
**State of the University
Gathering Day – August 20, 2013**



David L. Parkyn, President

As a kid I loved popcorn. We made it over the open flames in our fire place using a pan with a long handle. The first kernel would pop, then soon a second one, and quickly it sounded like a rapid-firing gun. Add a little salt and with my three siblings we would gobble it up.

My children also loved popcorn, though their memory is different from mine. In their day we had a new kind of corn and a new kind of popper. Remove the plastic wrapper, set the timer, and press the “start” button on the microwave oven. It produced the same popping noise, offered the same great aroma and taste, but was delivered faster and with less mess.

My grandchildren also love popcorn though they don’t cook it in a microwave oven and certainly not in a fire place. Their experience of popcorn offers instant gratification with a lot of choice. Hungry for popcorn? Go to the pantry, tear open the bag of already popped corn, take in the instant aroma, and eat it by the handful. Want it plain? Open that bag. Want it with butter and salt? Open that bag. Want it kettle popped? Open that bag. Want it skinny popped? Open that bag.

These three are the same—they all are popcorn. Yet they are different—popping corn, quick-pop corn, and popped corn. I love the romance of popping corn over the open fire; my children know the convenience of popping in the microwave; and my grandchildren couldn’t live without the convenient choice of specialty flavors. It’s all the same—popcorn in every case—yet different.

The student experience at North Park, through each succeeding generation, is like this.

We want to be sure North Park never changes, that she remains faithful to what she has always been, that she be as good and true for students in years to come as she has been for students in years past. We say, at all cost North Park must remain the same.

We also want North Park to be always improving, growing stronger, serving better. We want North Park to be a place where students excel. We want new courses in new disciplines, better programs for student engagement, and new buildings for student learning and community. We say, North Park must move forward.

Always the same, yet different with each generation.

I want us to reflect this morning on this idea of North Park being both constant and always changing, and to prompt our reflection I'll tell a couple stories from North Park's history.

The first story took place on September 26, 1893. Three days earlier five men—C.A. Bjork, Nils Frykman, Otto Hogfeldt, David Nyvall, and E. August Skogsbergh—had traveled to Chicago with a single purpose: to visit the World Columbian Exposition and specifically to participate in the 1893 Parliament of World Religions where three of the men made formal presentations.

At the conclusion of the Parliament, the five men decided to visit Claus and Augusta Youngquist. So they took an El train as possible. From there they walked the next couple of miles to a farm on the north side of the city. On a few acres of this farm, donated by Claus and Augusta, a new building was being constructed. Excited to see the progress on the building the five men climbed the scaffolding to the second floor platform to take in the view from that vantage point.

A small group gathered to greet them and lay the cornerstone for this new building. The people clustered near the front of the building, sang a hymn, three of the men preached, and then they placed the cornerstone which read: "1893—The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." A few months later the construction of Old Main was completed.

There's a miracle hidden in this story. Two people gave a small portion of their farmland; many volunteered to dig the foundation, erect the walls, and place the roof; five others came along to lay the cornerstone; and a school was born. Among the early students were Ellen, Rose, Esther, Clarence, and Violet, the four daughters and one son of Claus and Augusta Youngquist.

Leap forward 121 years to September 13, 2014. A group will gather to dedicate another building just a block away. The Johnson Center and Old Main have a lot in common, but there also are differences between them. Both buildings are for students, both are expected to frame education at this school for decades to come, both are built by the generosity of many, both include socializing and dining spaces, classrooms and laboratories, both have views of the city skyline from the top floor. Yet they are different, considerably different. They are as different as a pencil is from a computer, a slate board from an electronic screen, and a beaker from a 3-D printer. The same, yet different.

Now, a second story. This is an account the five men and the Youngquist's from our first story could never have imagined in 1893—though it mirrors their interests in the Parliament of World Religions and in educating young adults.

On two occasions in history a graduate from North Park has been featured on the cover of Time, the weekly news magazine.

On December 4, 1964 the Time cover story was titled: “The Congo Massacre.” The cover featured a portrait of Dr. Paul Carlson who received his associate’s degree from North Park in 1949, attended Stanford University and received a medical degree from the George Washington University.

On April 15 of this year the Time cover story was titled: “The Latino Reformation.” The cover featured the praying hands of Wilfredo (Choco) de Jesus who received a master’s degree in Christian ministry from North Park in 2006.

Paul’s father had immigrated to America from Sweden at the age of ten. Choco’s parents also migrated to America’s mainland, settling in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood.

Paul’s parents spoke Swedish at home. Choco’s parents spoke Spanish at home. When forming their own families both Paul and Choco spoke English with their children.

After completing his education Paul traveled to Africa as a missionary with the Covenant Church, establishing a network of hospitals and clinics in Congo. Choco stayed in Chicago after completing his education, establishing a multi-campus church—now at 17,000 members the largest congregation in America with the Assemblies of God denomination.

There’s a constant ideal reflected in these two stories. Throughout her history, North Park has educated students with a single-minded dedication to preparing students for lives of significance and service. The Youngquist siblings were among the first, Paul followed their footsteps some decades later, and in the new millennium Choco studied on this same acreage of farmland. The same story can be told through the lives of 26,000 other graduates. The same story with each succeeding generation of students.

Yet, there’s also a pattern of change in these stories as the school is nurtured from infancy to young adulthood. For the Youngquist’s North Park offered only introductory-level study in either commerce or ministry training. Paul completed an associate’s degree which sent him off to finish his undergraduate and graduate work elsewhere. Choco completed a graduate degree at North Park. The Youngquist children studied in Swedish, Paul studied in English then learned French and Lingala for his life’s work, and Choco studied in English then preached in Spanish. After Ellen, Rose, Esther, Clarence, and Violet completed their studies other buildings were erected adjacent to Old Main—first a small building today known as Wilson Hall and then a gymnasium which today we call Hamming Hall. After Paul studied at North Park residence halls were completed; a larger gymnasium, a library, a student center were built; and a new academic building was constructed that today carries his name, Carlson Tower. And after Choco graduated from North Park—well, we’re living that history today with construction of the Johnson Center.

Here’s the point: North Park today remains sufficiently unchanged to recognize her and love her for who she has always been, and North Park today is different enough from

who she had been in years past for us to know she has moved forward. The same, yet different.

What does this teach us about the state of the University today? It places on our shoulders the responsibility to make sure certain things hold true and remain constant at North Park while other aspects change and advance; that our mission endure while our approach to this mission be current and ever improving.

This isn't a new responsibility. Phil Anderson recognized it twenty years ago in a short history of North Park he wrote for the University's centennial commencement. This was the year Anderson Chapel was under construction and the same year the college introduced the MBA. Phil ended his short article with this single-sentence inquiry: "One wonders as we witness a new chapel rising and the first class receive its MBA degrees what the future has in store for North Park." Phil praised what was new but didn't get caught up in it. He dared to imagine more. As an historian Phil recognized that each time North Park takes a confident and courageous step forward, this is exactly the time we should dream boldly about what will follow.

But this is scary business. It isn't hard to celebrate change that took place in the past, but it is challenging to embrace change before it happens. Here's what we should not miss: we have North Park as she is today, the school we love, only because many people who came before us dared to risk change. Every decision to bring something new to North Park has required an embrace of risk. The decision to advance from an associates degree to a four-year curriculum, to change the seminary from a B.D. to an M.Div. program, to introduce Division III athletics, to close the Academy, to add graduate programs beyond the seminary, to keep our campus in its historic location in 1979, to restructure tuition ten years ago—all of these and many others are part of North Park's identity and program we simply assume today. Yet in their day each decision was critical to the school's future, required risk, and caused a measure of angst.

Now here's another brief story from our past, one I doubt you've ever heard. In 1902 some visionary people determined that North Park should become a junior college. So just 11 years after the first classes were offered, our school introduced undergraduate-level studies. Six years later, in 1908, the junior college was closed. These visionary people had risked, and they had failed. It took them another 11 years to muster the vision again, to embrace the risk again, and to start a junior college again. This time it worked, and out of this first failed attempt, and then out of the profound courage of some who chose to risk a second failure, our school moved forward first as a junior college, then as an undergraduate school, an accredited seminary, graduate programs, and eventually the university she is today. She is the same school Claus and Augusta envisioned when they gave the land for the first building, yet she is different with each succeeding generation.

So it is with North Park—the same, yet always changing.

- Always located on the same corner at the intersection of Foster and Kedzie Avenues, but now changing her signage from a blue Lego to a brick and limestone bulwark.
- Always committed to teaching and learning, but now leaving behind blackboards and chalk, transforming passive teaching into active learning, preferring outcomes to seat-time, and wondering whether badges will replace degrees.
- Always present in the city, yet now with a renewed commitment to learn in, through, and for the people of Chicago.
- Always a place of Christian faith, but now embracing students who are Covenanters and Pentecostals, Catholics and Orthodox, Jews and Muslims.
- Always committed to doing service and learning through service, but now changing the time, place, and context of service as social realities evolve.
- Always recruiting students, telling our story, and inviting generosity, but now with fewer print pieces and more digital messages, no more paper files only electronic applications, fewer checks and more online giving.
- Always educating people new to America, yet now welcoming them from different parts of the world, hearing less of some languages and more of others.

This is North Park: enough the same to recognize and love her for who she has always been, and enough different to know she is moving forward. The same historic institutional commitment and mission, yet different because we feature the needs and interests of today's students.

We know our environment is changing rapidly. This means how students learn, when students learn, what students want to study, how we measure and bundle what students learn, and how we teach are changing and will change a great deal more in the very near future. It's our responsibility to determine how North Park will change; it's our responsibility to embrace the risks that change commands. To paraphrase Phil Anderson: as we witness the Johnson Center rising it's our responsibility to wonder what the future has in store for North Park. Every business and organization, every college and university, from time-to-time must say: "Today we introduced microwave popcorn, I wonder what will be next."

Of course, we're already working on this. Two years ago we drafted some ideas around this theme. We called them NPU@125+--North Park at 125 years and beyond. This served to get our thinking started. Last year we organized over 25 groups, from every academic and work unit across the campus, to consider the ideas as drafted to that point and to imagine the future of North Park. Through this process NPU@125+ was substantially revised and then presented to and discussed with the Board of Trustees.

Simultaneous to this activity, during last spring semester, through this summer, and now continuing into this new school year, a group of our colleagues has been diligently at work on strategic enrollment planning—a project dedicated to identifying how best to connect the strengths and expertise of North Park with the interests of students at every level, how best to recruit students to these continuing and new programs, and how best to walk alongside students encouraging their success through graduation.

Why are we doing this? Because it is the only way to faithfully shoulder our responsibility to guide, frame, and co-create North Park's future.

While we each carry a particular role at North Park we all need to be part of shaping North Park's future. Next week we'll introduce a schedule of gatherings during the early weeks of the semester with opportunity for all of us to learn more about and to contribute to both the re-drafted NPU@125+ and the continuing work of SEP. I look forward to these discussions with you.

But I look forward to something else as well: the opening of a new dining room in the Magnuson Center. Today at lunch you're going to discover a whole new space at North Park. It's the same six walls, but everything else, and I mean EVERYTHING else is different.

And, this year, we all are going to spend time in our new dining room. Here's how.

First, each Monday of this school year, at 10:00 in the morning, we'll all gather for coffee by the fireplace. (The fireplace? I told you everything was new about the dining room!) Celebrating coffee together is an old tradition at North Park; this year we're going to claim it anew.

Second, throughout the year we're inviting faculty and staff to eat lunch in the dining room—with students or with colleagues from across the campus. To make this feasible we're introducing a special lunch price each day for all faculty and staff—a full lunch for \$5. You'll need to use your campus ID card as a payment method, with funds you place there as a declining balance. But don't worry about how quickly you fund your card. The card for each full-time employee has been pre-loaded with \$25—the first five lunches this semester are complementary.

Now, remember: it's our collective responsibility to make sure North Park remains the same, faithful to who she has always been, even as we make sure North Park is always changing, ever improving, growing stronger, serving better. As we witness the Johnson Center rising it's our responsibility to wonder what the future has in store for North Park. I look forward to creating North Park's future with you.

Thank you, and may God grant a wonderful year at North Park.