

FROM THE DESK OF PRESIDENT DAVID L. PARKYN

WINTER 2007

SIGNIFICANCE AND SERVICE

On my office calendar I select one day each month to reserve as an Open Office Day for students. This provides a full day, uninterrupted by any other appointments, for me to visit with students who drop by at their leisure.

Some students come with friends and are curious to discover who I am, why I came to North Park University, and why I've reserved a day each month just for students. Others come alone to tell me of what they've been learning recently, to tout an accomplishment in their life, or to share a recent challenge.

Today was such a day. And my first two visits were especially telling about the life and times of North Park University.

Tiffany visited with me. She is a senior math major seeking certification to teach in high school. A resident of the west coast, she came to North Park because it is an urban school. She was looking for a college, she said, where she could learn to be "in the world" and "in service to the world." The city, she determined, was the best place to do this. And this semester, as she completes her course of study, she leaves campus each day to student-teach in one of Chicago's public schools. In her class she has met a group of very interesting students. Forty percent of her students were born abroad. Sixty-five percent of her students speak a language other than English at home. Most of her students come from financially stable homes, but some live in significant poverty. "I teach the world," she tells me proudly; "my life-long dream is coming true!" These students represent her first class and she expects to find many others like them in the years ahead.

Tiffany has been well-prepared for this classroom environment, she claims. Because North Park University is in the city, over the past four years she has met many people like her students. Some occasions were linked to course requirements, but for the most part her experiences have come just out of living in the Albany Park and North Park neighborhoods.

Enas and Anis are sister and brother. She is a graduate student in our MBA program; he is in his senior year as a biology major. They came to my office to hand-deliver a letter addressed to me from Victor Khader Isaid, the mayor of Zababdeh Municipality in Palestine. In three weeks immediately prior to the end of the fall semester Enas and Anis raised \$4,500 from students, faculty, and staff for Christmas gifts to distribute to children in their

Focus on the important

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hometown. With these funds in hand they returned to Palestine for the holidays and bought gifts for children and food for widows. Mayor Isaid wrote to me: “These gifts brought a grateful smile to our kids especially in these days where kids are the major victims of the recent conflict. The gifts included many essential items especially milk in the shadow of the hardships that the Palestinian people are living under, where the children are suffering from this situation the most.”

Sometimes I’m asked what we mean when we claim in the North Park University mission statement to “educate students for lives of significance and service.” Tiffany, Enas, and Anis are the best answer I can give. I’m honored to be part of the North Park community because these three are here. As Tiffany, Enas, and Anis have discovered, learning is most noble when used to benefit others.

UNIVERSITY MINISTRIES

Our campus ministries programs have been key distinctives at North Park for decades. In the 1980s a Habitat for Humanity chapter was established here, out of which grew a grass-roots, student-led program called Urban Outreach, which today partners with over 20 local programs to meet community needs. From its beginning, Urban Outreach grew rapidly and has involved a high percentage of North Park students. A primary component of Urban Outreach is the After Hours Center, which provides a safe and nurturing environment where the educational, physical, social, spiritual, and emotional needs of local middle school students can be met through one-on-one mentoring by North Park students and a variety of other services.

Likewise, our chapel program and other student ministries have been enhanced in recent years as part of North Park’s co-curricular programs. In 1998-1999, Interim Chaplain Mark Olson launched a study to identify the ministry needs of the campus. An extensive plan was then developed, calling for a dramatically increased investment in the spiritual life of the undergraduate students. At the same time, a generous donor stepped forward with an offer to help fund a five-year start-up cycle for the re-imagined department.

Enhanced staff and program investment has resulted in an across-the-board increase in the number of students involved. Student missions and service trips are one example: prior to 1999, there were two or three student-led trips each year. Today, that number has increased to 12-15 trips per year involving 125-150 students. And as the numbers increased, so did the quality. In like manner, in addition to the mid-week chapel program, *collegelife* draws a large gathering for late night worship each Sunday.

Located in Sohlberg Hall, University Ministries is headed by Rich Johnson, who serves as director. Judy Peterson is the interim campus pastor. The department has become increasingly integrated into the life of the campus, from the classroom to the athletic field. As well, Seminary students are now actively involved in a variety of programs. We are grateful for those who initiated and helped fund the transformation of our campus ministries, which now emphasize student leadership development in the context of a “best practices” approach.

NORTH PARK'S EVOLVING CULTURAL AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Most North Park friends are familiar with the school's early history: its founding in Minneapolis by new Swedish Americans (called "Swedish Mission Friends") in 1891, its relocation to Chicago in 1893, and its growth from an institution that prepared these Mission Friends for ministry and a handful of other vocations, to the multifaceted and multiethnic entity it is today.

The University's ethnic and cultural heritage is joined at the hip to the changing demographics in the city that grew up around the former farm where North Park was built. Although the Swedish component was for decades the dominant group, there were significant numbers of Greek, Jewish, and German residents in the community who took advantage of the convenience of getting their education at North Park.

The influence of the Swedes was the strongest, however, not just because of their presence in the community, but also because North Park educated students from the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant Church who came from many regions of the United States. The descendants of those original North Park constituents—including alumni, parents, and denominational supporters—are still a strong and loyal segment of the North Park family today.

The evolution to the multiethnic campus community that exists today has been in the works for at least fifty years. As Chicago has grown and evolved, so has North Park, and our student body has reflected the changes. Our response has been to embrace this diversity and to become an institution that expresses the richness and variety of its own community.

We also desire that the learning and teaching on this campus reflect the diverse populations of students, faculty, and staff, and that they are inclusive of a variety of perspectives, experiences, and pedagogy in the community. I spoke to this challenge in my inauguration address with these words:

“When students study at North Park, and when we work at North Park, we must lose our cultural innocence. Our complex cultural environment must nourish a voice which speaks out of a deeply ingrained respect for every person. We must learn to see beyond race, beyond creed, beyond gender, beyond personal preferences to the essence of the image of God in our neighbors.”

MEETING ALUMNI AND FRIENDS THROUGHOUT AMERICA

Settling in as North Park's president means that I begin addressing two worlds simultaneously: the on-campus world with all its immediacy, and the community that resides somewhere in the rest of the world—the one that in so many ways reflects the mission and character of North Park.

Many North Parkers—friends, parents, and alumni—live in Minneapolis and Florida, New York and California, Kansas and Ohio, Washington and Colorado. North Parkers are spread out in diverse places across America and around the world. And this winter and spring Linda and I are privileged to meet many of you as we travel to various regions.

Spending time with these friends is incredibly enriching and informative. North Park is affirmed on these visits as a vibrant entity comprised of people crossing many generations. As I meet you I learn your specific North Park story and see how your life, shaped by North Park, is now influencing many others in your respective families, businesses, communities, and churches.

I greatly enjoyed some early meetings in Colorado and Washington during the fall, but a more rigorous schedule will prevail during the winter and spring. A list of events is posted on North Park's web site. Earlier this month Linda and I visited Minneapolis and Southern California, and in the immediate future, we will travel to Seattle, Portland, and Northern California, stopping at several places for events from February 16-26.

If you have a question or an idea about an event and would like to speak to someone on campus, please contact Rick Yngve, co-director of the Office of Alumni, at (773) 244-6248, or Alice Hartley, associate vice president for development, at (773) 244-6264.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

I often wonder how to pray—for peace, for healing, for restoration in brokenness, for guidance, for health, in good times and bad. I wonder, sometimes, how to pray for North Park University.

I've found help in this by turning occasionally to prayers written by other Christians, other people who have worked through these same questions. One such prayer is a short prayer "for schools and colleges" included in *The Book of Common Prayer*. I offer it to you, both as a concluding reflection and as a means to guide your own praying for our students and this fine university.

O Eternal God, bless all schools, colleges, and universities, and especially North Park University, that they may be lively centers for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom; and grant that those who teach and those who learn may find you to be the source of all truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 824

Blessings to you,



David L. Parkyn
President