University Update

March 30, 2020

Dear North Park University Faculty and Staff,

The Board of Trustees and the Cabinet join me in thanking you for all the ways that you are leading, serving, supporting and praying for our beloved students and our institution during these challenging times. The COVID-19 pandemic has required everyone to make major changes in their lives, relationships, and educational experiences. We remain grateful for the collaboration and cooperation being demonstrated by all in our community.

Academic Excellence

Working to support a successful semester, Dean Katie Maier-O’Shea and the gifted and enthusiastic staff in the Center for Online Education, along with Jeff Lundblad and our talented and dedicated staff in IT, are providing a wide range of resources and assistance to support our hard-working students and devoted faculty as they continue the transition to online learning. Faculty and staff in our Seminary have been a tremendous help in sharing their positive experience and deep expertise in this modality. Many positive new partnerships and collaborative experiences are forming that will stand us in good stead in the future. Thank you!

I seek and receive reports every day about both good progress and continuing needs. There are countless ways that our faculty, staff and students are stepping up to meet the academic and personal challenges of this time. A few wonderful examples from our undergraduate faculty are listed below:

Dr. Eric Brown and Dr. Lindsey Alexander (both in Biology) in preparation for the launch online –

“We are confirming that Human Anatomy is well positioned to be delivered online the rest of the semester. We have been in communication via email and over the phone generating a common plan for delivery across our sections. This will include “flipped” lectures as well as online lecture and lab exams all through Canvas. We will be available for our students with virtual office hours should they have any questions. Despite these unusual circumstances, we are confident that this online delivery will go quite smoothly.”

Professor Mark Gavoor (SBNM) in the humble tone of professional adjustment and learning –

“I think I am learning more every day, just like my students. This is a system of continuous improvement. I am better at teaching online this week than I was last week. And I will be even better next week!”

Dr. Leona Mirza (Mathematics) offering empathy and encouragement for a colleague who was feeling overwhelmed in preparation –

“Thank you for your message. I, too, am overwhelmed but I finally have been able to realize that my job is to reach out to students to calm them and help them learn. They are anxious and are looking to us for direction. How we handle this situation is more important than if we get every statistical detail accounted for. I consider this situation an opportunity for me to learn to be a better person and teacher. Consider it a gift in unusual packaging. Each of us is a special person in the eyes of our students and we need to use this time to be positive role models.”

Residence Life and Student Engagement

Our thanks to colleagues in Residence Life, Student Engagement, Campus Security, Physical Plant, and Aramark dining staff for their swift action and tireless work to secure residential options for the students who needed to remain on campus during this time. A robust schedule for increased and intensified cleaning by internal staff and external services has been in place and will continue. Our Campus Security staff is fully in
place, and Nurse Meghan Pillow has provided guidance and direction in meeting CDC and Chicago Public Health guidelines and protocol instructions for our community. Our professional partners in Aramark dining show up every day – to serve and sustain our students in a safe and healthy manner.

Thank you! Please be encouraged by the support of so many who are praying with you and for you.

Retention, Recruitment, Advancement

Retention, Recruitment, Advancement are all top of mind! The support we offer to our current students for their success this semester and a return to campus in the fall, is our highest priority. Course registration for the fall semester is scheduled to launch on Monday, April 6. Let’s offer best combined efforts to support and encourage our students for the next steps in progress toward their North Park degree.

The Office of Student Success and Director Dennis King will be seeking your help in contacting and encouraging our students to finish this semester strong and register for fall. Faculty advisors, staff, recruitment officers, coaches, administrators, alumni and trustees are joining this effort! Watch for the specific role you can play in participating in this effort and THANK YOU in advance for your help.

The Enrollment Management team is working very creatively in the current environment to keep developing meaningful relationships with prospective students, recruiting first-year traditional students, transfer students, adult learners and graduate students. Campus visits are being replaced with calling and writing campaigns, social media connection and the targeted personal outreach that is happening every day. Our recruiters and coaches are working constantly to secure next year’s incoming class.

Enrollment projections are uncertain at this point, and of course, many factors are outside of our control. We know that economic conditions and realities will impact North Park and all of higher education for next year, and for years to come. But the things we CAN control – our attitude and action, will continue to reflect the highest effort possible, concentrating on the most personal and comprehensive model of recruitment we can.

The Office of Advancement has a significant role to play generating funds for North Park. They are gearing up for our annual Blue & Gold Day fundraising effort, which will take place on April 22. We are thankful for the support and encouragement from our campus community along with our faithful and generous alumni and friends. Many of you have asked how you can support North Park during this challenging time. Though working remotely, our staff in the Office of Advancement is fully prepared to assist you by phone, email, or teleconference in your financial support of North Park.

Next steps

In all our decisions at North Park University thus far, we have kept two priorities top of mind: 1) Protecting the health of our students and community. 2) Successfully completing this academic year. These priorities have served us well in the first emergency days and weeks and have allowed us to keep academic progress moving in a positive and progressive manner. Our first two priorities were clear and required our immediate attention and action.

With measurable progress and momentum in these first two areas, and with confidence in the effectiveness of our plan and the faculty and staff executing that plan on a daily basis, our leadership must now turn its focus to assessing the overall impact of this global crisis on our institution and planning for next steps.

What is the mission of God in crisis?

Finally, I am honored to share a gift from our own Dr. Boaz Johnson, posted yesterday morning, engaging the question for his students, indeed for ALL of us – What is the mission of God in crisis? Boaz beautifully brought forward the evidence of God’s intent, action and faithfulness. From the first chapter of Genesis, God reveals Himself as a God of Creation. He speaks the creative and healing Word. He creates day and night. And the earth and all that is in it. Throughout history, when crisis and the accompanying destruction have come – God has broken through, continuing to create and re-create. When our God breaks through, He brings goodness, light and creation in place of destruction. Life, in the midst of death.

In this crisis, as in any crisis before – we may turn to the faithfulness of our God, trusting in Him for re-creation and our future.
This crisis has, and will continue to, require and illuminate the very best in North Park. We will seek God daily and continue to trust in Him for creation and re-creation. May God bless and guide us now and always.

With gratitude and respect,

Mary K. Surridge
President

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