



Gather Covenant Annual Meeting

June 24, 2022

Madame Moderator, with gratitude and respect to the full delegation, I am delighted to bring the report from North Park University, a foundational ministry of our denomination's history – and a vital partner in the healthy and thriving future of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

This year at North Park, we celebrated the 130th anniversary of our founding. We remembered the faithful community of Swedish immigrants of our early church - who envisioned our school and brought it to life – we honored their devotion to God and their deep commitment to provide for the educational future of next generations, in Christian faith and professional calling.

This year, across multiple platforms, we also told 130 stories of CURRENT North Park students and alumni, highlighting the ways God moves and speaks into their lives – leading them to seek ways to significantly serve their families, their churches, their communities, their professions, and their denomination.

From this faithful history, and from the creative minds in our community today, we are drawing inspiration and energy to imagine and to plan “what’s next” for North Park.

- New academic programs that will increase our enrollment – programs that are consistent with our mission and compelling in the marketplace.
- Campus master planning that stewards our facilities well and adds to the beauty of our campus today.
- New partnerships that will increase our visibility in Chicago and the region, while developing new ways to deepen and broaden our relationship with the Covenant church.
- And as Christ followers, we are moving forward in faith – seeking the Living word of God to feed us, and the Spirit of God to lead us as we plan and proceed - ever forward.

There is no doubt that this past academic year was a challenging year for higher education overall, and a particularly challenging year at North Park – it was a year that included lament, a great deal of listening, and ultimately - a great deal of learning.

It was a year of difficult decisions across the full university – including addressing chronic financial issues and stabilizing our operations – allowing us plan a sustainable and thriving future.

And it was a year when our Board of Trustees, ultimately charged with wisely and strategically advancing the mission of North Park University, showed the courage and leadership to hold accountable ALL of us who serve our mission on a daily basis. We are living more fully into our commitments to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion across all levels, pursuing an authentic community and lived experience that honors all.

For the wisdom, courage, composure, and compassion shown by our Board of Trustees throughout this past year especially – we are exceedingly grateful.

This has been a year that will propel us forward claiming the high value of a Christian higher education and striving to own our vital and compelling place in that competitive landscape.

And we have some measurable momentum and important points of progress that you will want to know since we all last met in person,

- North Park's accreditation has been fully re-affirmed by the Higher Learning Commission for the maximum 10-year term, without exception.
- We posted record enrollment numbers for first year students this past year, and we are on track to achieve similar results for the coming fall.
- We honored the remarkable leadership of our Seminary Dean, Rev. Dr. David Kersten, and we joined to celebrate his life of significance and service before our full community.
- We are strengthening our senior leadership team - attracting seasoned Christian leaders - and elevating innovative and transformational academic programs – in the university and the Seminary.
- And just one week ago, we celebrated the historic commencement of our first cohort of Master of Divinity Students in the Seminary's School of Restorative Arts in Stateville Correctional Center.
- All of this – while successfully navigating the multi-faceted Covid-19 challenges – keeping our campus one of the safest in the region - and keeping our students progressing on track toward their academic goals.

We are elevating our three distinctives, unapologetically claiming our Christian identity...leveraging our magnificent urban location in Chicago...and championing our diverse student population – to emerge as a singularly compelling model for Christian higher education.

We are embracing a new approach to our work together – a culture of open communication with practices and protocols that encourage everyone to participate effectively and respectfully.

We will continue to heal and strengthen relationships, and we will promote engagement and pursue excellence in everything we do.

All of this sounds ambitious – and it IS! But we will aspire to nothing less - because we are North Park. And we have been working to get better and better for 130 years.

A final point of impact we should note - North Park's regional and national rankings shot up in multiple categories - and in areas that matter most to our students – like social mobility - especially for our first-generation students.

In other words, the North Park degree is helping the students of today dramatically improve the opportunities for their generation, over the last.

Our founder's priority and vision 130 years ago – is in fact, North Park's lived experience, today.

Our “Why?” – our reason for being – in many ways is the same today as it always has been. We are the University of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Founded by a faithful and devoted community of Christians - to provide education to an immigrant population - in the liberal arts, professional studies and theology – to improve life for the next generation who will contribute to their communities of faith, family and profession.

Our Kingdom Call has been sustained and advanced for well over a century – and now it is up to us to keep it moving – ALL for God's glory and the good of neighbor.

Thank you for your prayers and support of North Park University.

I look forward to our continued partnership in mission and, **GO VIKINGS!**