

North Park University

Commencement Remarks and Charge to the Graduates – May 2023

Good morning, families, friends, honored guests, distinguished faculty, Golden Circle alumni, and most importantly, the graduating class of 2023 – Welcome to the North Park University Commencement ceremony! This is the day that the Lord has made – let us rejoice and be glad in it!

What a journey you graduates have traveled in reaching this important milestone!

We are delighted to celebrate with you and congratulate you, on your perseverance.

You have worked diligently to complete your degrees, during a remarkable and challenging time in the history of the world. We are so proud of you ... and we have high hope and confidence in the future because of your commitment to the completion of your studies, and your devotion to each other in this beloved community!

We give thanks to God for bringing us safely to this day.

Graduates, we know that you did not do this alone – that your hopes and dreams - fulfilled in part today – are rooted in the support of those who love you and encourage you – the parents...family members...faculty members, and friends - who have helped you reach this tremendous milestone.

Let's take this moment to stand, turn and find those faithful champions who have joined you here today.....and let's offer them a round of applause for all of their support!

And now, dear graduates it's your turn to step forward into the lives that God has designed for you – equipped with your many gifts, talents, strengths... and your North Park degree! On behalf of the full community of North Park University, it is my privilege to congratulate you and offer a charge to you as you go...

We cannot presume to know all the paths that you will travel or the opportunities you will grasp, but we can offer the assurance that you are well prepared -- you have demonstrated your willingness to work very hard... to immerse yourselves in an environment of life and work in our multi-ethnic community....valuing and embracing your own culture and identity, while uplifting and honoring your classmates in theirs....achieving collaborative success together, and individual achievement of your own.

North Park has been a place of preparation, and in a few moments, we will award the degree that is the evidence of your completion of all requirements pertaining to your degree.

But at our Christian university in this world-class city, we have the freedom and gift of turning to Scripture as a guide and encouragement in all that we do.

This year – we read a book together on campus, written by a North Park alum – Rev. Dominique Gilliard – and in Dom's many visits to campus, we had opportunities to talk – and reflect on how the North Park community and educational experience should help to prepare a student for a life of significance and service – and what the characteristics of that life might come to be.

We see great evidence of that in our 50-year Golden Circle class of 1973 – and some of the next steps for our graduates today will be developing eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to respond, to the needs of the

people around us – in our communities, churches, professions, and the world.

Using the gifts that are uniquely yours, paired with your excellent degree, to meet those needs.

Today, as we prepare to depart from each other, we can take great encouragement from Philippians 4:4-9, and the vital promise it provides.

One of the gifts I have treasured in my role as President was a gift given to me by the students upon my Inauguration – a Bible that includes the *Message* interpretation (by Eugene Peterson) alongside a traditional translation.

In preparing for today – I read this message and reflected on it many times.

Here is Eugene Peterson's message interpretation of Paul's letter to the Philippians, 4:4-9:

"Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! ⁵ Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute! ⁶ Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. ⁷ Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

⁸ Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious - the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. ⁹ Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

The degree you will receive today demonstrates that you have completed all the requirements of learning for your degree. You will have it forever as evidence of your hard work and your academic accomplishment.

But it is not a guide for living. The guide for living is the Living Word of God! And today, we heard a great promise.

In the life ahead, there will be great joy – new beginnings, new opportunities, shared relationships, professional promotion, and personal development.

But there will also be challenge and loss, anxiety and worry – there may be some of that even now as you think about moving to a new state....seeking or starting a first job...seeking a *better* job....balancing family needs and professional opportunities...or processing the loss of daily life on campus as you know it today. But in all of that – we receive an invitation from Paul’s letter to turn worry and anxiety into prayer – and claim the promise of God’s peace.

Be anxious for nothing – the Lord is always near.

North Park has been a place of preparation – not a place of destination. Your destinations are out there – the Almighty God will go with you – and will never leave you. Remember what you have heard and seen and learned here. Be anxious for nothing – turn every worry into prayer – and the Almighty God promises to be with you and give you PEACE.

And what is a life of significance and service? One that has eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to respond to the needs of the people in our communities, our homes, our places of work and service. Using the degree you have achieved, the tremendous gifts you possess and will

continue to increase - to glorify God, and serve the good of your neighbor.

Graduates, we love you – you are ready – and God will be with you. Amen.

Remarks to the Golden Circle class of 1973 at Commencement May 2023

“Whatever is true... noble... right... pure... lovely... admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy – think about such things.”

Golden Circle class of 1973, when we think of YOU, we think of these things that Paul expressed in his letter to the Philippians. Your lives reflect the commitment, creativity, resilience, generosity and truth that a life of deep faith, friendship and service embodies.

As we knew you would be joining us today, we took a look back at what life was like during *your* senior year at North Park 50 years ago:

North Park class of 1973, in your graduation year:

- The United States launched the first Space Station – Skylab I – on May 14, 1973, at the Kennedy Space Center. It paved the way for the International Space Station active today.
- A U.S. Patent was awarded to the first Automated Teller Machine (ATM).
- U.S. President Richard Nixon declared an end to the Vietnam War, and the last active-duty U.S. soldier serving in Vietnam, came home. (March 29, 1973.)
- The cell phone had its start in 1973 when Motorola engineer Martin Cooper invented the handheld cordless phone. Yes...you could hold it in your hand – but it weighed 2 ½ pounds!
- The beautiful Sydney Opera House opened in Australia.
- The Sears Tower opened in Chicago as the tallest building in the world for the next 25 years.

In music and entertainment -

- “A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving premiered on CBS.

- “The Godfather” won the Academy Award for Best Picture.
- Gunsmoke, All in the Family, and the Jeffersons were big on TV in 1973.
- Top songs came from a diverse and talented group of performers... “Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree” by Tony Orlando and Dawn,
- Roberta Flack’s “Killing Me Softly,”
- Carly Simon’s “You’re So Vain,”
- “You Are the Sunshine of My Life” by Stevie Wonder, and
- Elton John’s “Crocodile Rock.”

In the world of sports,

- UCLA captured its seventh consecutive national championship, (and its eighth in 10 years), under Coach John Wooden.
- Secretariat won the Triple Crown
- And Billie Jean King defeated Bobby Riggs in the “Battle of the Sexes” before 30,492 people at the Houston Astrodome and a television audience of 90 million in 36 countries.
- You could buy a gallon of gas for 40 cents.
- A first-class stamp cost only 8 cents.
- A gallon of milk was \$1.40, eggs were 69 cents a dozen, and a big package of Oreos was 59 cents.
- The average cost of a home in 1973 was \$32,000, and you could buy a new car for \$3,200.
- Average college tuition per year at a public four-year university was \$503, and private was \$2,000.

And news from the weekly student paper and the yearbook:

- 37 students and four faculty members drove in a caravan of five vans to Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument to study the desert biome.
- 140 students and faculty enjoyed a lecture on Irony by U. of Chicago professor Wayne Booth for the annual Lecture-Artist series...(article in College News...)
- North Park's movie program, selected by drama teacher Craig Stewart, included classic films with Marlon Brando, Humphrey Bogart, and James Dean.
- Students could rent refrigerators for their dorm rooms from Hitachi for \$17 per semester.
- Bill Murray and John Candy were in the cast of Second City
- Nancy J. Larson was homecoming queen (fall, 1972)

You enjoyed your years at North Park, and you stepped off this campus and into your lives with hopes and dreams, and destinies.

You invested your energies and intellect in ways that deeply served your families, your friends, your churches, your communities, and your COLLEGE.

You advanced in your professions and seized opportunities to learn and serve, to live and give – of yourselves, your time, talents, and treasure – Golden Circle Inductees on this important day, we salute your remarkable lives of significance, service, and SUCCESS!

And while you were working toward that first job, and the next job, your career, your calling...while also building families and homes...you always found time and resources to love and support your alma mater. You remembered that many supported your path while you were a student here, and you never, ever forgot that.

Over the course of your lifetime, you have invested and supported generations of North Park students who came after you, including the graduates who sit in these very rows with you today. You offered internships and career opportunities. You sponsored scholarships and facilities. And your prayers and generous gifts have made it possible for generations of North Park students who came after you, to fulfill their own hopes and dreams. For your noble, lovely, excellent commitment, we are deeply grateful.

Graduates, families, and friends, please join me in thanking the Golden Circle class seated with us today, who have collectively made more than 5,500 individual gifts to North Park in their lifetime, totaling over \$1.6 million dollars since the day of their graduation. For your faithfulness and generosity to our students and our mission – we thank you! You have our deep gratitude and respect.