

# REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES May 2011

## David L. Parkyn President

#### **Reflections at Five**

Five years. It was five years ago this month that I first met with the North Park University Board of Trustees. At that spring meeting in 2006 I was introduced by the Presidential Search Committee, and after visiting with the Board I received your invitation to serve as president. I say "your" invitation, knowing of course that most of you were not on the Board at that time! Nonetheless, it has been and continues to be my pleasure to serve our beloved institution together with you.

During this spring semester I read a short volume by David L. Ulin, book critic for the Los Angeles Times. In *The Lost Art of Reading* Mr. Ulin discusses why reading full-length books matters. Among the values he proposes is that in reading we stop, or at least pause, to see another world. And in seeing this other world we return with a renewed perspective on our own world. He states: "We have to remember to stop, because we have to stop to remember."

There's nothing magical about five years, but it is a good marking point to pause and reflect on how we have come to this moment in our life together.

One of the many highlights for me from my first five years has been our growing embrace of institutional identity. Increasingly we know who we are as North Park University. Ask six students and six trustees, a dozen faculty members and a dozen parents of undergraduates, to describe who North Park is and today you'll find an answer common to each individual. We share a common vocabulary—on our way to "preparing students for lives of significance and service" we are "distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural." These are not new phrases at North Park; they are rooted in our historic legacy. Yet these threads are now featured more prominently in the fabric of this place.

Achieving this prominence for our institutional identity did not happen by accident. As noted in the strategic plan we developed during my first year at North Park (a document which I often describe more as a strategic narrative than a plan) we identified as a major objective the need to "affirm a distinctive, ownable, and sustainable 'space' for North Park University in American higher education." How fully have we accomplished this?

One voice which speaks to this is the perspective of the accreditation visiting team we hosted early this school year. In both their exit interview and their formal report they commented most positively on North Park's self-understanding and our collective embrace of a common identity. And even these visitors, after just three days on campus, were easily repeating the phrases which in shorthand fashion identify who we are.

In this same strategic plan we identified three other major objectives. (a) To offer students an education of "measurably improved quality." We've taken some good steps in this direction, yet we have not fully reached this objective. (b) To embrace Chicago as a primary resource for student learning. We now claim our place in this great city and as a result we have enhanced a number of opportunities for student learning, with many more initiatives yet to be undertaken. And (c) we set out to provide the necessary financial resources, personnel, and campus facilities to support our educational program. In spite of an economic environment unforeseen five years ago we have always balanced our budget, we've made important incremental improvements to our campus facilities, we've hired some very effective members of our faculty and staff, and we're on our way to achieving a successful fund raising campaign.

From my perspective as president, overall these have been five good years in the life of North Park University. We have many to thank for this. Among these is a very capable senior leadership team—colleagues who I take great pleasure in working with each day, who are unquestioned in their devotion to our school, and who daily bring their best effort to the tasks before us. I'm also deeply grateful for our faculty and staff who each day provide numerous examples of what it means to "walk alongside our students." And you as our trustees, though on campus only occasionally, offer effective direction for our university and extend great care for each of us who works here.

One of my colleagues reminds me that when I visited the campus as part of the presidential search process I was asked whether I was inclined to move to North Park. My response (I'm told) was simply this: "Yes, my heart is warming to North Park." This colleague has been a critic of this response—wanting me to be more direct and to express a more deeply held emotion than mere "warming."

So let me be clear—I love North Park. I love this school certainly for what it has been in the lives of thousands of students over the past 120+ years. And more than this, I love North Park for all it will become in the lives of those hundreds of new students who will join our community this coming school year, and each year thereafter. It is in this spirit that I thank you as our Board of Trustees for inviting me to serve as president and for supporting so faithfully our work together.

## **Critical Topics**

One year ago at the May meeting of the Board of Trustees I identified three topics of urgent and critical interest, all in support of a robust undergraduate program. These three included the successful recruitment of new students, the retention of students

through graduation, and support for undergraduates during their first year. It is appropriate to summarize our progress in each of these areas and in this light to bring these critical topics back to the center of the Board's deliberation.

## Recruitment of Undergraduates

Following on our work with consultants from Scannell and Kurz during the 2009-2010 academic year, this past year we have continued to seek supportive advice and counsel from David Black of Paskill Stapleton and Lord. We also engaged the services of Royall Search to identify a larger pool of applicants, reorganized our digital marketing team, and paid careful attention to developing the effectiveness of our recruitment team. In mid-year Nate Mouttet joined the senior leadership team as Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing.

One important marketing priority involved a redesign of our print marketing pieces. Though the project is not yet fully realized, we do have in place a growing family of print publications designed to support the effective recruitment of undergraduates. This work has been carefully led by Mark Olson. I've invited Mark to present some of this work in the opening session of our Board meeting.

## Retention of Undergraduates

Throughout the academic year Andrea Nevels has brought together a team of colleagues to collaborate on an effective cross-institutional approach to student retention. Now named the Undergraduate Student Persistence Council this group meets on a regular basis to assure the right kind of attention to our undergraduates at critical points in the academic year.

This work has led to a renewed understanding of the critical nature of this work and of the responsibility of every member of our faculty and staff toward this end. The Council has identified the key components for a successful program in support of undergraduate student persistence, and I've invited Andrea to present an overview of this work to the Board in our opening meeting.

#### First-Year Experience

On Gathering Day in mid-August I invited all members of our faculty and staff to give renewed attention this year to what is commonly labeled as the "first-year experience." Additionally, I appointed a task force to give considered review of the experience of first-year undergraduate students at North Park and to recommend ways to enhance these efforts.

Led by Elizabeth Snezek and Karl Clifton-Soderstrom the task force recently presented its major findings and recommendations. The task force identified five goals for students in their first year. These goals guide both faculty and staff in their interaction with first-year students, but also inform students in how they can embrace the responsibility to

create a meaningful and productive first-year experience for themselves. The goals are informed by substantial national research in undergraduate persistence and are summarized as follows:

- 1. To gain confidence and competence as a college-level student.
- 2. To make positive connections with peers, faculty, and staff.
- 3. To engage in behaviors that promote your personal health and balance.
- 4. To understand yourself as a member of a culturally diverse urban university community.
- 5. To develop awareness of your own values and how they connect with a Christian liberal arts community.

The task force also recommended a new way of organizing the various cross-institutional programs which support an effective first-year experience. These will be clustered under a new rubric: "North Park Voyage—The First-Year Connection." Karl and Elizabeth will present the work of the task force to the Board in our opening session.

# **Campaign North Park**

This has been a critical year for advancing the objectives of Campaign North Park. As the Board gathers, Mary Surridge will summarize our work in the Campaign over the past year. This activity has included visits with individual donors and group events this spring hosted in a number of locations across the country and supported by individual trustees in each region. The Campaign Executive Committee will meet as the Board gathers and in the Board's opening session Mary will summarize current progress to our campaign goal.

Of critical importance to our transition from the "quiet" to "public" phase of the campaign is a Festive Reception and Program on campus scheduled for the evening of June 4. The success of this event is dependent in no small measure on the active involvement of the Board of Trustees. Please place this as a high priority item on your calendar. Details of the Board's responsibility and involvement in this event will be presented at the Board meeting.

Additionally, during the spring semester our University architects have organized a number of charrette sessions. Meeting with select members of our faculty, staff, and students who have a critical interest in the program areas to be supported in the new building, the architects explore the types of spaces required and the program and institutional culture which should be reflected in the design of these spaces. These sessions are critical to informing the drafting of schematic design for this building which will be initiated during the summer.

### **Seminary Leadership Search**

The Board-appointed Seminary Leadership Search Committee has worked diligently over the past 16 months but is not yet prepared to present a nominee for the Board's

consideration. At the May meeting the Board will receive a progress report from the committee, and will also have opportunity to advise on continuing approaches to this important task.

# FY '11 and FY '12 Budgets

Our budget for FY '11 is in good order, and summary statements will be reviewed with the Finance Committee. A budget for FY '12 will be presented for Board review and approval near the end of June, as enrollment numbers become certain.

## **Faculty Publications**

During the past few months new books have been authored and published by two faculty members.

Roger E. Hedlund, Sebastian Kim, and Rajkumar Boaz Johnson, eds. *Indian and Christian: The Life and Legacy of Pandita Ramabai* (London: MIIS/CMS/ISPCK, 2011)

Paul H. De Neui, ed. *Suffering: Christian Reflections on Buddhist Dukkha* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2011)

# **Trustee Recognition**

As we gather for this meeting we will recognize those trustees who are completing the fifth year of their term of service. These include:

- Scott Bolinder
- David Greenidge
- Mark Lindberg
- Ted VanDerMeid

#### **New Faculty and Staff**

Throughout this academic year several program areas have undertaken searches for new personnel. During the spring of the year several appointments have been confirmed, including a number faculty positions, a men's basketball coach, and deans for the School of Music, the School of Adult Learning, and the School of Nursing. Details on these appointments will be presented in the respective committee meetings.

#### **Baccalaureate Service and Commencement Convocations 2011**

As the school year is completed we will gather for our annual celebration of student achievement. On Friday evening, May 13, the University's annual Baccalaureate Service will be held at Fourth Presbyterian Church on North Michigan Avenue. The service begins at 8:00 p.m. On Saturday, May 14, we will host three commencement convocations, all on campus: 10:00 a.m. for undergraduate degrees, 3:00 p.m. for

graduate degrees and students in the School of Adult Learning, and at 7:00 p.m. for Seminary graduates. Trustees are welcome to attend each event.

#### Reaccreditation

I've saved what is perhaps the best news of the year for the end of my report. This week we received formal notice from the Higher Learning Commission that North Park University has been granted continued accreditation for a ten-year period. This is wonderful news and reflects the careful and diligent work of Provost Joe Jones and many who worked with him to support the review process. The affirmation of accreditation also reflects positively on the work of our learning community over the past ten years.

To assure that the University continues to meet accreditation standards over the coming years three follow-up measures will be required. These include:

- A monitoring report on remedial courses, to be submitted by September 1, 2011
- A progress report on student retention, to be submitted by November 1, 2012
- A focused visit on assessment of student learning, to be completed in the spring of 2014

Provost Jones will discuss these follow-up items more fully with the Mission and Academic Committees.

Thank you for your dedication to our collective responsibility for providing leadership at North Park University. Your loyal support for this community of learners is a precious gift. Blessings to each of you as you travel to this meeting of the Board of Trustees.