2011 State of the University Address August 23, 2011



David L. Parkyn, President

Imagine with me this morning that we are the crew. Each of us in this room, as a new academic year begins, is part of the crew on this Viking ship, a vessel set to launch on its next voyage.

As with any crew, we have individual roles to play, specific responsibilities to perform, certain places to occupy high on the masts, on the deck, or in the galleys. We teach—biology, history, nursing, business, art, music, and languages. We coach and mentor. We cook, clean, repair, and maintain. We record and promote. We recruit and solicit. Each of these is necessary for a successful voyage.

To our individual roles we bring our particular expertise. Individually we're experts in areas as diverse as plumbing and writing, as different as computing and healing. Yet we're all educators, called to this place to help others learn. We bring our individual gifts, our special interests, and our particular contributions to our common calling as educators at North Park University. And so we are ready to launch this year's voyage, ready to offer expert care, guidance, support, and challenge to our now over 3300 students enrolled at North Park.

This is my sixth year at North Park and yet I remember well my first Gathering Day. We met in the campus dining room for breakfast and a brief program. Our dining service colleagues had prepared a good meal and to make it special they had crafted a great ice sculpture of a Viking ship and placed it at the center of the buffet table. Flooded with blue and gold lights it was impressive. But just as I started to speak following our breakfast together the heat from those lights melted the ice so that the great mast broke off causing considerable damage to the whole sculpture.

Momentarily I thought this was a forecast of our life together on this ship. But, good fortune has reigned. The Viking ship is still afloat, the sails are raised, and we are catching a good wind. All this because the sailing crew, this team which comprises the heart and soul of North Park University, knows what needs to be done, shows up each day in their respective place, and marshals the energy and commitment required to fulfill our individual roles and responsibility—all for the sake of our students.

I come into my sixth year just as you come into your respective year at North Park—energized by our mission, committed to our students, optimistic about what will unfold each day of this year, grateful to God for all he brings to our life together.

The Past Year

No year at North Park turns out exactly as we thought it might, but we have much to celebrate from this past year.

- Our accreditation was reaffirmed by the Higher Learning Commission. This
 accomplishment required all hands on deck so the achievement belongs to each of
 us.
- Last year our mantra might have been: recruitment and retention are everyone's business. I'm pleased to report that through our collective efforts, and the special diligence of our staff in the enrollment office and our athletic coaches, we have achieved an historic level of new first-year and transfer undergraduates. This reflects a strong effort on many fronts and by many people. Special thanks to all who work in admissions, financial aid, and athletics for serving North Park in an especially effective manner this past year. Additionally, recruitment of new graduate students is strong and when combined with returning students in all areas we likely will reach the highest fall enrollment in North Park's history.

We also gave attention this past year to undergraduate student retention. We worked hard at this and in doing so discovered that it's easier to let our persistence rate slip than it is to make it increase. We've seen a modest increase in retention this year, yet the task is great and will continue into the years ahead.

- The academic year started and ended with the North Park Vikings named as CCIW
 conference champions. In the fall John Born recruited and coached the men's
 soccer team to a conference championship and participation in the NCAA national
 tournament. And in the spring Luke Johnson led the baseball team to a CCIW cochampionship as the season ended.
- On the afternoon and evening of June 4 we hosted a grand event on campus to formally launch Campaign North Park. This is the most ambitious fund raising effort in our school's history and we're well on our way to succeeding with each of the campaign goals. On June 4 we announced that the total raised to-date for the new science and community life building has surpassed \$30 million. This represents great progress but the task is not yet completed. We have more to raise—more than we've ever before accomplished at North Park. We need everyone's participation so I encourage each of us to start the year in a great way by making your commitment to Campaign North Park.
- Over the summer we undertook a number of campus improvement efforts. One of the larger projects involved a major interior refreshing of Sohlberg Residence, along with a new entrance approach and renewed landscaping. This is now a much improved residential space for some of our undergraduates. Additionally, we have (almost!) completed a new simulation lab for the School of Nursing located in renovated space in our building along Foster Avenue. Our nursing colleagues will

soon host an open house in this new facility and we'll all be invited to visit at that time.

- This was also an important year for increasing our presence in Chicago and around the world. We presented the David Nyvall Medallion to Richard M. Daley as a way to recognize his service as mayor of Chicago for the past 22 years. We also welcomed Chicago's new mayor, Rahm Emmanuel, as a guest at the May Symposium of the Axelson Center. And we signed collaboration agreements with five universities in China to expand opportunities for global study.
- Last year a task force led by Karl Clifton-Soderstrom and Elizabeth Snezek reviewed
 the first-year experience for our undergraduates. This group helped to better
 organize efforts already in place, identified appropriate goals for students in their first
 year, and inspired us to create Voyage, a year-long coordinated set of curricular and
 co-curricular programs and activities designed especially for students in their first
 year.

Many parts of the campus community will be involved this coming year in Voyage. While these programs are primarily for first-year students they will be most successful only as we participate. So I have a direct appeal to each of us. Choose two or three events or activities to attend in the fall and another group for the spring. And when you attend make it a point to meet three or four new students. I promise that if you do this you'll find it to be a highlight of this year for you at North Park.

The Year Ahead

What else beyond Voyage shall we expect for the year ahead? We'll undertake the usual activities—teaching, coaching, cleaning, cooking, advising, counseling, preaching, painting, and recruiting . . . all these things which are so important to walking alongside students during their days at North Park. These are our highest priorities; these must remain central in each day of the school year.

We'll also do some things which will be unique to this year. We'll develop the architectural plans for a new building; we'll attend a great series of lectures by invited guests including Francis Cardinal George, John Perkins, Sharon Haar, Wil Willimon, Robert Putnam, and Cornell West, among others; we'll participate in the President's Inter-faith Community Service Challenge; we'll launch Voyage with all our first-year students; we'll complete an important renewal of our undergraduate general education program; and we'll achieve our fund raising goals.

It's also time for us to develop a new strategic plan for North Park and I want to comment on this briefly this morning. Linda reminds me occasionally that not everyone gets as excited as I do about strategic planning. And sometimes strategic planning gets a bad rap, one it often deserves. So my task today is to briefly set a context for our work in strategic planning knowing that many of your will be part of this activity.

To introduce this topic here's a brief story from my teenage years. As a family we would occasionally go on a summer vacation which always involved a road trip. To prepare for this my father would gather us around the kitchen table where he would unfold a large road map of the United States. Together we would agree on the "big picture" for the summer's road trip. Would this year's trip be focused on cities or rural areas? Would we stay in hotels or camp in state parks? Would we travel primarily on interstate highways or would we travel on lesser roads? Would the trip include visits to as many baseball stadiums as possible or was this year to be dedicated to civil war battle sites? After considerable discussion we knew this level of trip planning was complete when dad took out a thick green marker and traced on the map the large-scale contour of this summer's road trip.

After this dad would take the big fold-out map and visit the local AAA office. Soon he would come home with tour books for each of the cities and states we planned to visit and most importantly a "trip-tik" map that identified, page by detailed page, the particulars of every road we would travel that summer.

I realize this is a very dated way to plan a family vacation—Bing and Google Maps have revolutionized today's trip-planning process. Nonetheless, my teenage experience illustrates what we'll be about this year.

The strategic planning we'll engage in will be much like opening a fold-out map on the kitchen table and determining the parameters which will guide our family vacation. We'll save for other school years the visit to the local AAA office where all the details of each leg of the journey are carefully identified and settled.

Here's why. This summer Linda handed me a short article by Jack and Suzy Welch and said, "You should read this." In the article these two well-regarded individuals comment on the importance of having a game plan. Here's what they say:

We're not huge fans of strategic planning as it is commonly . . . practiced in . . . many companies. Lengthy reports about strategy from headquarters or consultants . . . frankly scare us. They usually claim to predict the future in a way that no one can anymore, and they're ridiculously expensive to boot. No, in today's global market, strategy means picking a general direction and executing like hell.

So here's the approach we'll take to strategic planning: we'll identify the general direction (something like tracing a bold line on a large fold-out map) and then over the years to come we'll visit the AAA office and execute like mad consistent with the general direction identified on the large fold-out map.

We won't start from scratch. Each year my family knew the boundaries for our family vacation—it would be a road trip, not a cruise, or a plane ride, or a journey by train. We were a car family; we believed in four wheels on the ground all the time; highways were

made to be traveled, there were few tolls to be paid, and gasoline was 25 cents a gallon. This was the American way (in my family).

In the North Park family our strategic planning will be defined by certain parameters because we know who we are—we are distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural. We also know why we're here—to prepare students for lives of significance and service. These things won't change; they're in the North Park DNA.

I anticipate, however, that our strategic plan will help us primarily to link these two—our identity and our purpose—more effectively than we've done in the past. Our mandate is not to change who we are or what our purpose is; rather our objective is to determine how we can best mature into the school we should become, knowing who we are and why we are here.

In developing a new strategic plan we'll work with established campus groups—the faculty senate, the university council, the deans' council, and the Board of Trustees. We'll also focus our annual academic program review sessions this year in ways that will encourage each academic unit (along with a number co-curricular programs) to identify how their program already supports the central objectives identified in our existing strategic plan and determine how we can build on this in the years ahead.

This collaborative work among us will lead us to an important moment in the life of North Park University – the year 2016. Let's commit now to doing all we can, in our respective places and roles, to assure that in 2016, when North Park turns 125, this will be an increasingly exceptionable school. Let's envision together a school which affirms the wonderful heritage of the past 125 years and simultaneously is poised for everincreasing effectiveness in our mission to prepare students for lives of significance and service.

In Closing . . .

Early in the summer I asked you to help me be a good president for North Park by participating in my performance appraisal. Nearly 200 of you, from both faculty and staff, accepted my invitation and responded to both a set of questions with quantitative responses and three questions which encouraged more reflective and qualitative impressions.

Thank you for your care and support. Your responses provided encouragement balanced by important suggestions for constructive improvement. Both are crucial to an effective performance appraisal, especially one which comes after five years of service.

From you I learned that our collective sense of institutional identity, purpose, and direction is strong; that the senior leadership team we have brought together is highly regarded by our campus community; that generally we communicate well and in a timely manner with faculty and staff; that our efforts in fund raising are strong; and that you appreciate the ways in which I help us to know our voice as a university.

On the side of the evaluation that encourages improvement some of you expressed an interest in more active leadership from me in fostering student learning outcomes, and a stronger and more effective relationship with the faculty. In your narrative comments many of you expressed a fondness for seeing me occasionally in your respective workplace and encouraged me to be out and about more often. Consistently you praised our work in encouraging diversity on campus and involvement in Chicago, and then you quickly reminded me that we still have many miles to go on this journey.

So I close with a simple word of thanksgiving. At the beginning of my sixth year at North Park, and at the beginning of your first year, tenth year, or thirtieth year, I'm especially grateful to be at North Park and I'm honored to be your colleague. Ours is a sacred obligation. Our aim is to be with our students but for a while—to have hold of them today, so we can send them forth tomorrow; to serve them today, so they may serve the world in every tomorrow.

By God's grace we walk this journey together.

Now let's hoist the sails, catch the wind, and be off on this year's voyage.