



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER TO PRESIDENT'S CLUB AND HERITAGE CIRCLE DONORS
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*Grow tall. Be pruned.
Bear fruit.
Be transplanted.
Prosper.*

CAMPUS TREES

It's Saturday morning as I write this newsletter. Most students are still sleeping (you remember those days!) but the Admissions Office is busy hosting families who are visiting North Park today.

I stopped to greet one family on the back steps to Old Main. In the course of our conversation, they commented on the beauty of the campus. So I volunteered to show them my favorite location—a gorgeous and shaded spot by the walking path along the river just west of Carlson Tower. In this place, our landscape architects designed a small area that is a perfect spot to sit under the shade of the leafy canopy and next to some beautiful ground plantings.

As we sat there together for a moment, I told this family of the words I spoke to new students and their families when we gathered at Convocation at the beginning of this school year. Here's an excerpt:

When I tell people across the country that I'm from North Park University in Chicago, they often are curious about our campus. What must it be like, they wonder, for a small university to be located in the third largest city in America? I tell them our campus is like a park with lots of trees, and a river running through it.

Our campus is a park, with a water feature (the river!), and marvelous foliage. But it hasn't always been like this. I suppose the river has always been here, but it hasn't always been the controlled flow of water it is today. In fact, there's an early photo of our campus taken when Old Main was the only building and the river had flooded all the way up to its back steps. In this photo, a couple of adventurous students are pictured in a canoe, docking at the steps of Old Main.

There's something else curious about this photograph, however. There are no trees. The same thing holds true for other early photographs of Old Main. Near the steps, there are a couple of new plants, hardly six feet tall, but beyond this, both close to the building and off into the horizon, there are no trees; there are only farm fields.

It's quite different now. How did a field cleared for farming become a campus of hundreds of trees in the middle of the country's third largest city? We planted them. . . We planted them a long time ago, and we planted them just a few years ago. In fact, Carl Wistrom, who heads our Physical Plant Office, estimates that during the lifetime of today's new students, we've planted nearly 300 trees—that's 18 trees, on average, during each of the past 18 years.



This planting of trees on North Park's campus reminds me of the third verse of Psalm 1. Here the poet writes:

They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

The person who wrote these words never visited North Park's campus, and especially not since the river bank has been contained and the campus canopy has been enriched by so many trees. Yet the poet must have been sitting in just such a place to write this psalm.

Not only does the psalm remind me of our campus, but the poet's metaphor also describes so beautifully what happens at North Park. "Trees . . . planted by streams of water . . . which yield their fruit in its season."

Students at North Park are like trees planted along a stream of water. Here their roots are to be strengthened, their branches are to be pruned (that hurts a little), and their first fruit is to be harvested (that's simply delicious). And then there will come a

day when we will transplant them. Their family and friends will say they're graduating, but, really, transplanting is such a better word. At this transplanting, we will uproot them from this park along the banks of a river so they can be re-planted in another park, some nearby and some in more distant locations.

The poet also reminds us that as our young trees grow, and as they are transplanted, they will prosper. . .

As their roots run deep in the soil for nourishment, as their branches are pruned, as the wind blows and bends them this way and that, as their leaves dry and drop to the ground in the cold of winter, and bud forth again in the warmth of spring, they will bear fruit. In bearing fruit, they will discover more of life, and as they discover more of life, they'll discover more of God. As they discover more of God, they'll uncover their place in the world and their way to make the world better, a place more aligned with God's intent.

And when they are ready to do this on their own, we'll transplant them to bear their fruit in its season, to live with significance and in service.

Here is God's directive to new students at North Park:
Grow tall. Be pruned. Bear fruit. Be transplanted. Prosper.



A STARTLING STATISTIC

New students are always on my mind in a special way at the beginning of a new school year.

There are a number of reasons for this but perhaps the most significant is how clearly I remember how anxious these same days were for me during my first semester at college many years ago. Everything was new. All was new because I was living, sleeping, and eating in a new place. All was new because I didn't know anyone on the campus. All was new because as a first-generation college student, the undergraduate experience required entering an entirely new "culture." And all was new because I was now responsible for my personal well-being, including my own finances.

For some students today this last point is a real sticking point. How will I pay for college?

We work hard at North Park to keep our tuition at a modest and affordable level. When compared to many schools, we succeed at this. And we offer a large amount of financial aid. This past year we provided nearly \$13 million in scholarship aid to our students.

Yet, many students at North Park struggle to pay for college. And this is a dominating concern for many of today's first-year students.

What we know is startling: **27 percent of this year's class of new students expects to work more than 25 hours each week while enrolled in full-time coursework.**

These students are dedicated. They work hard—both on their studies and in their job (or for some it's *jobs*). Yet, I wonder how they survive.

As I walk across campus and greet students on their way to and from class, I wonder which one of every four students I pass has been awake through the whole night trying to prepare for class after putting in an eight-hour shift at work.

Because you receive this newsletter, I know you are an active contributor to North Park's Annual Fund. Perhaps you've wondered what this fund is about. Perhaps you've asked if it is really necessary to fund an account which simply supports our annual operating budget.

Here's what you should know: **Gifts to the Annual Fund support student scholarships and financial aid.** Less support for the Annual Fund means less aid to students. More support for the Annual Fund means more aid to students. It's a simple formula, and you control the variables.

MY READING LIST

About once a year in this newsletter I write about what I've been reading lately. Through this, you've come to know that I love to read.

Because I love to read, I deeply enjoy one of our annual traditions at North Park—a fall semester Convocation in which we recognize special professional achievements by our faculty and staff. In this Convocation, we identify faculty who have been recently tenured and/or promoted in rank, and we formally install individuals new to administrative and leadership assignments.

In addition, we recognize our authors—members of our campus community who have published a book during the past year. This year we will applaud the authors of 15 books! The authors represent a wide cross-section of academic disciplines, and the topics of the books are equally broad. Here's a sampling:

- Norwegian and Swedish immigration to the United States
- Easter in the early church
- A biblical perspective on health
- Three views on the human struggle with sin, based on interpretations of Romans 7
- Vocal technique for conductors, teachers, and singers
- How money and missions come together in Asia
- The *Philokalia*, an ancient Christian text on Orthodox spirituality
- A poem about “kissing a stranger”
- Expressions of Christian faith across generations of Asian-American immigrants
- Modern Greek identity and the teaching of national Greek history

While you may not have the opportunity to study with these authors, our students do—undergraduates, graduate students, and seminarians, each of them is deeply blessed by the chance to sit side-by-side with the authors of these books and by others who are now writing those books whose publication we'll celebrate next year.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Many of the New Testament epistles begin with a common refrain: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These letters of Scripture begin with us—“Grace to you . . .”—and then wrap us in the powerful embrace of our loving God—“. . . and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

When our faculty and staff gathered just before students returned to campus I commented that these are good words for the beginning of a school year. These are words we can speak when we greet each other after having been apart during the summer. And these same words can shape how we reach out to students who join us for the first time and others who return for another year.

I'm also hopeful that when we come together for our Baccalaureate Service and Commencement Convocations in May we will discover that the opening words of the epistles have been transformed from words of promise and assurance into words of fulfillment and faithfulness, attesting to God's constant journey with us in the life and service of North Park, and in your life, also.

So then, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

