

Charge to the Graduates December 2018

Dear Graduates, on behalf of the full community of North Park University, it is my privilege to offer to you a charge upon the occasion of your graduation. The charge is characterized as a command, a direction, an instruction, a wise encouragement.

This is a tall order, and whereas we cannot presume to know all of the paths that you will travel and the opportunities that you will seize, we can offer the assurance that you have done a great deal to prepare yourselves for these opportunities and now it will be up to you to take hold of what comes next.

You can take encouragement from the fact that you are very well-prepared. I say this because you are exactly the kind of graduates that employers desire. When we have invited business executives and other professionals to our campus and have asked them: What are the most important qualities in a graduate that you seek to advance your business or your mission?

They have consistently told us that they are looking for employees who can think critically, who communicate well and who can help to solve problems. They look for people who can adapt to change, who can work collaboratively with others, particularly others unlike themselves — in other words, people who can function easily among a diverse work force.

And most of all, they want people who are ethical — who have a strong moral compass to guide their decisions and their actions.

They are describing YOU! And the sky's the limit.

As you step into your bright futures, it is your most recent past, your experiences here at North Park, that we hope will have significant influence on your next steps. And tonight, we issue a challenge in how to approach the many opportunities that lie before you.

At our Christian university in this world-class city of Chicago, we have the freedom and the opportunity to turn to Scripture as a guide and encouragement in all that we do. And even tonight as we prepare to depart from each other, we can take our lead from the Apostle Paul, speaking to the citizens of another global city, Phillipi offering these words upon his farewell.

Finally, dear brothers and sisters ...

Whatever is true,

Whatever is noble,

Whatever is just,

Whatever is pure,

Whatever is lovely,

Whatever is admirable,

If anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think on these things.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard here — put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

At the time of his leaving, Paul is recognizing the fact that the things which occupy our minds and hearts, will drive our actions. This is the human condition. And throughout your days at North Park you have been stretched and challenged and tested to go deeper in your faith, higher in your pursuit of truth, deeper in the knowledge and proficiency in your academic field, and broader in your embrace, understanding and appreciation of your fellow students. You have been encouraged and challenged and inspired by our remarkable faculty to think on these things, so as to make them your own. Your soul was made for them, and in nothing lower can it be happy. Only by thinking on these things can their opposites be cast out. Darkness is only to be expelled by light, ignorance by knowledge, the problems of injustice by the love of God — in individuals and in communities.

But merely thinking on these things will not propel them into action. That will be your choice, and your opportunity.

Many of your actions during your days as a student were driven by your academic obligations, the expectations and requirements of others and the completion of your coursework. You think and learn and read and reflect and study and write and express and comprehend — and as you have learned, you have also been examined — in the classroom and outside of it. Testing your knowledge through written exams, and the application of your skills through internships, clinicals and practicums.

You did a lot of thinking, reading, and thinking, and studying, and thinking, and testing.

But now your exams are complete and your actions cannot be limited to meditating upon these abstractions, or offering your interpretation of the materials to a beloved professor.

It will be the embracing and living and acting on these things in the paths that you choose, that will be the indelible mark of your life, and a deep reflection of your education at North Park.

Whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, admirable.

From this night forward, you must not only think on these things. But you must act on them too.

Find the ways to be True — to your faith, to your instincts, to your loved ones, to your calling.

Find the ways to be Noble. It's not so popular or recognizable these days. When you are confronted with an opportunity to take a short cut in your work, to do the least rather than the most, to be dismissive or disrespectful of others. To be popular rather than professional. Find the way to be noble. To do that which is excellent. To grasp the cause of a person who needs your help, your time, your interest, your love, your defense.

Find the ways to be Just. To insist upon the appreciation and embrace of those on the margins of our society. To use your outstanding North Park education to work to address the needs of the city and challenges and problems of the world. These are all problems that are answered by God, but spoken through people. North Park graduates are those people.

Find ways to be Pure and Lovely and Admirable in your approach to all with whom you work, serve and engage.

Think on these. Act on these. Make them your habit, make them your way, make them your reputation, make them your life.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard here — put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Congratulations on your wonderful accomplishment. May God Bless you and Keep you this night and always. Go with our blessing and our confidence that you will be true, noble, just, pure, lovely, admirable. You are ready — and this is your time. Now, on to the conferring of your degrees.