of Nils Lund, long-time dean of the seminary. One Sunday after having attended church in the morning, Lund commented in his diary on the preacher as being a gifted orator “but he had not much to say.” And then Lund continues by noting that the preacher “needs development of the brain.”

Lund was a teacher and in a letter to a colleague in 1928 he explained his philosophy of teaching... his voice in the North Park classroom:

My whole aim in teaching has been to enable these boys to live an intellectual life as Christians. I have not missed the signs of change in the intellectual attitude. Six years ago, they were mostly suspicious against learning. Now they are interested and willing to weigh and consider.

For Lund, intellectual discipline and faith development are companions, not competitors.

Some thirty years later Karl A. Olsson, the fifth president of the university, also noted how faith is best nurtured through learning. In an address to the faculty in 1961 Olsson stated:

We take reason seriously. We believe in academic freedom. We believe that any academic question can be discussed in the classroom without prejudice to either teacher or student. We believe that any serious book can be placed on the shelves of our library and referred

to without embarrassment. We do not believe that the academic play should be encumbered by frantic efforts to make every discussion come out “right” or that creative doubt is an evil. The class session may well end in a mood of fear and trembling; no student ever matures who has not felt the earth shaking beneath his feet.

To make the earth shake; to nurture understanding by nurturing faith; to nurture faith by nurturing understanding. Created in the image of God we are free to make choices; to love, to create, to reason, to live in harmony with creation and God; to believe. This is our life. This is the voice of North Park University; it is a voice nurtured by an inclusive faith.

### COLOR: LEAVENED IN THE CITY

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Color. In this borderland, the color which leavens the voice of North Park University is the color of the city, and the city of Chicago specifically.

However, North Park has not always been in the city. Old Main was not built in Chicago, for in 1893 when the college moved here from Minnesota the city was really quite far away from Foster Avenue. In fact, in his history of North Park College, Leland Carlson noted that one of the very early difficulties encountered by the college was the fact that it was established in a “sparsely settled community.” Listen to Carlson’s description of our neighborhood one year after Old Main was built:

Within the North Park community were nine homes established by 1894—less than one house per square block. Foster Avenue... was a muddy wagon road, well-nigh impassible after a heavy rain. The north branch of the Chicago River was no placid creek strictly confined within banks, but a river which in the spring overflowed its bank (often up to the back steps of Old Main), which became a sluggish stream in the summer,

turned grey and murky in the fall, and froze over in the winter. 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 the 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.

One thing is clear: this was no city.

Yet Leland Carlson's description is not true for the University and its neighborhood today. What happened? Simply this: in the intervening decades the city has come to North Park. Over time, the borders of the city have been expanded, they have reached this place, and they have gone beyond. The city has come to our neighborhood and wrapped its arms around us.

The onion fields and cabbage patches have been plowed under, the streets and sidewalks have been put in place, businesses have been established, the river has been contained, bungalows and two-flats have been built, and most importantly, people have moved in. This is no longer the remote and isolated cornfield in which David Nyvall constructed Old Main.

And so 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 a resounding "No." And with that single word, the voice of North Park College was confirmed as a voice leavened in the city.

This place we call home, this city of Chicago, is a sanctuary, it is a holy place. It is the space 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 each other, as they move through it. Much of this movement is on foot—here we see the other, we make eye contact, we discover the other.

The voice of North Park University is leavened by the yeast of the city of Chicago. My friend and colleague, Timothy Peterson, who first taught me to love the city, also helped me learn that the city is both text and context for learning. I remind students of this as often as I'm able. The city, I say, is among the most important books you will read during your years in college. And the city is among the most important classrooms you will study in during your years in college.

The color of the city leavens our voice. This city, where borders meet, is the edge habitat in which North Park lives. And it has, and must continue to have, a profound impact on our voice. David Horner, my immediate predecessor as president, describes it this way:

Students who venture out from the security of the campus, as we encourage them to do, discover a world full of glory and pain. They see the city's resources and its needs. As a result, their intellectual, moral, and spiritual imaginations are stimulated. They imagine what might be done to make a difference, to express the values they affirm, and they act.

This city, where the voice of North Park University is leavened is a holy place, a sacred land, a sanctuary.

There was a day when North Park College was a landmark 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). Those of you who traveled here by plane probably are quite pleased that Old Main's cupola no longer serves this purpose.

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 where is its voice? 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?

This is the voice of North Park University; it is a voice leavened by the color of Chicago.

### **COMPLEXITY: SEEKING JUSTICE FOR ALL PEOPLE**

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Complexity. In this borderland North Park University is nourished by a complexity of language and culture which pushes our voice to cry out seeking justice for all people. We live in what I have been told is the most diverse zip code in America. Earlier I suggested that in the years since Old Main was built the city of Chicago had come to our neighborhood. This is only part of the story. In fact, the world has come to our neighborhood. We live in a neighborhood that is as complex as the world itself—our neighbors are Latino, Native American, Asian, African, European, Middle Eastern, and beyond. One half of the residents of our immediate neighborhoods are foreign-born. Our neighborhood is the world.

Two weeks ago at the fall meeting of the University Board we asked our trustees, in just five minutes time, to reduce the fea-

tures of the University to a twelve-word billboard. With our neighborhood's complexity of language and culture in mind, one small group of trustees proposed these words: "60625 – a global education in the heart of Chicago – North Park University."

Yet living here, and learning here, is not always easy. David Nyvall, North Park's first president, was himself an immigrant. And he was challenged with how to live in this new land. In the fifth year of his presidency, which was the same year he became a U.S. citizen, Nyvall wrote nostalgically in a letter about his homeland and his church:

Sweden... where my language is everyone's language. That country! Where our mission and ministries are part of a healthy Swedish branch: with her roots deep in the soil; a high and tall trunk of national self-understanding in the bark, wood, and core; and with a whole nation as the overshadowing crown! This is different than being a foreign flowerpot in the window of an attic [as in America].

In his day, David Nyvall, college president and foreign flower pot in an attic window, did not find America's diversity an easy thing to manage.

America's diversity of language and culture is no less challenging today. Yet when students study at North Park, and when we work at North Park, we must lose our cultural innocence. Our complex cultural environment must nourish a voice which speaks out of a deeply ingrained respect for every person. We must learn to see beyond race, beyond creed, beyond gender, beyond personal preferences to the essence of the image of God in our neighbors. Our voice must be a voice which seeks justice for all people.

We are privileged at North Park because in this zip code students engage a complex array of languages and cultures and see the world. And in this place, in the midst of this complexity, we have opportunity to recognize and embrace the image

of God in others. In our very neighborhood we can recognize that God is revealed across the human spectrum, not just in those who are Jewish, male, or free, nor only in those who are Gentile, female, or slave. The word became flesh and now dwells among us.

This complexity of language and culture in our very neighborhood nourishes a voice of justice, and mercy, and compassion. By living here and through learning here our students discover that life is not simply about us.

Mitch Albom is a sports columnist who had an extraordinary experience. Twenty years after graduating from college he had the chance to spend time with one of his college professors, Morrie Schwartz, who at the time was very near death. Their conversations are recorded in a best-selling book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

In one of their conversations Morrie explains how he sees the world differently, and knows the world differently, now that his body is wracked with illness. Morrie says:

Now that I'm suffering, I feel closer to people who suffer than I ever did before. The other night, on TV, I saw people in Bosnia running across the street, getting fired upon, killed, innocent victims... and I just started to cry. I feel their anguish as if it were my own. I don't know any of these people. But—how can I put this?—I'm almost... drawn to them.

Morrie sees the deep need of others, and it makes him cry. Perhaps this should be a requirement for graduation from North Park: Has your life brought you into contact with people who are worth crying over?

Yet the voice I heard as a young lad, far away from here in the rural mountains of Guatemala, demands that I go beyond crying. The Amerindian exhorted: "Learn to change the world."

The prophet commanded that we love mercy but also that we do justice. To cry is good, but insufficient. We must act. We must live. We must strive to make the world a better place, not for ourselves, but for others. We must seek justice.

And this is what teaching is about. Good teaching facilitates the making of connections in a way that inspires openheartedness, thinking, talking and action. The way to promote social and economic justice is by telling the truth, and by encouraging civil public discussion. We must do this, and more. As we stand before our students we must tell the truth and we must live the truth. We must proclaim the voice of justice “not only with our lips but in our lives.” This is difficult, but it is well worth our effort.

Walking side-by-side our students we must change the world and be changed by the world. As we walk in the world immediately around us with its complexity of language and culture, and as this same complex world walks among us, we must speak through, and we must live out of, a voice which seeks justice. This is the voice of North Park University, nourished by the complexity of language and culture to seek justice for all people.

### IN CLOSING...

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We Chicagoans are quite proud these days of our city’s stunning lake-front of public parks, gardens, lagoons, marinas, and beaches. It is unique among the world’s great cities. We owe it primarily to one man, architect David Burnham. In his famous Chicago Plan of 1909 Burnham spoke with a prophetic voice which forever changed the face of this city. By reorienting the city to face the lake and by setting aside vast tracks of land for tulip beds, fountains, and public parks he declared that “every citizen should be within walking distance of a park.”

His was a single voice. His was a voice which sought change, and environmental justice, for all people. He dared to dream big dreams because the cause demanded only big dreams. “Make no little plans,” Burnham said, “They have no magic to stir man’s blood.”

We too must make no little plans. We must be bold. We must embrace risk. Our faith demands it. Our city needs it. Our people deserve it.

People who know their voice are bold and embrace risk. Institutions who know their voice are bold and embrace risk. The voice of North Park University must not be characterized as decaffeinated with skim. This would put us in the “Who cares, anyway?” category. What we have before us is a challenge, and as Archbishop Romero taught us, in our time we may not accomplish it with any finality. Yet we can begin and we can move forward. We must water the seed which others have sown. We must sow seeds of our own for others to water. We must prune the vine so that it soon bears fruit. We must harvest the fruit from the vines others have pruned. We must be bold. We must risk. We must make no little plans.

North Park University is an edge habitat. Because borders meet at North Park this is a place which teams with life, with color, and with complexity. It is the life of inclusive faith which nurtures the voice of North Park University. It is the color of the city which leavens the voice of North Park University. It is the complexity of language and culture which nourishes the voice of North Park University to seek justice for all.

This is what we are about. This is our borderland. This is our voice.