

FROM THE DESK OF PRESIDENT DAVID L. PARKYN

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Calendars order our lives. Calendars break time into definable units—years, months, days, sometimes hours and minutes—which give a pattern to follow and serve as a means to "keep track of time." Calendars also foster relationships; we know when we can greet and meet another person for business, pleasure, or both.

As a citizen, academic, and Christian I follow three calendars. Three is sometimes too many. Rather than giving order they confuse because they provide competing rather than coordinated patterns to follow. When one calendar begins another is ending; when one provides rest another expects energy; when one calls for anticipation another requires reflection. So though my life is usually ordered, it also can be chaotic.

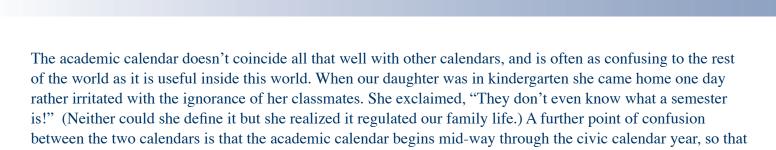
My citizen calendar has a year defined by 12 months, each with a varying number of days from 28 to 31, and 52 weeks following a consistent pattern of seven days each. This calendar includes a number of days of special observance, and most of these are defined by one's country—so we Americans observe Thanksgiving Day late in November, Independence Day on July 4, Labor Day on a Monday in early September, and so on. Some special days on the civic calendar are defined by a particular heritage. Irish-Americans celebrate March 17 as St. Patrick's Day. Neither Linda nor I are of Irish heritage but we are faithful observers of March 17—it is Linda's birthday!

One of the most peculiar parts of our civic calendar is leap year. Once every four years we add an extra day and give a little more prominence to February. This balances our civic calendar a little more closely with the lunar rotation. However, I recently came across a further curiosity in this practice. Leap year is observed every four years, except when it is a centennial year, such as 1700, 1800, and 1900. In centennial years leap year is not observed, except when the centennial year is evenly divisible by four, such as 2000. In these evenly divisible-by-four centennial years, leap year is observed. My young grandson may know this better than I do as he'll celebrate his 93rd birthday in 2100, a centennial year which will not be a leap year.

My academic calendar follows an entirely different sequence. It has two large segments called semesters. Each semester is marked by a first day, each ends with a period of final exams, and each has a brief break or rest period somewhere near the middle. The academic calendar is occasionally interrupted by the civic calendar—we have no classes on Labor Day and Thanksgiving Day even though observing these days interrupts the flow of the learning calendar.







the academic year extends over parts of two civic calendar years (such as 2007-2008). For undergraduates this two-semester calendar also has a "leap year" tradition—a celebration of commencement that often comes after

The Christian calendar is unique unto itself in many ways. It follows a pattern of seasons—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time. Each season varies in length, but together they tell a story centered on one man's life. The story is repeated on a three-year cycle of readings from Scripture. As such it teaches much about life itself—we embrace both birth and death (and even resurrection!), we celebrate and mourn, we are exuberant and reflective.

The Christian calendar doesn't match particularly well with the other two calendars. It begins somewhere near December 1, just as the civic year is coming to an end and the academic year is approaching its mid-point. As Advent begins we hit a frenetic pace on campus, trying to complete final exams and celebrate Christmas almost simultaneously. Easter would be easier to fit into the academic calendar if it didn't move around so much from year to year!

These are the worlds we live in. Recently on Thanksgiving Day we cooked a turkey in the middle of the week because it is the American way. In December I'll send Christmas cards to greet many friends at this special time of the Christian year. Some five months later I'll send Commencement announcements to invite many to a big celebration in the academic world.

May you be filled with God's grace, love, and peace today regardless of how you keep track of time.

RECENT READING

four years.

Two books I've read recently may be responsible for prompting me to reflect on the calendars I follow.

Quite fortunately, I believe, the one aspect of the Christian calendar which has influenced and often shaped the other two calendars is the Sabbath. This one day in seven is set aside from the other six as a day God blessed and hallowed. As the fall semester rolled along I took time to read a classic Jewish text, *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel. He teaches that we observe the Sabbath because in doing so we both imitate God (who rested after six days of working on creation) and we find God's presence (because we allow ourselves to "be still" and in doing so we "know" God). Heschel also reminded me that whether or not I observe this day it remains holy because God declared it so.

For your own Sabbath reflection I offer these short passages from Heschel's book:

The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath. It is not an interlude but the climax of living. (p. 14)

The Sabbath is the inspirer, the other days are inspired. (p. 21)

God has sanctified the day, and man must again and again sanctify the day.... The Sabbath is holy by the grace of God, and is still in need of all the holiness which man may lend to it. (p. 54)





In the language of the Bible the world was brought into being in the six days of creation, yet its survival depends upon the holiness of the seventh day. Great are the laws that govern the processes of nature. Yet without holiness there would be neither greatness nor nature. (p. 76)

Along with reading this book on the Sabbath, I've also begun reading an abbreviated compendium of the work of Frederick Buechner. Structured as daily readings the excerpts in *Beyond Words* are taken from three earlier works by Buechner in which he outlines the "ABCs of faith." Reading the 366 entries a day at a time will work in whatever calendar we follow.

Because we celebrated the marriage of our son on December 1 I returned recently to the reading for "Day 207 – Marriage." Buechner writes:

A marriage made in heaven is one where a man and a woman become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone. (p. 243)

This has been the gift Linda and I have cherished in our 33 years together; this is the gift we hope Nathaniel and Casey will discover in their life together.

UPDATE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As is our custom, the Board of Trustees gathered on campus in late October for its fall meeting. Five new trustees joined this meeting: Mark Dennis of Evanston, Illinois; Jon Heintzelman of Lake Bluff, Illinois; Tomás Ivens of Grand Rapids, Michigan; Bonnie Pihl of Wheaton, Illinois; and John Snow of Oak Lawn, Illinois. Among the highlights of the meeting we note the following:

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- A professional development workshop was organized for the Board on the topic of "The Role and Responsibility of the Board in a Fundraising Campaign."
- The Board received a report from a task force regarding the potential for a new fundraising campaign. We expect to consider a campaign proposal at the February 2008 meeting.
- A presentation was made by architects from VOA Associates regarding work-to-date in
 preliminary design for a University Commons. Early questions considered in this work
 include building location, footprint size and shape, and building program. The architects
 were commissioned to further refine the preliminary design for purposes of establishing a
 cost estimate for the project.
- The Finance Committee met with and received a report from the University auditors. A clean audit was reported for fiscal year 2007.
- The Board agreed on a resolution supporting 100% Board participation in the University's Annual Fund with combined contributions by the Board to exceed \$150,000 for 2007-2008.
- Faculty emerita status was granted to Alice Iverson.

In addition to regular business, the meeting schedule included a first-time program for spouses of Board members. We'll likely repeat this on an annual basis.



THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS

In this holy season we reflect on the words and images of Christmas in Chicago and around the world.

Peace . . . Joy . . . Light . . . Hope . . . Gratitude . . . Mystery . . . Gospel . . . Promise . . . Salvation . . . Gift giving . . . Snow falling . . . Bells ringing . . . Lights twinkling . . . Sheep grazing . . . Shepherds sleeping . . . Stars guiding . . . Angels announcing . . . Virgin, yet mother. Infant, yet savior . . . How can this be?

This is the wonder of Christmas.

David L. Parkyn

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