

First Word

**“Joyful in hope,
patient in affliction,
faithful in prayer.”**

Romans 12:12



PRESIDENT MARY K. SURRIDGE

With our historic fall semester complete, a new class of North Park graduates celebrating their winter Commencement, we give thanks for the joy brought by a blessed Christmas season, and look forward with hope to the new year. Thanks to hard work, perseverance, and God’s provision, North Park University delivered a safe, strong, and successful Fall 2020 semester for our students.

In a year like no other, we kept our two highest priorities front and center in all our work: Protecting the health and safety of our campus community; and ensuring the successful educational progress of our students.

Collaboration and creativity across the university have been the hallmarks of this good work, and in the pages that follow you will see and read about so many wonderful examples of this in our new normal.

A deep word of thanks goes to our students, faculty, staff and administration for their hard work, cooperation, resiliency and faithfulness. Our students were very grateful to be together on campus this fall, and even though everyone had to adjust plans, expectations and goals, North Park is united in the feeling that we are all in this together. This good work was noted in a message for our campus community, that I received from a former trustee just before Thanksgiving:

“Congratulations again on completing your fall program...as I told you, I have never seen a more difficult management environment than you all have faced. EVER! And you and your team met the challenge!”



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We remain deeply grateful for the leadership of our trustees, for the courage and confidence to endorse our plans for re-opening, and to keep us accountable for continued safety and progress.

And I am happy to report that managing pandemic challenges is not the only vital work we are pursuing at the University this year! We have also made important progress in pursuit of our strategic agenda:

- Advancing our work in North Park Next, the university strategic planning process that will ultimately strengthen our university by stewarding our existing resources well, improving our financial position, and inspiring investors. It will allow us to advance our mission and achieve our vision of emerging as the model for Christian higher education in 21st Century America.
- Preparing for our institutional re-accreditation visit and evaluation with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in April; producing evidence for the five criteria of institutional assessment required as part of the Open Pathway model.

NORTH PARK NEXT

The institutional review and strategic planning efforts, North Park Next, are progressing steadily. We know that in the sum and interaction of our three distinctives—Christian, city-centered, and intercultural—North Park University finds its unique value, its competitive advantage to become a singularly compelling model for Christian higher education in 21st Century America.

To seize our compelling opportunity, and to ultimately support student access and success, the University must meet the challenges facing all of higher education. These include demographic shifts and a decline in the number of high school graduates over the next decade; increased competition from alternatives to the traditional college campus experience; the pandemic's impact on students and families already concerned about college affordability and barriers to graduation. Any one of these factors would be a significant challenge. We are navigating them all at once.

That is why we are examining and optimizing our academic portfolio, prioritizing our commitment to student success, and improving our current practices to secure a strong financial future and the healthy financial margin we need to advance our mission, reward innovation, and improve compensation and support.

Through North Park Next, the Academic Prioritization, Review and Enhancement Team is assessing our academic portfolio to identify new programs that could help us increase enrollment and net revenue; reviewing existing programs we can enhance to attract more students; and reviewing under-enrolled programs we can adjust to steward our resources well.

I have been encouraged by the positive progress of this broadly representative team, and the detailed, inspiring work that will lead to recommendations for a sustainable and promising future.

Broad based strategic planning—including evaluation of institutional operating structures, co-curricular programs and campus facilities—will be underway in January, will include broad community input, and will result in a strategy map to propel us

forward with a detailed plan to guide our work in the coming years.

Another vital part of North Park Next will be our commitment to improving issues of racial equity, in part through a North Park adaptation of the Evangelical Covenant Church's "Six-Fold Test" as a framework for our ongoing life and work in community.

This framework examines current realities and develops methods for moving North Park forward in these six areas:

Population: Is the University increasing and supporting students, faculty and staff from diverse populations?

Participation: Are we finding ways to engage life together through education, worship, events, service and fellowship?

Power: Do the positions and structures of influence include the perspectives and gifts of diverse populations?

Pacesetting: With the range of perspectives, needs and gifts in our midst, what opportunities can the University strengthen and initiate?

Purposeful Narrative: How do the stories of all backgrounds become incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into our blended story moving forward?

Practicing Solidarity: In what ways are we purposefully and measurably advancing the access and success of our intercultural student community?

Members of the President's Cabinet are working with campus colleagues to bring this framework to the North Park community.

HOW FAR WE HAVE COME TOGETHER

As we continue our daily planning to welcome our students back for the spring semester, and prepare for several possible scenarios, we are focusing our attention and energy on solving the next challenges.

But as I noted in remarks at a November meeting of the full faculty, it is also valuable to stop and remember how far we have come together in "the most difficult environment we have ever seen."

We pivoted in a week last spring, kept our students and our campus safe, finished the spring semester and graduated our class.

North Park Next was launched and planning is gaining momentum.

We set an operational plan for the fall, and successfully recruited a strong incoming, undergraduate class.

We prepared the campus all summer with new protocols, new schedules, new air systems, new room capacities, new residence hall realities and new library schedules and adjustments.

And we opened the fall semester—in person, on time.

We adjusted our protocols to meet the changing environment and we finished the fall semester successfully.

Through ALL of this, we give thanks to God—for His great provision, for His presence with us, and for this opportunity to deepen our understanding of His promises that sustain us. We know there is hard work ahead, but we will not fear that hard work or the future. For we know that God does not give us a spirit of fear—but rather, a spirit of power, and of love, and of sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)

And we will call on that power—His power in us through the Holy Spirit, who walks with us and lives in us. And the spirit of love—who came to us first as the sweet baby in Bethlehem—born to save us. He will give us the sound mind that we will need to face the future that is tomorrow—next month—next semester—next year—and every year to come.

To the beloved alumni community of North Park University, thank you! For your prayers, your encouragement and your financial support. We remain deeply grateful for you—and I am honored to serve our vital mission. Enjoy this edition of the North Parker!

IN CHRIST,

Mary K. Surridge

MARY K. SURRIDGE, PRESIDENT

