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**State of the University Address
August 19, 2008**



David L. Parkyn, President

Gathering Day brings us together after the summer months during which we've traveled near and far, enjoyed longer periods of light each day, and found times to delight in Chicago's summertime traditions. Of course, during these days we've also worked. Staff members have been busy hosting summer conference groups, completing tasks we just don't find time for during the school year, and recruiting and registering students who will join us later this week. Faculty members have taught summer courses, written essays, gathered data for research projects, and revised syllabi. In the midst of this work, however, for all of us there has been the refreshing change of pace which summer allows.

Linda and I spent much of the summer in Chicago and on campus. But we also vacationed with our children and their families on the outer banks of North Carolina, hosted a dozen Fulbright exchange teachers from Mexico, read more than a few books, saw three stage plays, attended a number of concerts at Millennium Park, and joined a million Chicagoans for fireworks over the lake on July 3.

For each of us it has been a good summer...yet we're also pleased to be back with the North Park family. And so I greet you with these words: "welcome home."

A special guest at Gathering Day this year is Rev. Gary Walter, the new president of the Covenant Church. Gary is here at my invitation; please join me in greeting him today.

Welcome also to those of you who are new to our community. Individuals who have begun to work with us over the past year will be introduced in a short while. This community may not yet feel like "home" to you but we certainly hope that it soon will. We're delighted you've chosen to be part of North Park.

What Did We Accomplish This Past Year?

My comments this morning are primarily intended to help us reflect on where we might expect to journey together during the 2008-2009 academic year. What objectives are we seeking to achieve, what specific projects might we initiate?

A good way to start this discussion is to refresh our memory of what we achieved during the past year. It was, overall, a good year for North Park. During 2007-2008:

- We achieved an all-time record in student enrollment.

- The Seminary and the School of Music each successfully completed accreditation reviews.
- A number of books were published by members of our community, in topics as diverse as biblical and theological studies, conflict resolution, and academic dishonesty.
- Music CDs were produced featuring the compositions of one faculty member and the band of another.
- For the first time in the history of the University a graduating student achieved a Fulbright award.
- We provided \$1.2 million in compensation increases for faculty and staff.
- We secured funding from the Kern Foundation for several full-tuition scholarships for students in the Seminary.
- Attendance at the Axelson Center's ninth annual symposium increased by 26 percent.
- We welcomed our new provost.
- We hired more than 35 new members of the University's faculty and staff.
- We received an Award for Excellence in Landscape Architecture from the American Institute for Architects and the Society for College and University Planning.
- Burgh Hall was renovated.
- The faculty by-laws were re-written and a new governance structure was agreed on.
- We held the first annual fall academic convocation to recognize new administrators and recently tenured and promoted faculty.
- We held the second annual senior honors symposium.
- We graduated 611 students.

This is a selective list. You'll forgive me if I failed to mention some part of the year which was especially important to you. Recalling the achievements of the past year is important, especially as we anticipate the beginning of a new academic year. Each accomplishment is not the achievement of one individual; rather each accomplishment represents the best of our collective efforts.

Following the Compass

Another important accomplishment of this past year was preparation of a new strategic plan for the University. This plan will serve as our institutional compass. The plan identifies a direction, a trajectory. It doesn't tell all that we'll encounter on our journey, but it points us toward the end we want to reach. It is a compass but not a GPS system.

So then, what direction does this compass set, what end does it identify for our journey together?

We have a mission -- we are here specifically to "prepare students for lives of significance and service." We claim an identity -- we are "distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural." We affirm a vision -- "to fashion a university of uncommon character and enduring excellence where faith, learning, and

service meet.” We expect that this mission, this identity, and this vision will point us to the particular space we ought to occupy in the broader framework of American higher education.

The space we occupy will be fostered by certain ideals which guide the education we provide at North Park. In reflecting the core values which shape our distinctive learning community, students at North Park University experience an education that:

- Is rooted in and committed to the Christian faith and its sacred text, the Bible
- Engages Chicago as a dynamic context for learning and service
- Embraces all people and celebrates the richness of cultural difference
- Affirms learning in all its forms—in the classroom and beyond—as a gift, a joy, and a sacred obligation
- Encourages dialogue as a means of learning where open inquiry, integrity, and civility guide our life together
- Seeks to form and transform the whole student (intellectually, socially, and spiritually)
- Values each student for who he or she is and who they will become.

This mission, this identity, this vision, and these educational ideals guide our work together; they shape the culture of this place; they instill a common purpose; they teach us how to live and learn together in this community. My hope is that as members of the faculty and staff we will not only be familiar with these elements of institutional identity and culture but that we will engage an ongoing, dynamic, and always civil conversation about how they ought to shape our life and work together. As one voice in this campus conversation, this year I plan to write briefly on these themes in my occasional campus communiqués, commenting in each communiqué on one of our seven educational ideals. I hope that my voice on these topics will be one of many voices which come together in formal meetings and sidewalk conversations as we reflect on what it means to be North Park University.

Easier Said Than Done

Questions of institutional identity are important to each of us. During my first two years at North Park I’ve been asked hundreds of times why I chose to come to this school. I’ve also asked this question of many of you. Each time I interview a candidate for a position at North Park I want to know what is drawing them to this place. And those candidates who join us most often have the same answer I do—I’m drawn to North Park because of its basic commitments. This is a place which educates students from a commitment of Christian faith within the context of freedom “on issues that might otherwise divide;” from an engagement with people who come from all walks of life in the third largest city in America; from a love for God expressed through a love for others; from an embrace of diversity, difference, and inclusion rounded-out by a commitment to dialogue and civil discourse; from a commitment to justice shaped by a dedication to mercy and compassion; from a high regard for the liberal arts complemented by attention to applied disciplines; from the word of instruction

transformed into a life of action. We are drawn to this place by the identity—the commitments and ideals—it holds, by who North Park University claims to be.

Yet in having been part of North Park for two years I've also discovered that though it is relatively easy to describe and discuss the essence of our University's identity it is no small task to actually live out this identity. It is easy to say who we are. It is harder to live out who we claim to be. Staying true to the direction of the compass requires deliberate and sustained commitment.

Why is staying true to our compass a challenge? Specifically because what we are seeking to accomplish in the community we gather at North Park is counter-cultural, it reaches in a direction which challenges the natural inclination of most Americans, it challenges the natural inclination of a fallen world.

Sociologist and journalist Bill Bishop, in a recent book titled *The Big Sort*, asserts that across America the over-riding tendency is for communities to be comprised of like-minded people. What he argues, however, is that over the past 30 years this phenomenon has been radically accentuated across America. Bishop's point is that increasingly we Americans are closing in our ideological wagons. He writes:

We have built a country where everyone can choose the neighbors (and church and news shows) most compatible with his or her lifestyle and beliefs. And we are living with the consequences of this segregation by way of life: pockets of like-minded citizens that have become so ideologically inbred that we don't know, can't understand, and can barely conceive of "those people" who live just a few miles away.

American communities are comprised of like-minded people. By contrast, at North Park we expect just the opposite—we have deliberately shaped our learning community to be comprised of different-minded people. We want to gather different-minded people into a single, cohesive learning community where we all will live and sleep, learn and play, eat and work together, 24-7.

Why do we do this? Why is this commitment to a learning community shaped by different-minded people foundational to the identity of North Park? There are several reasons for this, some shaped by educational philosophy and others influenced by the legacy of those godly people who established this institution and others who have cared for it so faithfully over the course of 118 years. Yet the central reason, the most vital and profound reason, which drives our commitment to be a learning community shaped by different-minded people is the substance of our faith. As Christians we dedicate our lives "to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves." This is a foundational principle of Christian living and it is central to shaping the learning community at North Park.

Yet, there is a considerable challenge in doing this. It is easy to say we seek and serve Christ in all persons; it is harder to love our neighbors as ourselves. And so we

struggle. We wrestle with the implications of being true to this commitment as our campus population begins to reflect the neighborhood around us and the world God created.

Students of color now represent a third of our undergraduates and the proportion is higher in our adult and graduate programs. This diversity is true also for faculty and staff who work at North Park. To my great delight, the people gathered in this room speak a host of languages—French, Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Croatian, Italian, Czech, Assyrian, Arabic, Serbian, Lingala, Portuguese, Swedish, Hungarian, Catalan, Slovak, Danish, German, Bulgarian, Greek, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, and Twi—and this list comes only from our staff; if we added languages spoken by our faculty the list would be much longer. With such an impressive and ever-growing diversity among us you would think we could easily and naturally find our way to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.”

Yet we do not always live in harmony. We are discovering that living together and learning from each other as an inclusive community is hard work. We are discovering that because much of our life is spent with people who are most like us (in the schools we’ve come from, the neighborhoods we’ve lived in, and the churches we’ve worshiped in) we do not always know how to live and learn together as we should at North Park.

Much of the time we get along quite well. But during the past two years there have been occasional days when we have been a community of hurt. There have been times when symbols of hate have been drawn on campus buildings, when inter-racial dating has been criticized, when racial slurs have been voiced, when international students have been treated as aliens, when gay and lesbian students have been shunned—and on these days each of us has been tempted to hunker down ever more closely with those who are most like us. Hunkering down, however, isn’t a very effective response, and it doesn’t model for our students and our neighbors the kind of Christian learning community we hope to be.

Yet this is the very context in which we learn and in which we ask our students to learn. We learn, in words paraphrased from Barbara Brown Taylor, that “being diverse is not about serving God perfectly but about seeing God visibly; allowing other people to learn whatever they can from watching us rise and fall.” At North Park University rising and falling is a way of life—a way of life we should not shy away from; a way of life we should embrace as good, not perfect, but good.

We are not the first of God’s people to face the challenge of knowing who to welcome into a community and how to embrace them. This has been going on for centuries, and it will likely continue. In these circumstances, however, we can learn from those who have gone before us.

Five centuries ago Bartolomé de las Cases believed there should be room in the Church for the indigenous people of the “new world,” and so from here in the Americas

he wrote to and asked the pope: "Are these people the children of Adam and Eve? Were not these souls redeemed by the blood of Christ?"

Dorothy Day, the early 20th century Catholic social worker and activist, advanced the Christian mandate to love others. She wrote: "When you love people, you see all the good in them, all of Christ in them. God sees Christ, His Son, in us and loves us. And so we should see Christ in others, and nothing else, and love them."

The Church has yet to figure out how to live together with all God's people. And in like manner, we at North Park University have much left to figure out. We rise, and then we fall. We include, and then we exclude. We embrace, and then we silence. We change, but we are not always transformed.

Yet, we learn. We learn because learning is best done in the company of others, those who are different from us. We seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

What Will We Seek to Accomplish this Year?

So we face a considerable challenge because we have identified a high standard for ourselves. How can we move ahead during the coming year in attaining this standard, in reaching for the end to which our compass points? What priorities will we address during 2008-2009? What specific projects might we initiate?

These questions are best answered by referencing the nine strategic goals identified in the strategic plan. Because our time is limited, however, I will not mention today a number of things we hope to accomplish this year for each of these nine goals. Rather, we have prepared a written summary of these expectations and we have included this summary in a packet you will receive during our picnic lunch which follows.

In this summary, each of the nine goals is mentioned, along with several projects identified for each goal. The projects are quite varied, and fairly extensive. They range:

- from completing the faculty's review of the general education curriculum to considering an intensive urban semester program;
- from addressing concerns about student retention to enhancing our program in career development and internships;
- from identifying ways we can work more effectively with students of exceptional academic ability to introducing a senior assessment project;
- from implementing a coordinated university-wide integrated marketing communications plan to designing and implementing an economic model for our academic programs; and
- from considering how best to recruit transfer students to clarifying our existing policies on faculty tenure and promotion.

Presenting these proposed initiatives to you in writing, rather than discussing each in our presence today, saves time and gives me the opportunity to end my comments by drawing your attention to a bold ambition we plan to initiate this year.

A Bold Ambition

This past May, the Board of Trustees agreed that it is time for us to launch the University's next fund raising campaign. This campaign will include several projects including funds for a new campus building, funds to support academic programs, funds to grow our endowment especially to support student financial aid, and gifts to the annual fund which supports our yearly operating budget.

We will launch the campaign this academic year with specific attention directed to major donors—those 100 or 200 individuals who will lead the way in the campaign and from whom the largest gifts will be attained. During this time we will also seek 100% participation from the Board of Trustees and we hope that in this first year a large percentage of our faculty and staff will pledge to the campaign as well.

The principle project coming out of the campaign will be a new building to support both academic program needs and student services. Combining these two areas of campus life – the curricular and the co-curricular – in a single building offers a unique opportunity to model for our students what we mean by our institutional commitment to “educate the whole student”—in mind, certainly, but also in spirit and body.

The building will provide space for an array of needs. The student services part of the building will provide space for the Student Development Office, Residence Life, University Ministries, Student Support Services, the Cultural Centers, the Office of Diversity and Intercultural Programs, and the Center for Career Development and Internships. In support of our academic program the new building will feature state-of-the-art laboratories in the sciences, technology-enhanced general purpose classrooms, and faculty offices. In addition, the building will feature large gathering spaces for students, faculty, and staff, as well as a café which will be considerably larger and feature a more extensive menu than the Viking Café.

We are still in the early stages of planning this new building. However, we expect the design process to move forward this academic year so we are prepared to build as soon as the funds have been raised. Consistent with our master plan, this building will be located in the central campus and will complete the green space and new landscaping introduced just a few years ago.

Though the building will be designed to meet several important campus needs it will not, of course, satisfy facility needs for every program area. However, when the primary occupants in this new building relocate from their various current locations we will have opportunity to enhance the space allocated for other program units in Carlson Tower and elsewhere on campus. In this way the net effect of this new building will be much

greater than simply the new program space constructed through this project. In addition, parts of the building will serve the campus more broadly. A new food venue can be used by everyone; the new general purpose classrooms in this building will be available for general use throughout the day and in the evening and on weekends. Student services such as the career center, the cultural centers, and University Ministries address the needs of many of our students. Improvements which serve selective parts of the campus program have a positive effect on the entire University.

This will be a busy year in preparing for this building and the campaign. Early in the semester we will introduce the process we'll follow for collaborating with the project architects in designing the building. Simultaneously, the development office will move forward with implementing the fund-raising campaign. And throughout the year, we'll keep the campus community apprised with our collective work toward bringing this project to completion.

Exciting Days . . . To Seek and Serve Christ

These are exciting days to be part of North Park University. We have a compass to set our course. We have an institutional identity which we want to embrace, with all of its challenge and opportunity. We have a number of projects to be initiated this year. We have an ambitious goal of raising funds to enhance our program, support student scholarships, and add further to our developing campus facilities. More than all of this, we want to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Central to all we do is our mission – to transform student lives. It is to this end that we are called by God. It is to this end that we embark together on this journey.

May God bless each of us on this voyage of the Vikings! Thank you for being part of the North Park University learning community and for venturing together this year on the exciting the journey before us.