

# FROM THE DESK OF PRESIDENT DAVID L. PARKYN

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER TO LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY DONORS  
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*I'm happy  
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## ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Recently I carved a dozen turkeys.

I had been visiting friends of North Park in Minneapolis and St. Paul during the first part of the week and returned to Chicago late in the afternoon. A quick trip from O'Hare Airport to campus, and I arrived outside of the Magnuson Campus Center just before 5:00 p.m.

I could hardly make it through the crowd. The hallways on the first floor were jammed with students waiting to enter the dining hall. The ones at the front of the line had begun to gather early in the afternoon.

A week before Thanksgiving Day it was the night of our traditional campus observance of this national holiday. Every North Parker is invited. All students are there—it doesn't matter whether they enroll in a meal plan, whether they live on- or off-campus, whether they're a first-year student or a senior. In fact, this year I noticed in the serving line a number of students who had received their diplomas last year...graduates who live in the neighborhood and know a good free meal when they see one!

It's always a festive occasion with a traditional menu: turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy, green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberries, and great desserts.

Our tradition is to have the University's senior leadership team and staff serve the dinner, and a few of us don chef's garb and do the carving.

I've gained a reputation in this campus tradition. Word has it that I'm the fastest (and thereby most skilled!) turkey carver, so my serving line moves more quickly than others. Better than this—my serving portions are larger than anyone else's (I'm more generous with my turkeys). Students also have noticed that I bring my own carving knife to this event.

We have a number of campus traditions at North Park, practices passed along from year to year, which shape the ethos of our community. The one-week-early-Thanksgiving-Dinner is one of the best. I'm happy to carve the turkeys; I love happy and well-fed students!

Lives of Significance and Service

**NORTH PARK  
UNIVERSITY**  
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## STUDENT DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

The Board of Trustees gathered on campus for its annual fall meeting on October 23 and 24. But much more important was another campus gathering this same weekend.

Hundreds of North Park students, plus an additional 200 students from more than 20 Midwest colleges and universities, attended a Student Diversity Leadership Conference held on our campus. The conference was organized by the University's Office of Diversity and Multicultural Programs along with the Collaboratory for Urban and Intercultural Learning.

The keynote speaker for the day-long conference was Brenda Salter McNeil. I had the privilege of introducing Brenda to this great group of students that morning. Here's a brief excerpt from what I told the audience:

*Brenda is a gift. She has been God's gift to me, and she will be God's gift to you today.*

*Our usual practice is to open our hands to receive a gift. And when the gift is a person, who has come to us, we applaud with our hands.*

*But this morning we should hold our hands still. Brenda is a gift that comes to our very being. To receive her gift we must quiet our souls, open our ears, and let the voice of Brenda Salter McNeil fill our hearts. So hush now and listen.*

Brenda spoke, and she filled our spirits. Those gathered were inspired—inspired to return to their home campuses, or back to their North Park classrooms and student residences, and make a difference. . . . Make a difference by recognizing what it means to understand human differences.

The conference is one of many means through which North Park promotes one of its seven educational ideals—to embrace all people and celebrate the richness of cultural difference.

## SEMINARY LEADERSHIP

Fourteen years ago Dr. Jay Phelan was appointed to lead one of the historic parts of North Park University's educational program, our Seminary. During this time Jay has led with vision and with care, focusing on developing a faculty of active scholars and effective teachers dedicated to educating future generations of pastoral leaders. During these years the Seminary has developed several new degree programs, and we have introduced new initiatives to encourage increased enrollment.

And after 14 years, Jay wishes to return to his first love: teaching. He will do so by remaining on the faculty of the Seminary, where he can teach future pastors and church leaders while continuing his ministry of writing.

This places before us the need to appoint new leadership for this important part of North Park University. And this places before you the responsibility to pray for the Seminary's new leader (whoever he or she may be) and for those who will make this appointment. We'll assume the task before us because we know you will assume the responsibility which is yours!

## FAITH IN ACTION

The Epistle of James instructs that we should be “doers of the word.” When James wrote these words I’m sure he didn’t have North Park University in mind, but I often wonder whether an organization—one like North Park—can be a “doer of the word.”

Of course we can. And most often it is our students who lead the way. Our students lead the way in approaching the mandate of the prophet Micah to “do justice, love kindness, and walk with God.”

Learning is a noble endeavor, but learning is most noble when used to benefit others. With the gift of learning comes responsibility. As our students learn we encourage them to serve others—to turn faith into action—believing the principle taught by Jesus: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.”

In mid-November Linda and I gathered one evening with a group of students for dinner at the Sheraton Hotel on the riverfront just off of Michigan Avenue. We were there to attend the annual gala dinner sponsored by Casa Central, the largest Hispanic-serving social service agency in Chicago.

The particular reason for attending this dinner was to receive the Faith in Action Award from Casa Central. Our students were proud because their university was recognized for its work with Spanish-speaking communities in Chicago. I was proud because most of North Park’s work in these communities comes through the service of our students. We offer graduate classes in nonprofit management at the central offices of Casa Central in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood, so North Park takes its education into the community. But our students are really the ones who make a difference—through internships with social service agencies, by volunteering through church-sponsored programs, and by teaching in the Chicago Public Schools—serving others across this city.

Our students enter the community and make a difference.

Our students put faith into action.

Our students lead the way.

## HOW ARE WE DOING?

Most nights as I walk home from the campus I ask myself a single question: “How did we do today?” I’m not asking how I did in the specific tasks I completed that day. Rather I’m asking how we (as a University community) did today in achieving our mission and reflecting our identity. We say we are “distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural.” These are good words and this is a worthy identity to strive for. But I wonder, each night, how to transform these words from mere rhetoric into reality in the life of each student.

For this reason we occasionally undertake assessment activities in our campus programs. And the best kind of assessment provides a venue to measure individual student activity and compare it to student learning at our peer institutions.

During the spring semester of this past year our first-year and senior students participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE clusters a large number of effective

learning practices into five categories and measures the extent to which students participate in these important learning-directed activities.

Among the clusters are Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student–Faculty Interaction, and Supportive Campus Environment. In each of these areas the experience of North Park University students often mirrors those of students elsewhere—we do well, and we can do better.

But in the fifth cluster—Enriching Educational Experiences—the student experience at North Park is considerably better than the norm. Here we excel! We excel in providing students with specific kinds of educational experiences which research has proven to be highly engaging and effective in advancing student learning—learning which draws on relationships with others, especially others who are different from us.

These kinds of learning experiences are at the core of North Park’s institutional identity. They include such activities as “frequently having serious conversations with students of varying religious, political, or personal beliefs,” “frequently having serious conversations with those of a different race,” and “engaging in spiritually enhancing activities such as worship and prayer.” These three and many other activities are numbered among the kinds of practices which provide for an “enriching educational experience” and which advance learning in important areas.

The good news for North Park, and especially for our students, is that the commitment of our faculty and dedication of our staff, coupled with our very location in the heart of Chicago, have come together in special way—a way that advances student learning. The NSSE has identified some ways in which we can improve (and we’ll give attention to these) but it also has identified certain learning practices at which we excel (and we’ll keep up the good work).

## ADVENT GREETINGS

I conclude this message with a special note of greeting during this wonderful Advent season. May the blessing of God be richly present in your home this year, for you and all those you love.

As I think of Christmas certain words immediately come to mind. I reflect on them often in considering the meaning of Christmas, in my life and for our students.

*Peace . . . Joy . . . Light . . . Hope . . . Mystery . . . 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 in Chicago, in your home, and around the world.

May God’s light, enkindled in our hearts, shine forth in our lives.



David L. Parkyn  
President, North Park University

3225 West Foster Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60625

[www.northpark.edu](http://www.northpark.edu)

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