University Update

Joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12:12

Dear North Park faculty, staff and community,

First and always, thanks to each of you for doing your part to advance North Park University’s mission and priorities during this remarkable and challenging time in the history of our institution, nation and world.

Sometimes I share with our community the words and ways in which God reveals Himself as I daily seek His guidance and direction in my work and service to our students and our mission. Often, He draws me to Paul’s letters and his encouraging and instructive words as a teacher and leader in ministry and service. Paul’s many letters to communities of faith include clear and direct instructions, faithful encouragements, words of endearment and admiration for the people in those communities, cemented with words of hope for the future.

Recently I have been reflecting on a portion of Paul’s letter to the Romans (Romans 12:12) where he encourages the people to do three important things:

Be joyful in hope.
Be patient in affliction.
Be faithful in prayer.

I believe nothing could be more timely for our community, and our world.

In a recent conversation of friendship with our NPTS theologian, ethicist and colleague Dr. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, I asked Michelle if I might be free to change the order of these three instructions, to keep my priorities straight -- being faithful in prayer first, starting each day and all attempts to address my personal life and our institutional challenges by practicing time in prayer, laying my gratitude and petitions before our God.

To be patient in the affliction that is invading all of our lives – some much more personally and physically than others. To seek the endurance, resilience and healing that is needed now – and ways in which we can support those providing frontline care for those physically affected.

And finally, to be joyful in hope – that our God has plans and a future for us – that this medical crisis will come under control and progress toward reasonable management, allowing us to return to teaching, learning and faith development on the campus at North Park.

Michelle gave me permission to rearrange the order of instruction – and to remember that God will use His word and His people in every circumstance. I am grateful for the ability to pray, to work, to serve – and I remain grateful for every person in the North Park community. May God continue to lead us in faith, work and service.

Our priorities

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, we at North Park have kept our top two priorities in view – the health, safety and wellness of our students, faculty and staff – and successful completion of the academic semester.
As a community and as individuals, we are all making fundamental and often disruptive changes in our daily lives and work, our relationships, our teaching and learning. We are working to excel within the limits of the present situation and continually planning for a successful future.

Our students have had to make an immediate change to an online platform that is very different from our integrated face-to-face learning experience. Although some of our students are accustomed to online learning through past experiences with individual courses or curricula, most have changed their location, trying to learn and accomplish their coursework from home, while managing all of the demands and changes that this transition presents. (My own daughter is a college junior living and studying online in our home too, so I see the challenges and the opportunities firsthand!) I admire and respect all of our students for their willingness to keep moving ahead with a goal of finishing the semester well!

Our talented and committed faculty members have worked diligently with the Center for Online Education and with each other to meet the sudden demand for all-distance learning, striving to deliver for our students, the highest quality education possible. Our staff members are also working hard and well from home, with good structure and good results.

North Park students, faculty and staff are moving forward in every way they can and merit our thanks for the successful “pivot” that everyone has made to keep moving toward a strong finish to the 2019-20 academic year.

In this enormous public health crisis, the performance and resilience of so many North Parkers exemplifies our community at its best. We have the significant evidence of our own present experience to see how our community can pull together quickly, adjust to opportunity, and deliver — all with a goal of sustaining and advancing North Park on behalf of our students and our mission.

I write today to provide updates about a number of developments across the University, to discuss our planning for the future and, to offer some encouragement as we navigate through this time and toward our future.

**Academic Support**

- **Academic Support Services** is using Microsoft Teams for supplemental instruction and individual tutoring, helping students adjust to the online environment and continue to learn. Contact with and support for our students is a priority to ensure a strong finish this spring, and support retention efforts for next semester. We are focusing on care and concern and providing emotional support, as well as help with practical problem solving.

- **Pass/Fail option:** Following extensive conversation with faculty, students, Provost Johnson and Dean Kersten, a decision has been made to offer students at all levels, a Pass/Fail option for selected courses, according to a set of guidelines developed. The form for Pass/Fail can be found [here](#).

- **Summer 2020 Online!** All courses will be moving online for the summer session. Thanks to all who will support this proactive move.

- **Registration for Fall 2020.** Registration for fall semester 2020 officially opened on Monday, April 6. We encourage all North Parkers to take the important step in looking forward to the fall semester, by registering TODAY! Our [Course Registration webpage](#) holds all the information you need for a successful registration. Faculty and staff stand ready to support you in successful planning for the future!

**Student Support**

- **Diversity and Intercultural Life.** Everyone in our community has experienced pain through this global crisis, though not all in equal ways. Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago
Department of Public Health (CDPH) released new demographic data revealing great disparities by race and ethnicity in sickness and death from COVID-19 in Chicago. The African American community has been hit particularly hard in our city. Additionally, some of our international students have recently experienced harassment by strangers in public. Our Office of Diversity and Intercultural Life is reaching out to our students of color to help them know they are loved, supported and sorely missed.

- **Hispanic Serving Institution.** We are happy to report that an HSI Auxiliary Committee is holding bi-monthly meetings, studying opportunities that this new and important designation provides North Park University. A Student Advisory Committee is also being developed.

- **Room and Board refunds and credits:** North Park University has issued a credit to student accounts for 50% of the Spring 2020 semester charge for housing and meal plans, net of financial aid, for those students who moved out of student housing by March 27, 2020. Students with a remaining spring semester balance will have this credit applied toward their current payment plan and it will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are paid in full may use this credit toward a future semester or request a refund.

**Planning for the Future**

We remain vigilant in the protection of our campus community as the medical situation in our city intensifies. We continue to be creative in seeking ways to support our students and faculty in completing a successful academic semester. And our senior leadership and Board of Trustees are planning for the future by addressing the financial impact that this pandemic is having on our university and considering how we best strengthen our institution now and in the future.

The Cabinet has joined me in assessing the institutional financial pressures that the pandemic is causing. We are dividing our work in the following ways:

1. First, examining the immediate impact on this year’s operating budget and strategizing ways in which to adjust for the remainder of this fiscal year.
2. Modeling for the future with a range of scenarios due to the uncertain projections that accompany our changing environment. Our goal, of course, will be modeling and constructing a plan that supports a successful future, allowing us to advance our mission – enroll and graduate our students.

We have a strong handle on the first of these challenges and will soon present a plan to the Board of Trustees for their approval. Next, we will work with our trustees to develop a financial plan for the 2020-21 academic year and beyond.

**CARES Act**

Our deep thanks to Renee Cox in the Office of Advancement who is very capably leading our effort to apply for and secure the funds that are part of the CARES Act assisting North Park in relieving financial pressures for our students and our institution. More news will follow about the distributions and timelines for receipt of these critical funds.

**What can you do to help?**

Supporting retention efforts for current students and recruitment efforts for incoming class are critical at this time, and every one of us has a role to play.

If you are a faculty advisor, help your students get cleared for registration for the fall. If you are a staff or faculty member willing to call or write to a prospective student, volunteer today to support those important activities. Our enrollment staff will immediately include you in these critical efforts. Please sign up here to participate.
Thank you in advance for your participation! We need your help to bring our class back – and bring our new class in.

**Staying Connected**

Our normal inclination as a caring campus community, and especially in times of crisis, is to stay close with each other – but we are forced to do the opposite for now.

As one way to express our sense of community, North Park is launching a weekly, interactive blog posting to share with the entire campus community. We hope it will be another way for us to connect online through news, unexpected blessings and helpful ways to stay inspired, hopeful, and healthy as a community. Follow and share this link: [https://www.northpark.edu/stories/weekly-community-update-staying-connected/](https://www.northpark.edu/stories/weekly-community-update-staying-connected/).

Finally, thank you for setting the example to stay home, practice distancing and continue with handwashing and wearing face masks in public. I am praying for our community to be further spared and for us to reach that wonderful day when we are together again. We will do what is necessary now - we will be strong and courageous. We are meant to be together. We will wait in hope for that day to return.

Be faithful in prayer – for our students, faculty, staff, leadership, and our Board of Trustees.

Be patient in affliction – extend grace and hospitality by staying close even while distant.

Be joyful in hope – for the future that our God has set out for us.

On this Good Friday, as we engage the passion, pain, and death of Jesus, we remember so many in pain – and look forward with hope to the joy and promise of the Resurrection.

With deepest gratitude and respect,

Mary K. Surridge

President

**North Park University** : 3225 W Foster Ave, Chicago, IL 60625-4895