

Perseverance, Character and Hope at North Park

Even in our suffering we rejoice, knowing that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope!

And hope does not disappoint us – because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-5



PRESIDENT MARY K. SURRIDGE

At North Park University, as in every community, we have endured the broad range of challenges and loss that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to us. But in responding strongly and responsibly over the past four months, this campus community has demonstrated perseverance, character and hope, all in great measure. We kept our mission and priorities in front of us and we finished the 2019-2020 academic year Viking strong. Now, we face our future with continued commitment to wisdom in our prudent planning, and faith in God’s provision and protection.

This past spring the pandemic stopped international travel and commerce, it stopped weddings and wakes, and it stopped the wide world of sports! Millions of Americans lost their jobs, and tens of thousands have lost their lives. But the pandemic has not stopped North Park University – and, as we congratulated the class of 2020 in our virtual May Commencement, I noted that it did not stop our

students from completing their studies online and earning their degrees. We had to send our students home and close our campus to daily operations in March, but our dedicated and talented faculty and staff made the difficult pivot to online education and service for our students so their education could remain on track. As president, I could not be more proud of their performance.

Immediately following their crucial work to finish the spring semester well, our Emergency Management Team transitioned into our Campus Reopening Task Force, meeting online daily to plan and implement the many logistical changes and safety protocols required to bring our students, faculty and staff back to campus safely.

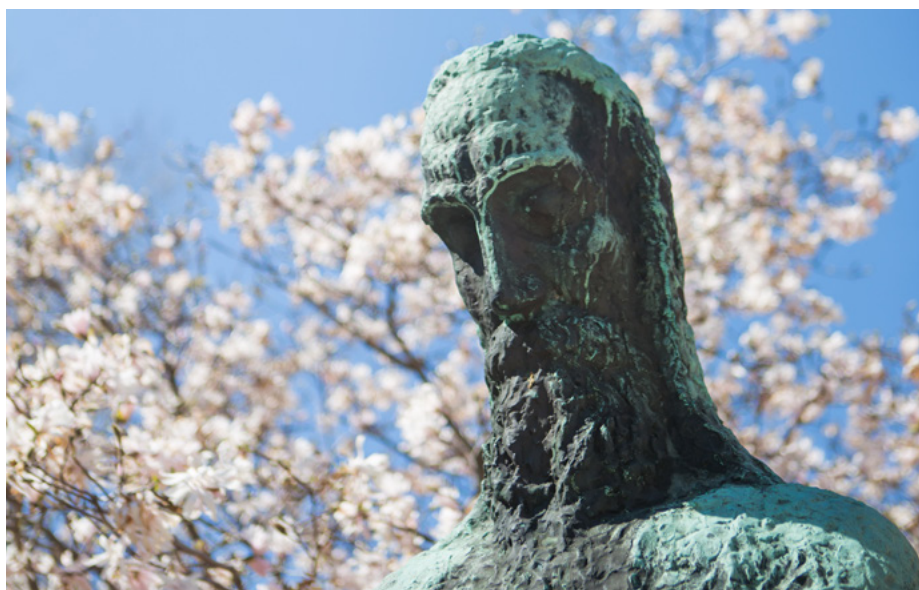
We have developed a detailed operational plan for the fall semester and a budget for the financial challenges of the new fiscal year, both endorsed and unanimously approved recently by the North Park Board of Trustees. We have planned for necessary changes in classroom capacities and residence halls and are ready to deliver a sound semester, with some courses in person, some online and some in a hybrid format – meeting student and faculty objectives for safety and quality. We are ready for the fall and we are also ready to respond rapidly and well to changing circumstances in any scenario. **We are alert to new information daily and will adapt with wisdom and confidence to any changes necessary.**

And I am happy to report that we have not remained exclusively in crisis mode in the first half of 2020 but have also focused on the long-range planning for our beloved institution.

In early May we calmly and thoughtfully took our first big step in **North Park Next**, a three-phase collaborative initiative unanimously endorsed by our Board of Trustees that will help us create an inspiring future for the University we love, aiming to emerge as a singularly compelling opportunity in Christian higher education. In the sum and interplay of our three distinctives—our Christian mission, city-centered Chicago location, and our intercultural commitment—North Park University finds its exclusive value, its competitive advantage and the vital opportunity to position ourselves as the model for Christian higher education in 21st Century America.

This first step in **North Park Next** was a broad-based campus workshop facilitated by the higher ed consulting firm Gray & Associates, entailing a review of our academic programs and possible opportunities for strengthening both mission and market outreach.

Equally important to our **North Park Next** work is the ongoing societal reawakening to issues of racial injustice that we have witnessed and participated in. On a personal level, I have taken to heart the need for each of us not only to examine our own hearts and perspectives, but also to work for meaningful



change and reconciliation on our campus and in our city. Multiracial and intergenerational momentum for permanent, positive action on racial justice issues is building in our nation and world – and it must remain an important priority on our campus as well.

In a University Update on June 24, I reported initial specific initiatives that the President's Cabinet has been discussing and is committing to:

- The President and Senior Team will engage in implicit bias training and work to extend that to the whole campus community in the coming academic year.
- North Park Theological Seminary is adapting the **Six Fold Test** of the ECC's Mosaic Commission as a set of metrics for measuring growth in interculturalism and assessing areas needing improvement, specifically as it pertains to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. Discussions are also ongoing about use of this helpful tool for our broader campus community.
- Review of the most recent campus climate study, including recommendations that were made at the time of the study.
- Renewed commitment to increasing diversity among faculty and staff. We have made progress on this priority and will continue to develop measurable goals and timelines for improvement in hiring practices and professional development.
- Scheduling comprehensive campus climate surveys in our campus constituency on regular intervals.
- And we are studying, and will pursue, new

initiatives in curriculum, student life, and leadership development.

Many members of the campus community will contribute to North Park's ongoing work together.

For all of us, 2020 has been a challenging, transformative, historic year. At North Park it has also been a very busy one! What follows is a closer look at where we have been, and where we are going.

Plans for Fall 2020

Two goals have guided the planning and decision-making for **re-opening our campus this fall**:

- Protection of the overall health, safety and wellness of our students, faculty and staff —as guided by the CDC, state and local protocols, and other governing bodies for colleges and universities such as the ACHA and the NCAA.
- Delivering the highest quality academic and residential experience possible taking into account our available resources.

The Campus Reopening Task Force is made up of faculty members, staff and leadership from across the University. It is accomplishing its work through six teams: Risk Mitigation Team; Academics/Classroom Team; Employee/Office Environment Team; Residential Life/Student Activities Team; Extracurricular Activities Team; and Communications Team.

The primary objective of the Risk Mitigation Team is to reduce the risks of campus exposure to Covid-19, with special considerations for vulnerable campus community members,

by providing personal protective equipment (such as face masks and face shields), hand sanitizer, disinfectant and other supplies according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The team is also ensuring stringent disinfection procedures across campus; addressing physical distancing strategies in classrooms, offices and high-traffic areas; treatments for safe air flow in classrooms and offices; and consulting with department leaders on risk mitigation planning specific to their areas.

The team has developed **four training modules** to educate the community on the ways we can protect ourselves and each other while safely reopening our campus. Students, faculty and staff are being asked to complete the training and then sign **The Viking Shield**—a personal commitment to shared responsibility in protecting our community by observing safety protocols for individuals and others.

We have missed our students, and we know from surveys and conversations that they are eager to get back to North Park in person and on campus, to pursue their educations. I promised them in **a video message** that we would do our best to support their educational progress, their spiritual development and their professional preparation —delivering the best fall semester possible under the circumstances. And I challenged them to bring with them creativity, adaptability and **a good dose of personal resolve** in observing the protocols that will help us maintain together the communal safety of students, faculty and staff.

Progress in North Park Next

Even before the significant financial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, we knew we were not immune from the economic challenges facing higher education – declining demographics in college-going populations, increasing tuition discounts and institutional expenses, and declining revenues. Prior to Covid-19, the charge to reimagine the North Park experience was front and center. As recently reinforced by our Board of Trustees, this work is more important than ever – and it is under way.

North Park Next is a three-phase strategic thinking and planning process through which we will reimagine our future with the aim of creating a missionally robust and financially sustainable future for North Park University.

In early May, in Phase I of **North Park Next**, an inclusive cross-campus working group of 46 North Parkers — comprising faculty and staff, deans, the President and senior team, and the Chair of the Board of Trustees — collaborated in a two-day online workshop hosted by Gray Associates, North Park's nationally acclaimed higher education consulting and data-gathering firm.

The workshop team was comprised of forward-thinking, solutions oriented, constructive participants who devoted two full days of their time and creative energy to this important effort. This workshop marked a strong start for **North Park Next**.

At the completion of this workshop, two specific objectives were completed: To identify potential academic program opportunities for enrollment growth; and to review data regarding our current student demographics and enrollments, course selections, financial aid distributions and the financial metrics of existing programs.

On the first day, we studied more than 1,400 individual academic programs offered in America — examining student demand, employment opportunities and the level of competition with other schools in a 40-mile radius and nationally. We did this in order to identify potential new programs North Park might launch that would be relevant to students, responsive to employers' needs, consistent with our mission — and viable sources of new net revenue. We identified 45 possible new academic programs and initially prioritized six for further study.

On the second day, we examined the data about our own 79 existing academic programs, reviewing their enrollments, revenues and expenses to the university. In small groups, we scored our programs and put each of them into one of four groups: programs with opportunities for growth; programs to sustain as they are; programs that require a specific fix; and programs that require further assessment.

We must now have the thoughtful and strategic conversations required to act on our data so that our Christian mission, vision, and values will not only survive but thrive, far into the future.

Phase II of **North Park Next** will be a strategic prioritization and planning process scheduled to begin this fall. The Board of Trustees has asked us to set measurable institutional goals for change in the coming academic year

— all toward realizing our vision for creating a new and compelling model for Christian higher education. This will be a formal process depending on reliable factors and collaborative experiences; the evidence and information gathered by Gray Associates; the participation of proven, professional academic and strategic planning consultants; campus and constituency input; and the leadership and endorsement of our North Park Board of Trustees.

Phase III of **North Park Next** will be the ongoing implementation of the plan, requiring strategic investments in our sustainable future, securing our Christian mission for generations to come.

We must elevate each of our distinctives to the highest levels of excellence — and the planning done through **North Park Next** will be our roadmap.

North Park University must generate the healthy financial margins necessary to thrive through disruptions in the economy. Ultimately, we will have the resources needed to fund and reward ambitious innovations and programs that are mission centered and market aware.

North Park University will have a faculty, staff and leadership that more closely reflect the intercultural student population we are so blessed to educate. Our students will have more professors and mentors reflecting our intercultural campus community, who support the conditions, curriculum and student life required for every student to flourish and to lead.

North Park University aims to be thoroughly engaged with the world-class city of Chicago, providing limitless opportunities for education and career development. We will forge partnerships, guarantee professional internships, and find service opportunities in the city, including those designed to help solve the most difficult urban challenges in education, health care, housing, jobs, justice and violence. We will seize these opportunities in ways that will make us stronger and more compelling to prospective students, funders, internship providers, and employers for our graduates.

North Park must be increasingly innovative and nimble, able to move to market quickly with curricular and cocurricular programs of the highest quality. And we will need your help to do it!

These are extraordinary times with extraordinary challenges — especially for higher

education. Colleges and universities that pursue innovation, seize new opportunities and wisely prioritize and invest, will be the ones that survive and find the way to thrive. It will require the best from ALL of us to meet the rising challenges, and advance North Park in a sustainable way. Our students need our encouragement, support and backing in a more tangible way than ever before.

In order to meet the existing financial burdens our university is facing, we have done the initial work of constructing an internal operating budget for the coming year that shares institutional sacrifice across many levels. Our dedicated faculty is preparing for the fall in three modes of

academic delivery, to serve our students well. Our talented and devoted staff has endured program and position eliminations in some areas, along with added professional responsibilities and salaries adjustments in others. We must work to strategically reduce expenses and continue to steward existing resources well, before seeking the support of partners in the future.

Our students deserve our very best, and across every generation the generous alumni and friends of North Park have come through to support the academic hopes and dreams of our students, sustaining our mission and helping to fund our future. Preparing leaders who are centered in faith, equipped with a sound education and armed with the strength and depth of a North Park degree — is now more crucial than ever before. As we continue to plan and prioritize, we will look forward to introducing a compelling case to our constituency for support, offering new and strategic opportunities for support of our students and our university.

And through it all, we continue to seek our living and loving God for safety and strength; courage and character, patience and perseverance. We *seek* Him, we *thank* Him, and we will daily *ask* our God to continue to guide our steps in these challenging times, and always.

Thank you for your commitment to prayer and support for our students and our mission.

Mary K. Sunidge