



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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"We find God in each step we take."

FINDING GOD

Parents sometimes wonder whether their sons and daughters will lose their faith in college. This is an important question; indeed it's one I asked many times as we sent each of our two children to school.

The faith of young people certainly changes in college. It is influenced by where they worship, whom they meet, experiences they have, ideas they encounter. At North Park, our students meet God in our classrooms, in chapel, on the athletic field, in counseling sessions. Yet our students also meet God on the streets of Chicago, on bus rides during a Sankofa journey, through internships, and in a million other ways. Surely they find God at North Park.

Yet, how we find God isn't a question only for our sons and daughters as they go off to college. It remains a question for me and I know it remains a question for each of us who work at North Park. I suspect it also remains a question for you.

How, for example, do we find God in Lent? How do we meet God when the words of worship liturgy step away from the discovery of Epiphany and center on penitence and suffering before we restore the alleluia of resurrection?

Or, how do we find God in the busy-ness of the second half of a spring semester? How do we see God in our work when warm weather distracts, priorities assigned to the year now extend beyond our reach, and a class long taught with a certain ease no longer reflects the passion we once brought to the discipline?

Or, where do we individually meet God in the normalness of each day and in the complexity which crops into each of our lives? Just yesterday, during conversations along the sidewalks of our campus, I heard the questions of a young father perplexed by the behavior of his three-year-old son, the challenge experienced by a staff member in moving his mother to a retirement home, the joy of another who had just received great news from their family physician, the puzzle of family budgeting from two new to married life.

How do we find God?

My reading of Scripture this week led me to Psalm 66. Here is the answer of the psalmist: we find God in each step we take, each challenge we face, each moment of joy; we find God in our very life.

Bless our God, O Peoples!

Give him a thunderous welcome!

Didn't he set us on the road to life?

Didn't he keep us out of the ditch?

He trained us first,

passed us like silver through refining fires,



A group of North Park University students studying in Ecuador.

Brought us into the hardscrabble country,
pushed us to our very limit,
Road-tested us inside and out,
took us to hell and back;
Finally he brought us
to this well-watered place.

All believers, come here and listen,
let me tell you what God did for me.
I called out to him with my mouth,
my tongue shaped the sounds of music.
If I had been cozy with evil
the Lord would never have listened.
But he most surely did listen,
he came on the double when he heard my prayer.
Blessed be God: he didn't turn a deaf ear,
he stayed with me, loyal in his love.
(The Message, selections from Psalm 66)

God sends college students everywhere (including at North Park) through the refining fire; God pushes college students to their very limit; God road-tests college students; God brings college students to well-watered places.

And God doesn't stop intervening in our lives when we graduate from college. We are refined, pushed, road-tested, and brought to well-watered places. God stays with us, loyal to us in divine love. We find God in each step we take.

FINDING GOD . . . OVERSEAS

We are a global community at North Park, and it is through the wonder of many nations that we find God.

This semester, North Park students are studying abroad in an array of countries. Here's the list:

- Argentina
- Austria
- Chile
- Czech Republic
- Ecuador
- England
- Finland
- France
- Israel
- Latvia
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Nicaragua
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Arab Emirates

What privilege today's students enjoy!



The North Park trip participants met with Chinese business leaders and MBA students in Guangdong Province.

Yet, there's more to this story. North Park University is also home to students from around the world. Specifically, 187 international students are enrolled at North Park for the spring semester. This includes:

- 21 graduate students
- 91 undergraduate students (in four-year degree programs)
- 54 exchange students (here for one or two semesters)
- 21 other students and scholars with various other visa status

These students come from Bolivia, China, Finland, India, Ireland, Korea, Norway, Portugal, Russia, and Sweden.

We are a global community, and it is through this wonderful mix of people from around the world that we find God!

FINDING GOD . . . IN SEMINARY

The Board of Trustees recently confirmed the recommendation of the Seminary Search Committee and nominated Dr. David W. Kersten to serve as the next dean of the Seminary.

David Kersten knows very clearly what draws him to the opportunity to serve as dean of the Seminary at North Park University. In his personal introduction to the search committee, he identified two themes:

"This is a critical time for vocational ministry. While the work has never been more complex, it nonetheless remains full of promise and hope. This is also a critical time for theological education. The issues cover a broad range, including financial viability, curriculum pedagogy, delivery systems, and faculty composition, just to begin the conversation."

Dr. Kersten is by personal profession a vocational minister—for 29 years he has been a pastor. Over these years, he has been a pastor to young and old, seasoned veterans of faith and young seekers, rural Alabamans, immigrant Floridians, suburban Seattleites, and urban Minnesotans. By definition, all the members of these parishes have been Covenanters, but much more important, they have been pilgrims in Christian faith and devotion.

More recently through his work as an executive minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church, David Kersten has been a pastor's pastor. He cares for the entry of men and women into the vocation of ministry, he cares for their well-being in the midst of this calling, and he cares for the completion of their labor through the full of life. As we like to say at North Park, he walks alongside—alongside pastors both younger and older; alongside those starting the walk, those running the race, and those crossing the finish line; alongside men and women, northerners and southerners, immigrants from Sweden long ago and others who have

journeyed from Mexico, Argentina, and beyond in more recent days; alongside those who worship with hands raised high and those who worship on bended knee.

Yet he is more than a vocational minister. He is also a theological educator. This begins with a deep personal commitment to learn and learn again, through all of life. He knows the value of initial preparation for and orientation to ministry. He knows the deep need for learning which sustains and nourishes pastoral excellence over a lifetime. He knows the challenge of change—change in curriculum, change in pedagogy, change in budget, change in faculty, change in ministry, change in church, change in society. He is well prepared to lead our Seminary because as he leads he will teach, and as he teaches he will pastor.

Perhaps I can say it best this way: David Kersten comes to the academy from and for the church. And more specifically, he comes to our academy, to the academy of the church in this place. Here is how he expressed this for the search committee: “North Park is shaped by its location, situated in this diverse sector of the city in which a distinctly Christian voice must emerge in dialogue with most known cultures, many religions of the world, and peoples of the world”

David Kersten’s appointment will begin with the coming school year; we look forward to welcoming him to the campus.

FINDING GOD . . . IN OUR PERSONAL LIFE

Linda and I have been blessed in recent years with the birth of two grandchildren. Will (now almost five) and Anna (now two) live in Massachusetts with our daughter, Betsy, and our son-in-law, Calder. There’s more to this story, however. On February 21, Catherine (Cate) Rose joined the family.

But there’s still more to this story. On April 9, our son, Nate, and daughter-in-law, Casey, gave birth to twins, Ella Marie and Carter David.

Linda and I have discovered that we find God in the joy of being grandparents (and I know many of you agree with me in this).

We find God—we discover God’s presence, we encounter a peace that passes understanding, we receive God’s most gracious favor—in each step of life. The Word was made flesh and now dwells among us, here with us to discover anew each day.

Blessings,

