

## Gathering Day August 20, 2019

Welcome back! First and always I offer my thanks to you for your service and leadership at North Park. It is a pleasure to serve with you, and alongside you and I am honored to be in your presence today as we continue to advance the mission of North Park University together.

To those of you who are new to our community, welcome! We are delighted to have you in our midst and we look forward to the contributions that you will bring.

To those of you returning this year, thank you! We are grateful for all that you mean to this campus, to our community and to our culture.

I hope that the summer has treated all of you well, brought a time of rest and refreshment — and that the North Park “July Fridays” were a time of renewal for you, giving you just a little extra time to enjoy this magnificent city, to enjoy your precious families and friends — and just an additional moment to thank our God for the good work He has given us to do every day, on behalf of our students.

While some of us were away from campus on those Fridays, other colleagues were present — making sure to keep North Park vibrant and beautiful — taking highest advantage of the weather and the time to make us better. Some individuals in the Physical Plant, construction, landscaping, Admissions and Financial Aid, and Advancement were here making our campus beautiful and serving students. I offer our thanks to these colleagues and our appreciation for their professional expertise.

Reflecting on our past year together I can say a few things with certainty. We made a great deal of progress — and we also have some significant work cut out for us in the future.

First, some of the progress made — starting with our budget. I was delighted to recently report to our trustees two critical financial elements that mark stability for our institution. We closed the FY19 books with a balanced budget. And we developed a budget for this fiscal year that was balanced upon proposal.

Neither of these, were easy tasks, and it required all of our efforts. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Senior Administrative Team, I offer my appreciation for the the sacrifices that were made and the creative thinking and problem solving that you applied.

This is key to helping us engage a healthy and vibrant future, And we all know that financial health and discipline are crucial elements of the HLC accreditation process, in which we are all currently engaged and have the responsibility to successfully complete.

Our campus is owning our new realities — the environment we are facing, engaging the challenges, while fully embracing the significant opportunities before us. I am very grateful for your courage, your commitment and your collaboration in this work. Our opportunities are waiting for us.

And now, as we are re-charged and fired up for the new work before us, we face our future together with hope and promise.

We all hear, read and learn more everyday about the current challenges and headwinds for ALL of higher education — and even though we will face this head on, we at North Park have every reason to be excited about the future direction of this beautiful and important place.

And here is why:

Our strategic advantage — our ability to prepare ourselves to compete and succeed in the intense marketplace of higher education — lies in our three core distinctives — and our ability to embrace and elevate ALL of them in the most compelling way possible.

Founded in faith, by a devoted immigrant community, for the advancement of future generations, and planted in this city location — North Park University now has the opportunity to emerge as the nothing less than the model for Christian higher education in 21st Century America.

The crowded marketplace of higher education is calling for

CLARITY in identity,

FOCUS of mission,

EXCELLENCE in execution, and

DELIVERY on our promise of a completed degree for our students, ALL at an affordable level of investment, for the students who accepts our invitation to attend.

It is a tall order, but we are actually in a position to deliver it.

We are going to seize this opportunity in some very specific ways, and it will require the efforts and energies of all of us to do it!

- First and always, our Christian identity; we are deeply rooted in faith, we will claim that, own that and we will live into it in every way we can. We are a Christian institution of

high academic quality. We introduce to our students, while they study and advance with us academically, a life of faith and a daily walk with Jesus.

- Additionally, we are centered in this world-class city of Chicago, a competitive advantage with opportunities that are limitless for education and career development. We will seize this opportunity in ways that will make us stronger and more compelling to prospective students, funders, internship providers and employers for our graduates.
- And finally, we are distinguished and blessed by the rich tapestry of a thoroughly intercultural student population. We celebrate a campus community that measures nearly 50 percent students of color, and that is an unparalleled strength for us. The Kingdom of God enters our gates every year, and we will seek to support and encourage every one of our students, meeting them at their points of strength and need, and helping them to progress in ways that will strengthen their ability to succeed.

Potential employers in all fields express their interest in graduates who can think critically ... work collaboratively ... and perform ethically — all in increasingly diverse environments, providing valuable contribution through their ability to respect and value difference, and advance cooperative and productive relationships.

I am describing the North Park graduate! This is exactly who we are! And we need to tell our story, and our student's stories, at every opportunity. Our time to remove the best kept secret in Chicago — the best kept secret in Christian higher education — is NOW!

It is in the sum of our three core distinctives that North Park finds our unique identity and our competitive advantage.

We are living into our Christian identity, will take full advantage of our strategic and enviable location in the third-major market in the US, and will celebrate and promote our intercultural student community as a significant strength for learning and excellence.

It will take the total dedication of all our efforts to integrate all three of these remarkable distinctives in all of our work. That will help us establish a position of strength in this very competitive marketplace. I am asking for your help in this — and I am counting on your faithfulness, your efforts and your expertise.

All of us must challenge ourselves to champion all three of our core distinctives, every day. All in! For all three! All the time!

This will be central to our conversations and our work. If our work naturally connects to and extends ONE particular distinctive, we must be challenging ourselves to integrate, elevate and incorporate the other two into our work as well.

One of our strategies for optimal growth must include raising our visibility significantly in the region, nation and world, so that prospective students, faculty, staff and benefactors will be drawn to us. I am willing to position and promote North Park in all the ways that I can and I will ask you to join me in this effort.

Each one of us plays a vital role in this missional work — and I have tremendous respect and gratitude for your dedication.

- To the faculty at all levels, I recognize the distinction you bring to North Park. I have great respect for the teaching, scholarship and service that you commit to every day. Our academic reputation and our student outcomes are a credit to your life's work. I ask you to identify how you can integrate all three of our distinctives in your work with students, and champion this identity in your teaching and modeling for our students.
- To the devoted members of our staff across the campus, your contributions are critical to our mission. You are positive educators — in every sense of the word. Bring that joy and that energy to your work and make it infectious to your students. Be aware of their needs and responsive in the ways you can, and I guarantee your students will know that you care about them and their ability to succeed. And to our colleagues who care for our beautiful facilities and grounds — we appreciate the professionalism with which you serve. You provide the welcoming foundation for everyone who steps on to our campus.
- For all of us — having chosen to commit our life's work to North Park and our students. Welcome students to our campus, personally learn their stories and their strengths, intentionally create a sense of home.

And our Board of Trustees is accepting their responsibility too. They know exactly who they are. They are the leaders and investors in this institution. They accept and embrace the fact that they quite literally, hold the future of our institution in their trust.

They value our mission, understand our challenges and are prepared to invest in our future. They are endorsing my request to assemble a presidential advisory working group to review our organizational structure and our financial model

We know that almost 90 percent of our operating budget each year comes from tuition revenue. Enrollment stability and intelligent growth are critical for us — but increasingly difficult in the current market where schools are competing for fewer students of college-going age, and where affordability is putting pressure on everyone to increase institutional financial aid in order to hit enrollment targets.

Schools with a high-tuition, high-discount business model are beginning to recognize that it is not sustainable — but nobody has come up with a replacement. I have assembled a small working group of advisors, tapping their expertise in business and finance to help us do two things: Examine our organizational structure, and examine our financial model, so that we can

move wisely toward our future. This may result in hard work, program audits and significant change for us going forward but we will face this issue head-on together.

We've identified that we must increase our visibility — our name recognition — and we have to do it on a tight budget, in a crowded and expensive media market. The Board has authorized a formal Marketing committee to address this. But how can YOU contribute to spreading the good word about North Park? Learn our student success stories, tell your own stories of success. And ask yourself each day — how YOU can be a champion for all threwh distinctives, all the time.

We also have to keep higher education affordable for a wider range of students. Our students come to us with very different levels of preparedness, both financially and academically.

That takes the careful stewardship and management of our operating budget and donor support.

I will begin visiting again with our generous alumni and friends, sharing a compelling case for scholarship support for our students, and institutional support for our future.

In order to do this, I will be asking Senior Team members to remain rooted on campus this year, executing the priorities that we have been working on throughout the summer during our times of strategic agenda setting.

They may be asking your help in addressing some of these priorities. They will most certainly be seeking your help in the critical process of reaccreditation for our institution through the Higher Learning Commission. When they do, please respond. And I thank you in advance for this vital work.

I want to leave you today, with some encouragement and a challenge:

Soon we will welcome more than 600 new students to our campus across all programs.

Of more than 500 new first-year students — over 200 are from Chicago and more than 320 are from the region and beyond — from four continents, 22 countries, one U.S. Territory and 27 states. Almost 30 percent are student athletes. Thirteen are CRUX students so far, up from 8 last year. Fifty-eight are Covenant affiliated, up from 29 last year. The Academic profile increased again for the second year in a row — with an increase in average GPA, a slight increase in SAT and HALF — on campus already — as part of athletics, CRUX and cohort programs.

Many thanks to our smart, hard-working teams in enrollment management, marketing, student services and student engagement for a job well done in a truly tough market.

Other things to celebrate:

- A second year of growth and development for our signature Catalyst 606 program engaging a growing number of students, faculty and courses. As we enter the 3rd year of Catalyst, and elevate this program, we must ensure broader and deeper opportunities for learning and service in this great city.
- We celebrate continued growth in our innovative programs in our Seminary, in the cohort distance learning program IGNITE, (with new classes beginning in the East Coast conference and the Great Lakes — along with a second class of 40 students at Stateville Correctional Institution, beginning their Masters of Divinity degrees in our School of Restorative Arts.)
- Nearing the successful completion of our fundraising efforts for Renewing Nyvall Hall, the physical work is nearly complete, providing a quality space for a signature program of our institution – and a strategic and useful space for the future.
- The Christiana landscaping, which follows through on our agreement with the City of Chicago to enclose and beautify the street in exchange for receiving ownership, provides the stunning entrance so appropriate for the renewed Sohlberg Hall, which houses strategic and immediate expressions of our core distinctives in the offices for CRUX, Catalyst 606 and the Office of Diversity and Intercultural Life.

Our mission and core values have been moving North Park forward for 127 years — and they are the VERY thing that will propel us forward now.

Our mission is to prepare students for lives of significance and service through education in the liberal arts, professional studies and theology.

We will continue to advance this university of uncommon character and enduring excellence by building on our core institutional identity — Christian, city-centered and intercultural.

Everybody here has an important role to play in making that happen, through the pursuit of excellence in everything we do.

Please join me as we deepen our commitment to the mission of North Park and as we create a brilliant future for Christian higher education.

Now, Let's Get Moving on this academic year!