

Inauguration Address

February 15, 2019

Ladies and gentlemen, cherished members of my family, honored guests, our exceptional faculty and staff, students, and friends —

I accept these symbols of office, and this faithful charge, with deepest gratitude, and with a fierce commitment to the sacred mission of North Park University.

I accept them with profound admiration for the inspiring wisdom, devotion, and legacy of those who came before me in presidential leadership.

And I accept them with humility, acutely aware of the responsibilities they represent — of the honor and sacred Call that it is to serve this remarkable institution and its members.

In all things ... to God be the glory!

This week has been such a marvelous week for North Park University.

We began on Monday by lacing up our shoes together and going the distance to raise critical scholarship dollars for the North Park Fund.

Wednesday was a great day from start to finish. We worshiped as a community in our morning Chapel, and heard Rev. Dr. Donna Harris bring words of support and challenge to enter and engage our city in a way that embraces the ministry opportunity before us.

Our students hosted a warm and wonderful luncheon of fellowship and encouragement, and later that afternoon, we received the grounded research, teaching and challenge of the scholars who presented their findings, and their passion, in our Academic Symposium.

The day concluded as we celebrated the accomplishments of our student athletes when the women's basketball Vikings brought home a thrilling victory to cap the evening.

Thursday's concert was a magnificent expression of the talented performing and visual arts that have always been a hallmark of North Park. We were all very moved and inspired.

And today, we are delighted to welcome friends from near and far to celebrate and witness our commitment to advancing our vital mission in every way. Thank you for your presence with us, and for the way you so nobly represent your own institutions and your families.

President Horner, I thank you for your kind words, and for your inspiring and edifying message to our community today — and most of all for the professional and personal encouragement and mentoring you have provided to me over the years. I will depend on them now more than ever, and this community will indeed be blessed by your continued investment in its success. Dr. Parkyn, I am grateful to you as well, for the opportunity we had to work together for many years at North Park, advancing the resources and the facilities that help make North Park University strong today.

I am grateful and inspired by the legacy of all of our previous presidents. I will draw inspiration and encouragement from the examples they have set. And I pledge today my every effort and energy to advance the mission and values of our dear school.

President Horner, the final words of your charge place the emphasis of the work of sustaining the mission of North Park exactly where it belongs — not on a single individual, but on this whole community. Even as I accept the sacred obligation of leadership, I recognize and value the deep and creative talents, abilities and commitments of our beloved students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and denomination. Together, we comprise the faith, strength, mission and values of North Park. Together we will practice the “collaborative art” you describe. And together we will pursue excellence in all that we do. This will encourage us, inspire us and sustain us each day, as we work to advance the mission of North Park University together.

We have heard the Scriptures today. Psalm 46. God is our refuge and our strength. An ever-present help in all that we do. We will call on that strength every day to provide the inspiration and the stamina to do the strategic work that is necessary to recruit the students we seek — and to deliver the experience we promise.

At North Park University, *we know who we are.*

We are the university of the Evangelical Covenant Church. We are dynamic in our Christian identity, having anchored our souls and our mission in the Lord since 1891.

We are centered in this world-class city of Chicago. We are distinguished by the rich tapestry of our intercultural student community. And we are dedicated to preparing our students for lives of significance, and lives of service.

This has never been more relevant or more imperative than it is today.

Christian!

In a world where Truth and Ethics are in danger of becoming personally and situationally re-defined beyond recognition, Christian institutions of higher education are absolutely essential. We have the extraordinary opportunity to introduce students to a life of Christian faith, and to nurture a campus environment designed to encourage their pursuit of academic excellence,

their search for meaning and purpose, and the deepening of their faith commitments during their college years. I personally know this is true, because it was during my own days as an undergraduate student, through a range of experiences and challenges, that I embraced a personal relationship with God, and a daily walk with Jesus.

I know the unique opportunity we have to offer an environment for students to draw near to God in a way that is transformational, making it possible for faith to be the framing for every personal and professional decision throughout their lives. We will faithfully provide that rich and rewarding environment.

We are City-centered!

North Park's opportunities as a city-centered university are limitless. Our signature program, Catalyst 606, literally takes our rich curriculum off of our campus and into our city, and has the potential to become a "game-changer" for this institution. It provides the opportunity to capitalize on the competitive advantage of our location in this major U.S. market — a differentiated and dynamic experiential learning context. This is the space where our students will be encouraged and expected to use their outstanding North Park education to address the needs of the city, and the challenges and problems of the world. Solutions to these problems are provided by God, but they must be spoken through people. North Park graduates will be those people.

We are Intercultural!

Certainly, one of North Park's greatest strengths lies in our historic and current identity as an inter-cultural institution of excellence.

From our founding 127 years ago by Swedish immigrants hungry for the advancement of the next generation through knowledge, professional preparation and growth of the church; to the invitation to our neighborhood and the promising students of this diverse city; to our expanding emphasis on international recruitment — North Park has always been a welcoming institution. Nurturing and encouraging students from a variety of cultures and backgrounds is a hallmark of the North Park experience.

Never more than today has this been an essential element for success. No person can be fully educated without the opportunity to learn and grow alongside peers unlike themselves. The cultural identity of our student body parallels the emerging demographics of our city and country. The institutional strengths of our city location and North Park's commitment to the rich tapestry of diversity in our student body, adds to the educational and personal experience of all students due to the variety of perspectives and backgrounds represented.

Quality

Which brings us to the imperative that we face together today and must embrace going forward. With the intensity of competition in the higher education marketplace and the headwinds that all liberal arts institutions are facing, it will be the universities that differentiate themselves that will succeed. Institutions that elevate their quality of experience and delivery, will be the ones that survive and thrive.

We know the North Park difference. Our imperative now is to further distinguish ourselves in those areas of identity we have noted — Christian, urban, intercultural, service-oriented — and to significantly increase our visibility. We must newly pledge ourselves to excel in all parts of our operation — in order to do justice to the sacrifices and the commitments of our founders, and all those who have served before us.

We must elevate our game and raise the quality of all that we do. We must design well, plan well and execute at a very high level. The daily work is not enough. We need continuous improvement. We need breakthrough innovation. And each of us will need to reach down a little further, and commit ourselves more deeply, in order to get it.

The North Park student, graduate, funder, and friend demands and deserves our best. And we must deliver. The stakes are very high and the future of our institution depends on three critical things:

- On our belief in, and ownership of, the vital importance of our mission,
- On our ability to generate and sustain the significant resources required to advance that mission,
- And on our ability to share our compelling case for enrollment and support.

Now, where will we find our energy and inspiration? From the source that never fails. From God's Word and God's Faithfulness from generation to generation. We've heard the Scripture today. Out of His glorious riches He will strengthen us with power through his Holy Spirit. We will have that power together with all the saints. And Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith.

In addition to the meaningful symbols of service received earlier today, I am grateful for another symbol, not presented today, but it has been hanging on the wall of the President's Office in Old Main. It was a gift from my treasured colleagues in the Office of Advancement at the start of this academic year, in honor of my transition in service from Vice President to President. This beautiful piece, hand-lettered by one of our talented alumni, expresses the faithfulness of several significant women of the Bible, and the circumstances in which God answered their prayers for courage, for counsel, and for comfort.

May the God of Deborah teach you Courage for your Battles.

May the Christ who knew Mary and Martha show you the way of Balance,

May the God of Eve teach you to Dance.

May the God who healed the bent over woman heal your pain.

May the God of Miriam bring you Companions when you Struggle.

And may Lord Jesus, be the author and hope of your future.

With this as our inspiration, we will intensify our commitment to our neighbors, our city, the region and the world. We will provide shelter in the storm of indifference for our fellow human beings who are marginalized and impoverished. This magnificent university in this rich and diverse neighborhood, will continue to serve as a community of teachers and learners who understand that the liberal arts, professional, graduate and theological education, are the keys that open doors for every person with a North Park education. And once issued those keys, the obligation and the desire to serve and contribute come with them.

These are ideas that have been central to my own life and service, and so we conclude in the same place we began — with glory to God, gratitude for His Faithfulness, and for me, with deep gratitude and love for my family.

Many wonderful members of my family of origin are here today, some present with us and some held in the memory of our hearts, my siblings John, Adrian, Jennie and Carrie — and many wonderful nieces, nephews and cousins. We share the common experience of first being introduced in our home to the idea that with the privilege of being part of a family community, goes the responsibility of contributing to that community. Everyone was expected to contribute, and all of us knew that we represented something broader than just our own individual personhood. It was service above self — a concept that has helped to shape me personally, spiritually and professionally. And for that, I am extremely grateful.

For my parents, whose physical presence may be absent today, but whose influence and encouragement are never far from my heart or mind — with gratitude for the stirring example they set, of devotion to education on every level, and of service to educational leadership — I offer my thanks and the return of that example, with a lifetime of service centered in the encouragement of students and their pursuit of knowledge, in faith, fueled by the support of those who love them.

And to my very own dear family — Jack and Jessie — I am so very grateful for you! You have walked every step of this journey with me and we have anchored our souls and our family in the Lord. I am devoted to you and to the future God holds for us together. Thank you for your love and your support. I would most assuredly not be here today, if not for you.

And now, North Park, as we together Anchor our Souls and our Service in the Lord — may the words of our mouths, and the work of our hands, may the teaching of our students and the carrying of our mission be pleasing in the sight of God, our Rock and our Redeemer.

We will seek God’s wisdom, mercy, and grace as we work to produce the “collaborative art” so beautifully described and so clearly necessary. All of this, for God’s glory, for neighbors’ good, and for the students of North Park.

May God Bless and Keep us in this passion and this purpose. Amen.