

FROM THE DESK OF PRESIDENT DAVID L. PARKYN

FALL 2007

MY SUMMER READING LIST

Her name was Helen Metz. I was six years old when we met. On my first day in school as a first grader, Ms. Metz stood in front of our class and, with these words, she introduced herself as our teacher: “Today,” she said, “we will learn to read.” And I’ve been reading ever since.

My preferred genre varies from season to season. Linda reads more novels than I do, but there are periods in my life when I take in a run of four or five consecutive novels. Among my favorite contemporary novelists are Gail Godwin, Jon Hassler, James Carroll, and Jane Smiley. I also like to read “memoirs” or reflective autobiographies. These include Lewis Smedes’ last book, published posthumously, under the title *My God and I*, Frederick Beuchner’s memoir on vocation, *Now and Then*, and Henri Nouwen’s wonderful journal of a year in Latin America, *¡Gracias!* I also have appreciated the more contemporary essays of Anne Lamott.

More recently my reading time has been dominated by authors who help me reflect on my life at North Park University. One responsibility I have as president is to identify a vision for the University and talk of this vision both near and far. In thinking about how best to communicate my vision for North Park I’ve appreciated reading two books in particular.

In the first, titled *Writing to Change the World*, Mary Pipher writes about finding our “voice.” She states: “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.” Reading this book became an “a-ha” moment for me...my task is to discover and then speak the “voice” of North Park University.

The second volume is one I picked up in a used bookstore this summer in Ashland, Oregon. Christina Baldwin writes about the role of storytelling. Her book, titled *Storycatcher*, proved very helpful in organizing the ideas I distilled in my annual fall State of the University address. She describes the importance of having a common story as the guiding point for an organization. When this story is missing, the people of the organization

“Chicago
is our
classroom
and all
Chicagoans
are our
teachers.”

“scatter like meteorites freed from gravitational pull.” We need a strong gravitational pull at North Park, and I’m convinced this is to be found in having a common story.

To be sure, one of the strong elements in the gravitational pull of North Park University is the city of Chicago. This summer I discovered a recent volume by Alex Kotlowitz titled *Never a City So Real*. (Some readers will recognize Kotlowitz as the author of the very well-regarded book *There Are No Children Here*, an account of two boys growing up in a public housing complex in Chicago). In *Never a City So Real* Kotlowitz introduces Chicago as a “stew of contradictions. Coarse yet gentle. Idealistic yet restrained. Grappling with its promise, alternately cocky and unsure.” He describes this more fully by devoting a chapter to each of seven neighborhoods geographically spread across the city.

The last neighborhood Kotlowitz writes of is Albany Park. Since half of our campus is in Albany Park this chapter in particular caught my attention. His chapter on our home neighborhood begins with this sentence: “The world intersects at the corner of Lawrence and Kedzie avenues.” Kotlowitz is absolutely right. Can you imagine what this means for the education of our students? At the Convocation for new students at the Seminary I suggested that their education will start when they walk through the streets of Albany Park and then come back to campus and ask their professors about who they met and what they saw. I also challenged our new undergraduates to “jump on the “El” and start learning!” Chicago is our classroom, and all Chicagoans are our teachers.

What will I read next? I’ll start with a recent book by Krista Tippett, titled *Speaking of Faith*, based on her award-winning public radio series of the same title. I also plan to learn how immigrants (some as residents in our Albany Park neighborhood, some as students on our campus) are changing the American religious landscape in a book by Peggy Levitt with the interesting title *God Needs No Passport*. The next time I see you be sure to ask me about these.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

The newest member of the University’s senior administrative team, Dr. Joseph Jones, joined our campus community this summer as the University Provost. As our chief academic officer Provost Jones is responsible for leading our entire academic program, both undergraduate and graduate. As a faculty member he has taught both criminal justice and community development, and most recently he has served as the Dean of the School of Education and the Social Sciences at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. He completed his undergraduate years at Colby College in Maine and a doctorate at the State University of New York in Albany.

With the appointment of a new provost, Dr. Jay Phelan has returned to full-time assignment as Seminary President and Dean. This reassignment allows him to return to his first love (at least in the academic world) of seminary education. One of his tasks this year will be to lead the search for a new Dean of Academic Life at the Seminary, as Dr. Steve Graham has accepted an appointment to direct programs in faculty development with the Association of Theological Schools.

Changes in personnel always require careful attention. I know you’ll pray for Joe as he discovers his place

at North Park, for Jay as he guides the Seminary, for Steve as he ventures into a new community, and for those who will consider moving to North Park over the years ahead.

“WHAT IS LIFE OF FAITH?”

Each year the University adopts a campus theme to encourage students to think about some of life’s big questions, and to formulate their own thoughts on these issues while they are here at North Park. Themes in recent years have included “What is a life of significance?”, “Who is God?”, and “What is Truth?” This year we’ll explore the question: “What is a life of faith?” The lecture program will bring an interesting group of people to our campus.

- September 12 – Martin Marty (emeritus professor of the history of Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School) lecturing on “Christians in a World of Too Many Others: Pluralism as Challenge and Opportunity.”
- October 4 – Carmen Acevedo Butcher (associate professor of medieval and renaissance literature at Shorter College, Rome, Georgia) speaking on “Life Lessons from Wise Women: Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, and Clare of Assisi.”
- October 25 – Kurt Senske (chief executive officer of Lutheran Social Services) on “Faith-Based Values: Doing Well by Doing Good.”
- February 7 – Eddie Glaude (associate professor of religion and African-American Studies, Princeton University, New Jersey) with a lecture on “Faith and the Challenge of Racism.”
- April 9 – Karen Lebacqz (professor of theological ethics at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California) addressing the topic “Ethical Decisions: The Faith Factor.”

Consistent with this theme, the University Choir and Gospel Choir will perform music on the theme “This Far By Faith” both in on-campus concerts and during their fall and spring semester tours.

UNIVERSITY MINISTRIES – SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS

In mid-May 32 students and staff departed on service trips to Thailand, Zambia, and Bolivia. Students traveling to Zambia collaborated with Hope Ministries to set up a temporary medical clinic. The team traveling to Bolivia partnered with International Teams, an organization establishing orphanages and providing a community for vulnerable children. And the group in Thailand partnered with NewSong Covenant Church/Xealot. A fourth group remained in Chicago, working with Urban Outreach Coordinator Tony Zamblé in sponsoring a summer camp for neighborhood students. Working with 45 at-risk youth from Albany Park, camp activities ranged from baseball games to health discussions, from meals in neighborhood restaurants to swimming at the lake.

Though these trips are designed as opportunities to serve others, participants learn as much as they give out.

- Leann Ippolito noted it this way: “I have fallen in love with Bolivia; its people, especially the kids, inspire me to serve God with my very best. From playing soccer with orphans and varnishing

an orphanage to feeding malnourished babies and speaking Spanish with house-parents, I felt so blessed to be a part of their lives.”

- Tim Collins had this to say about his involvement in the Chicago summer camp: “The kids who came are at a vital stage in development (ages 11-14). Some had parents who loved and cared for them. Others were struggling to make ends meet. One girl was unable to bring a lunch everyday, since her mother was working and paying for nursing school. Other parents were divorcing, others were new to America. The kids’ needs were often overwhelming, but their positive attitudes reminded me that every person is made in God’s image.”

In addition, during June and July, recent graduates, current students, and staff from the University traveled to several African-American Covenant churches. The students led worship for Sunday morning services and shared with high-school students about their experience at North Park.

CONVICTION AND SERVICE

The experiences of students described above remind me of a statement often repeated by Dr. Ernest Boyer, one of America’s most respected educators throughout much of the 20th century:

The tragedy of life is not death; it is destined for us all. The tragedy of life is to die with convictions undeclared and service unfulfilled.

People of faith declare their convictions and fulfill their service. At North Park University we call this a “life of significance and service” and it is the end to which we educate students. Thank you for joining us in this ministry.



David L. Parkyn
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