

FROM THE DESK OF PRESIDENT DAVID L. PARKYN

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER TO LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY DONORS
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WE ARE GRIEVING

We expect North Park University to be a place of life. We make this clear in our mission statement: North Park “prepares students for lives of significance and service.” Yet this academic year we have too often experienced death in our community.

In years to come, when we talk about this year at North Park, death will be an important part of our story. We will tell of Jessica and Kat, two undergraduates at North Park who died within a week of each other in the spring semester. We will tell of Vernard, a Seminary student; of Betty, a campus administrator; and of Wendy, a faculty member; who each died during the fall semester.

So, we are grieving. We have lost five beloved members of our campus community. These have been our friends and colleagues, roommates and lab partners—companions in the joy of life at North Park. We grieve the loss; we wonder why God allows such grief and loss, pain and tears into our lives.

Stories that matter—like the story of this year at North Park—often complicate life. The story isn’t being written as we expect or want. Yet in the unexpected we may discover the truth expressed in an old Spanish saying: “Dios escribe derecho con líneas torcidas,” God writes straight with crooked lines. Death is part of this year’s story at North Park, a story written by God with crooked lines.

In our grief we struggle for words to pray and in doing so we discover that aspect of prayer which is without words. As Marilyn Chandler McEntyre has written, “We know that God hears the inarticulate cries of those who have no words for their suffering or their gratitude or their rage.” In the silence of our prayers we discover a peace which illuminates the straight path we follow drawn with crooked lines.

We can be confident that part of our story this year will also tell of how we cared for each other in our grief. The North Park community is a gift to each of us. This is why our loss is so painful, but it is also why care for each other and eventual healing for each of us can be found here as well. And in caring for each other we will learn how to better care for the needs of the whole world—a world that often hurts just like we hurt this year.

Peace be to the memory of Vernard, Betty, Wendy, Kat, and Jessica.

Peace be to God’s people gathered at North Park.

Peace be to all God’s people gathered around the world.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

The strategic plan for North Park notes four major objectives for our immediate future. The first objective asserts “we will affirm a distinctive, ownable, and sustainable ‘space’ for North Park University in American higher education.” In the strategic plan this “space” is further identified as “distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural.”

So how are we doing? Is this ambition for our institutional identity mere rhetoric, or are we actually claiming this space and doing so effectively? During the current academic year we have received recognition in several ways which affirm we are reaching to this ambition.

NSSE Project – In the spring of 2009 our first-year and senior students participated in an assessment program known as the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE). In this project, students at North Park indicated a much higher than average participation in activities which NSSE calls “enriching educational experiences.”

These experiences include having frequent discussions, both in the classroom and beyond, with students different from ourselves in ethnicity and race, politics and faith, social background and economic position. These educational experiences also include the opportunity for internships, practica, field placements, and clinical assignments in businesses, social service agencies, communities, hospitals, and churches. Students at North Park identify this as a very special place of learning, one where learning in the company of others leaves a definitive mark on each student’s development.

Faith-in-Action Award – During the fall semester North Park University was honored to receive the 2009 Faith in Action Award, presented by Casa Central in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood. As the largest social service agency in the city that serves primarily the Latino community, Casa Central recognized North Park for its exceptional involvement with Spanish-speaking people in Chicago. This involvement comes through student engagement as volunteers and interns at Casa Central, and it also is expressed through the opportunity for North Park to offer courses on location at Casa Central toward degrees in nonprofit management.

Andringa Award – At the International Forum on Christian Higher Education held in February, North Park University was honored to receive the 2010 Robert and Susan Andringa Award for Advancing Racial Harmony. This award recognizes and celebrates the achievements of an institution which has made significant progress in providing a learning environment which embraces diversity and advances racial harmony and reconciliation.

President’s Honor Roll – For the second consecutive year, North Park was named to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for its exemplary service efforts to the Chicago community. Launched in 2006, the Honor Roll is the highest federal recognition a school can achieve for its commitment to service-learning and civic engagement.

Seeing the Light – In early 2010 the Johns Hopkins University Press published a new book on faith-affirming higher education. Written by Samuel Schuman, retired chancellor of the University of Minnesota, *Seeing the Light: Religious Colleges in 21st Century America*, portrays 10 institutions of note from across the country. One of these schools is North Park University.

In a chapter on “Swedes in the City,” and later in the book’s conclusion, Chancellor Schuman writes these comments about North Park:

North Park is distinct in the degree to which it integrates all three of these elements [Christian, urban, and multicultural] and in the ways in which it sees each element as reinforcing and, indeed, necessary to the others...North Parkers believe that their Christian character is shaped by their setting in the heart of the city of Chicago and that a contemporary Christian culture must be diverse. (p. 132)

As a visitor to the university, I was impressed and surprised by the way in which NPU has combined a vigorous and unapologetic Christian mission and identity with an openness to a student population that is widely eclectic in terms of race, ethnicity, economic background and, yes, religion. (p. 132)

I can understand why North Parkers have some difficulty defining peer institutions: they have created a university that is quite distinctive and difficult to compare to others. It is, on the one hand, vigorously religious and strongly denominational with a continuing tie to a particular immigrant population, and yet equally strongly and vigorously open to students from the widest diversity of backgrounds. It occupies a pleasant, green, and historical campus, in the very middle of a bustling major American city. Perhaps most impressive and surprising, not only is North Park University Christian, urban, and multicultural, but it has managed to be all those things and also to be coherent. (p. 143)

Of the institutions I visited in the course of doing the research for *Seeing the Light*, I think perhaps North Park University in Chicago was the most assertively outward looking in its philosophy... [In contrast to many of its peers] North Park work[s] vigorously to push students out into the complexity of a modern urban environment and to pull into the orb of the university the multifaceted neighborhood around it. (p. 216-217)

These statements describe a university that has affirmed “a distinctive, ownable, and sustainable ‘space.’” We have a ways to go before our journey is complete, but according to one researcher, at least, we’re making some very good progress toward this end.

CHICAGOLAND ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

The University’s 2010 advertising campaign features North Park students and introduces the community to www.mystory.northpark.edu, a website where, through short video segments, students discuss the impact of a North Park education. The campaign is presented on highway billboards, at CTA bus stops and El stations, and on CTA vehicles, including buses and subway trains.

Additionally, the 2010 campaign is reflected in a series of new banners located along Foster and Kedzie Avenues and along the central campus walkways. These banners mark our space in the neighborhood and remind us of our core institutional identity as we walk across the campus.

IMPROVEMENTS TO OLD MAIN

During the semester break contractors completed improvements to the first floor of Old Main. Brorson Lounge, which serves as a central campus meeting and seminar location, was better equipped for light food service, the lighting was improved, and the room's media capability was increased with the installation of a ceiling-mounted video projector. A fresh coat of paint and some new furniture also make the room a more pleasant and effective place to hold campus meetings and seminars.

Additionally, a Transfer Center for the Admissions Office is located in renovated space in the southwestern corner of the first floor. The Transfer Center includes a conference room for meeting with prospective students, workstations for three full-time admissions counselors, and workspace for student assistants. About one-third of North Park's new undergraduates each year are transfer students, and we expect this renovated space to enhance our recruitment of these students.

OUR PRAYER

As the spring semester continues, as students prepare for graduation and summer employment, and as prospective students contemplate their place of study in the coming year, we pray that God will grant us the grace and wisdom to know what path we ought to follow, and that in this path we may see light and journey with confidence into the future of North Park University.

Thank you for praying with us.



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