

FROM THE DESK OF PRESIDENT DAVID L. PARKYN

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER TO LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY DONORS
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CHICAGO AS A CLASSROOM

Place makes a difference.

Learning is always influenced by place—by the environment in which we study. We recognize this at North Park and frequently remind our students that, “Chicago is our classroom, and all Chicagoans are our teachers.”

North Park is ideally located to provide a highly effective learning environment. In 2008, for the first time in history more than half of the world’s 6.6 billion inhabitants lived in cities rather than in rural areas. And each week the cities of the world grow by a net of one million people.

Our University now stands with the global majority, whereas many colleges and universities (including most faith-affirming schools) which were established in small towns and distant suburbs, are now located within the shrinking minority.

Very little happens around the globe that is not shaped significantly by urban systems—whether economic, political, cultural, financial, social, medical, educational, or religious. Today, more than ever, cities shape the world.

A few months ago Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, a professor at North Park, wrote a book called *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*. This summer I read a review of this book, which had this sentence in the second paragraph: “Unfortunately, few western Christians have the opportunity to learn from believers in other cultures.” How true . . . and how mistaken. True for most people, but mistaken for students at North Park. Here in Chicago, students have every opportunity to learn from people from other cultures. These opportunities are important, because today, more than ever, cities shape not only the world but also the church.

As a result, at North Park we dedicate our wholehearted effort to shaping a generation of young leaders who will link their skills, their privileges, their dedication to justice, their commitment to loving kindness, and their passion for walking with God to the well-being of the city and beyond.

In 1979, North Park University had the opportunity to move out of the city. But on that occasion this community said, “No, we will stay in the city.” The responsibility of this decision now rests on our shoulders. We stand at the intersection of what our University is and what we hope it will be. Tomorrow can be North Park’s finest hour.

Because our “forefathers” at North Park had the vision to establish this school in Chicago, and later to keep it here, we are perfectly positioned to offer an excellent and profoundly transformative urban-infused education. We can prepare students for lives of significance and service in tomorrow’s cities. Chicago is numbered among the greatest resources North Park possesses for shaping the education of its students; Chicago is our gift from God.

MUCH IS REQUIRED

Among the rich gifts that have come my way since joining the North Park University community has been the opportunity to meet and know Bernice Brandel. Together with her late husband, Paul, Bernice left a transformative imprint on this school and on everyone she met.

Her name is written on the lives of many people in this community—faculty members who hold chairs in her name supported by endowed gifts, and students who have received scholarships made possible through her generosity. And her name is written boldly on the face of this campus. The Brandel Library, constructed in 2000, was made possible through the generosity of the Brandels. It anchors the west end of the campus green, but much more than this, the Brandel Library anchors the academic program at North Park.

Bernice Brandel was gracious in her financial gifts because she was grace-filled in her understanding of one’s responsibilities to others. Most who knew Bernice have heard her quote Jesus with these words: “To whom much has been given, much will be required.” Up to the moment of her death on July 8, 2009, at the age of 95, Bernice’s life reflected this divine expectation.

Well done, good and faithful servant.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN READING?

I always enjoyed my visits with Bernice Brandel because she was deeply curious about what I had been reading. She sometimes wondered about my choice of books(!) but she could always engage a grand conversation. Here are brief notes on four of the more recent books I’ve read.

- Now almost a decade old, Ray Bakke’s book, *A Theology as Big as the City*, remains important to those of us who live and work in the city. More than 50 years ago my parents left the farmlands of southwestern Wisconsin to be missionaries in Central America. Bakke reminds us that much has changed during these 50 years. He writes: “Non-Christians [are] not geographically distant peoples, but culturally distant peoples who often reside together within the shadows of urban spires. . . . Mission is no longer about crossing the oceans, jungles and deserts, but about crossing the streets of the world’s cities.” And I know he includes Chicago among those cities.

- A year ago Frederick Buechner published a “memoir” called *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*. I quoted from one of these sermons when I spoke just a few days ago at a training session for our student Residence Assistants. Here is the passage: “Sometimes you can spot right from the start who your new friends are going to be, but sometimes it doesn’t work out that way at all. Every once in awhile people turn up in school . . . who have nothing about them to make you take a second look. They come from different worlds from yours and have different interests and different views on almost everything and might as well speak a different language. But you never know when one of them may turn out to be somebody you’ll hang on to for the rest of your life.” I wonder how many life-long friendships were begun this week by students at North Park.
- I always enjoy the writing of Barbara Brown Taylor. This summer she published *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*. Here is a single sentence we should all act on: “If you are not sure what to believe about your neighbor’s faith, then the best way to find out is to practice eating supper together.”
- On one of my last visits with Bernice Brandel, I referenced Donald Hall’s memoir, *Unpacking the Boxes*. We had a wonderful time talking about this sentence on page 16: “One’s life begins on so many occasions, constructing itself out of accident derived from coincidence compounded by character.”

My summer reading has included other books, of course, but I’ll save comments on these for when we meet.

Bernice was also curious about what books were on my shelf, waiting to be read. So I offer this partial list in her memory (and honor):

- *Inside Mrs. B’s Classroom: Courage, Hope, and Learning on Chicago’s South Side* (McGraw-Hill, 2004) – I’m always curious about learning in Chicago.
- *Say Everything: How Blogging Began, What It’s Becoming, and Why It Matters*, by Scott Rosenberg (Crown Publishers, 2009) – Blogging is an intriguing new form of communication, and it has already begun to shape how we teach and how students learn.
- *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, by Diana Butler Bass (Harper One, 2009) – I expect to better understand the future of the Church after reviewing the way it has come to be today.
- *Welcome to the Urban Revolution: How Cities are Changing the World*, by Jeb Brugmann (Bloomsbury Press, 2009) – I suspect this is a must read for leading North Park University.
- *The Power of Small: Why Little Things Make All the Difference*, by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval (Broadway Books, 2009) – I happen to believe that small colleges and universities also make a big difference.

There are others but these suffice for now.

COLLABORATORY FOR URBAN AND INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

For a number of years North Park has had several centers, each dedicated to a specific cultural group. We noted the role of these centers recently as we developed a strategic plan for the University, which reflects the University's long-standing commitment to being a place which is "distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural." North Park University is uniquely positioned as a school that is: (a) faithful to the Christian gospel, while acknowledging the many expressions of Christian faith and other faiths worldwide; (b) determined to educate students in and through the city, and (c) committed to embracing the whole of God's human creation.

What we envision at North Park is a place that offers, as Bakke might say, a theology as big as the city, accompanied by a pedagogy as big as the city, and complemented by a people as big as the city. And we realize the efforts of our cultural centers should be organized to facilitate this vision.

So this summer, rather than having several centers operating independently, we combined them into a Collaboratory for Urban and Intercultural Learning. What is a collaboratory? Specifically, it is a laboratory in which learning is both active and engaging, and a forum that encourages people to collaborate—each learning from the other. This collaboratory begins with our home, the city of Chicago. After all, the claim that "Chicago is our classroom and all Chicagoans are our teachers" needs to be true both in our rhetoric and in the University's reality. The collaboratory isn't our only approach to this, but it will certainly be central to it. We expect student learning through the Collaboratory to be active, intercultural, and urban focused, as well as supportive of the University's commitment to justice.

The Collaboratory is located on the first floor of Caroline Hall. As you have opportunity to visit the campus, please stop in to see this new program venue.

A NEW YEAR

I write these words on the first day of class in this new academic year. Our doors are open, students are on campus, teachers are in their classrooms, food is on the table, football, soccer, and volleyball teams are on the practice field, and the river is within its banks! Athletic teams, residence assistants, and a few others returned about two weeks ago. New students arrived this past Tuesday for Threshold, our annual weeklong orientation, and the rest of our student body arrived over the weekend.

With students back on campus, I am reminded why we are here, and why you have partnered with us.

Blessings to you,



David L. Parkyn
President, North Park University