
**State of the University Address
Gathering Day
August 21, 2012**



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Many of the New Testament epistles begin with a common refrain: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These letters of scripture begin with us—“Grace to you . . .”—and then wrap us in the powerful embrace of our loving God—“. . . and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These are good words for the beginning of a school year, words we can speak when we gather after having been apart during the summer and words which can shape how we reach out to students who join us for the first time and others who return for another year.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Year Past

There are numerous signs that God’s grace and peace were with us this past year. The school year came to a close in a grand way with a wonderful Baccalaureate Service in which our graduates and their families filled Holy Name Cathedral. What a great moment that was in North Park’s history.

There is much more to note:

- Nine new faculty members joined us in the fall as well as a number of other people throughout the school year in offices across the campus.
- We enrolled a record number of new students, and with this record group we introduced a first-year experience for undergraduates called Voyage.
- With all undergraduates we gave increased attention to walking alongside students, to caring for them in ways that support their well-being. Here’s a kind note we received earlier this month from the parents of one of our students: “Please accept the enclosed gift in appreciation for the contributions of [three named people—someone in admissions, another in student administrative services, and another on the faculty]. Each of these individuals made a significant difference in our son’s year at North Park. Individually and collectively they helped him grow and achieve in several important areas, and our family is extremely appreciative of their help as educators and as stewards of the North Park mission.”

- Beginning with the fall faculty retreat we initiated efforts to grow service and service-learning at North Park.
- Our annual Festival of Lessons and Carols continued to grow, both in the quality of musical performance and in the size of attendance.
- Our baseball team won both the CCIW regular season and the conference tournament, and both men's soccer and baseball advanced to the NCAA national tournament.
- Sohlberg Hall was renovated, new elevators were installed in Carlson Tower, and this summer Anderson Hall was refurbished.
- During the summer we partnered with the Evangelical Covenant Church in this year's CHIC event which brought together over 5000 high school students from across the country.
- In the spring semester several campus groups collaborated to organize and host the Justice Summit.
- We continued to celebrate with graduating seniors receiving Fulbright awards, now numbering eight graduates in five years, with faculty joining the tradition this past year as well.

And this is just a beginning list of examples; many other people and events helped to make this past year a very good year at North Park.

Signs This Will Be a Good Year

And what about this year—are there signs to suggest this will be a good year at North Park, a year filled with God's grace and peace? Yes, there are.

- We remain grateful for the quality of people who join us at North Park; we're excited to welcome the new members of our faculty and staff who will be introduced shortly, including our new dean of the seminary.
- This year the faculty will complete revisions to our general education program and this renewed curriculum will be in place for first-year students a year from now.
- In the spring the Foster Avenue streetscape from Kimball to the Holmgren field will be replaced and renewed.

- The streetscape project provides us with the opportunity to enhance our campus along Foster Avenue as well, and by this time next year we'll have a vastly improved front gate to the campus at the corner of Foster and Kedzie.
- But here is perhaps the best news—a great indicator of a very good year for North Park: on October 26 we will formally break ground for The Johnson Center. This is a transformational project for student learning both in and out of the classroom. Architecture shapes learning and opens up new ways of seeing and listening, experimenting and discovering. It's easy to learn in places designed for and dedicated to learning, and The Johnson Center will be such a place at North Park.

One Sign That This Will Be a Challenging Year

One question I can count on being asked repeatedly at the beginning of each school year is this: “How does enrollment look?” Here is the answer for this year, in three parts.

- Undergraduate retention is up. In fact, 90% of those students eligible to return have chosen to join us for another year. This represents an improvement over recent years, and we did it with our largest class ever. It happened because you walked alongside our students.
- Recruitment in adult, graduate, and seminary programs has brought mixed enrollment results. Enrollment in the School of Adult Learning is up over last year and over the target set for this year. Seminary enrollment is constant with this past year. However, as it was a year ago, graduate enrollment in nursing, education, and business is below the target we set.
- Undergraduate enrollment is off the target we set. Here are the numbers:
 - For six consecutive years we had enrolled 600 new students each fall.
 - Last year this number reached 675, a record.
 - When we built our budget for this year we estimated an enrollment of 640 new students.
 - However, though we had a record number of applications this year, our enrollment of new first-year and transfer students this year will stand at 565.
 - In summary, we will have 110 fewer new undergraduates this year than we had a year ago with our record enrollment, and 75 fewer new students than we had budgeted for.

What do these enrollment scenarios mean? Well, certainly a number of things but I want to briefly focus on just two themes this morning. One is an immediate concern; the other is a longer-term challenge. Both must be addressed; if we approach one but not the other, we will be at risk.

First, we have an immediate concern: a budget shortfall exceeding \$1 million in a rapidly changing environment of college recruiting. We must respond to both of these.

By year's end we must achieve a balance between revenue and expenses; we'll do this by working hard to enroll more students mid-year, and we'll do it by cutting our expenses. This is a task to which we will give careful thought and measured action; we will care for this year's budget and we will do so in ways that support the long-term well-being of our school. I am confident that the steps we take in response to this year's decline in new student enrollment will move North Park forward.

Additionally, we've already begun to give careful, creative, and aggressive attention to recruiting students for next year's class. This past year we worked hard at a recruitment strategy similar to the previous year which yielded our record undergraduate enrollment. But we fell short of our target so we must assess our experience and with the advice of counsel identify a renewed approach to recruitment of both undergraduate and graduate students.

Because you care so deeply for North Park and for our students I'm sure you want to know more about what caused the decline in undergraduate recruitment this year and what has challenged enrollment in our graduate programs for the past two years. You also want to know what you can do to help. In response, during the third week of the semester we will host two community gatherings, one for staff and one for faculty. I'm asking everyone to attend. These will be information-packed sessions. We'll provide more data than I've given today, we'll analyze these data and talk about changes in student interests and college decision-making processes, we'll outline steps we're putting in place for recruiting during the coming year, and we'll ask for your insights. Additionally, we'll point specifically to ways each of us can be involved both in recruiting students and in assuring strong persistence of enrolled students. And we'll discuss the implications for this year's budget. The details of time and place for these sessions will be announced by the end of this week; we need everyone to attend.

But this year's recruitment experience should point us in another direction as well—a longer-term challenge. The undergraduate and graduate markets are changing rapidly and North Park must change with them. This concept, however, doesn't mean much for us unless we link it to student stories. And these are many—stories about family finances, about American demographics, about getting jobs, about the cost of education and the value of a degree, and about philanthropy by alumni. And two others I want to illustrate just briefly—student stories about technology and faith.

This past weekend Linda and I were in Boston to stay with our grandchildren while our daughter and son-in-law enjoyed a few days in New York City. We took the kids to a used bookstore (this wasn't my idea) and came home with another Berenstain Bears book to read to our granddaughter. In this book, it's cold season and because all the kids in school are coughing and sneezing the principal calls on the bear-town family physician to put on an assembly program about germs, coughing into our sleeve, and

washing our hands. In the story the bear-doctor presents a riveting lecture using a slide projector.

At 2 years and 4 months my granddaughter Anna is fascinated with reading. I like to think this is because she loves to sit on my lap and hear my great reading voice. The truth, however, is that she loves reading because she and her five-year-old brother share use of an iPad. Let me assure you, Anna knows more than how to turn it on and off, how to adjust the volume, and how to move the images on the screen with the swipe of her finger. She knows how to learn on an iPad. Because of access to this mobile device at her very young age Anna can identify every letter of the alphabet, both upper- and lower-case.

Last week on the day before I traveled to Boston I met here in Chicago a man who hopes his daughter, a high school senior, will consider studying at North Park. We talked about this briefly and as we parted I asked him to give me his daughter's contact information so I could pass it along to our enrollment office. He took a small piece of paper and on it he wrote his daughter's name and her cell phone number. I expected a postal address, perhaps an email address, but not her cell phone number.

This happened in the same week that the cover story for Time magazine proclaimed: "10 ways your phone is changing the world." It's an intriguing cover story about the nearly universal presence of mobile devices. Within two or three years the number of mobile devices will exceed the world's projected population. 75% of 18-29 year olds have used a text message to flirt with someone. iTunes U offers over 200,000 courses from 200 different institutions all accessed through mobile devices. Medical schools at Yale and Stanford now have paperless, iPad-based curriculums. And here I am a university president expecting a postal address from the father of a prospective student. This is one out-of-touch president.

Now a second set of stories. During holy week this past April Newsweek magazine carried a cover story which drew me in immediately by its provocative title: "Forget the Church: Follow Jesus." Written by Andrew Sullivan the article sought to describe developing changes in the approach of young adults to familiar themes of faith. Frankly, I was skeptical. And then I read a more complete study, a book by David Kinnaman, based on extensive research by the Barna Group. In this book, titled *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith*, it becomes abundantly clear that young adults today who have grown up in evangelical churches evidence a deep love for Jesus and a growing ambivalence about the church.

This concerns me, both because I love Jesus and the Church, and because I lead a church-related university. How do we educate students into faith when they are luke-warm to the primary institution for our faith? And, if they are ambivalent about the church, why would they choose to study in a church-related school, and why would they consider studying in seminary and entering church ministry? Our responsibility at North Park is clear: to make sure that after their formative years with us, today's young adults love Jesus more deeply than they ever have and to assure that the future of the church,

now in their hands, is in good hands. This is no small responsibility, but we're among the very few who can address it because of the critical, timely and formative role we have in the lives of young adult Christians.

Now here's my confession. I turned 60 this summer and I don't like the stories I've just told. I like books, not eBooks. I think slide projectors have the advantage of almost always working when you flip the "on" switch. I like to open my mail and hold the letter in my hand. I've never taken one of iTunes online courses and I don't aspire to teach online. I love Jesus. I love the Church. I love hymns.

If you believe this self-description you should be thinking right now how troubling it is that North Park is led by "an old codger." I hope you know me better than to think my confession is true. Actually, I think you identify with me quite perfectly—we understand change is necessary even if it unsettles us. We're educators and we know how challenging learning is. In this case, we're the ones who need to learn (and change) so we can keep pace with our students.

Our context is one of a rapidly changing marketplace and learning environment. In this setting we must learn new ways of being a university and we must change accordingly. How we recruit students must be changed; how we tell our story must be changed; what we offer our students must be changed; and how we approach teaching and learning must be changed. There's no getting around it, unless you want to join my codgerism support group which meets weekly at the local Borders Bookstore.

If we are going to educate the student whose cell phone number I now have, if we are going to educate young adult Christians who deeply love Jesus but aren't so sure about the church, if we are going to educate my granddaughter in 16 years, we must discover how we need to change and we must embrace this necessary change deeply and quickly. Our responsibility is to imagine new ways of being North Park, and to engineer these into a renewed North Park. We must imagine North Park into the future.

This discussion about our longer-term challenge is a conversation we'll engage together throughout this school year. You'll be hearing more from me on this topic during the weeks to come, and we'll identify ways for your voice and perspective to be present in this discussion as well.

And here's the key: In every challenge before us, whether it's rebalancing this year's operating budget, or recruiting next year's class of new undergraduate and graduate students, or designing new majors which align with student interests in the workplace, or approaching teaching and learning in ways which best suit today's students even though they may not be my preferred method...well, in every challenge before us we must not forget the talent in this room, the intelligence our community will bring to these challenges, and the creativity we will draw on to address these opportunities together.

Jim Collins writes the occasional book on organizational greatness, and here's a lesson worth noting: "It's not about your strategy as you climb the mountain; it's who you have

climbing with you.” We have an immediate challenge we must attend, and we have some important longer-term needs to address. But I have a deep and abiding confidence we will reach the top of our mountains because we will climb together.

Grace and Peace

A closing thought: I’m hopeful that when we come together on Gathering Day in May we will discover that the opening words of the epistles have been transformed from words of promise and assurance into words of fulfillment and faithfulness attesting to God’s constant journey with us in the life and service of North Park.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.