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***The Story of Our Lives***  
**Fall Academic Convocation**  
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NORTH PARK  
UNIVERSITY  
CHICAGO

**David L. Parkyn, President**

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At birth we are each given a blank book. At the time of our death we present a full and complete novel. We write the story of our lives in this novel one chapter, one page, one line, one word at a time. Though we don't have full control over what is written, nonetheless, we write our own novel. Today you begin a new chapter. We know it isn't your first chapter, and we assume it will not be the last chapter in the story which is your life.

So, what will you write in this chapter? Surely change will come, but what sort of change? Will the change be subtle or seismic? Who will influence this change? What new people will come into your story? What people from earlier chapters in your life story will we hear more of, and who will drop out of your story? Perhaps most importantly, how will the events of this chapter frame the rest of your story?

We know that the coming chapter of your story is intimately linked with preceding chapters. Though the chapters of any book are set side-by-side, and though the story is intended to be read from beginning to end, this does not mean that the story is told on a single straight line of thought.

The story of any life, yours included, continuously circles back even as it moves forward. Certainly we embrace the new, but the new is influenced by the past. Who we will be is shaped, in part, by who we have been. And this is as it should be.

In like manner, certain elements in this chapter will be entirely new to your story. We move forward, even as we circle back. The future is influenced by the past, but it is not bound to the past. And this is as it should be.

One challenge for you, then, is to decide what you will keep from your past. (A parenthetical piece of advice – you should keep your family!) Another challenge is to decide what new you will bring into your life. And a further challenge is to decide whether the trajectory of your life will continue on its present course, or whether and how the trajectory will be adjusted. In other words, to what end will your story lead, and who will go there with you?

We have a collective hope at North Park University. It is this: that your life will lead to a story of significance and service. These two words summarize our purpose, the goal to which we dedicate our time with you. You've heard our mission statement before, and you'll hear it often, so often that we're quite sure you'll remember it long

after you graduate (and we do expect you to graduate!). The mission of North Park University is to prepare students for lives of significance and service.

How is this done? How will this chapter in your life be written?

Of course you are central to the process. After all, it is your life we're talking about. So writing your next chapter begins with your past life and your dreams for the future. The University will supply an abundance of story lines. This will come through courses you take, experiences you'll have, books you'll read, places you'll visit all while a student at North Park University. We also will introduce you to a host of new characters, indeed some very interesting ones. Any of these story lines and any of these characters can be added to your chapter. But this is always your choice because you're doing the writing.

However, you should expect this chapter in your life to be shaped by three distinctive ideals characteristic of the community of learning here North Park University. They are these.

We are Christian. This does not mean we require the same of you, though we certainly welcome it. We do encourage you to consider the divine, the transcendent, that which is larger than life. You'll discover that at North Park faith is about certainty but it is also about questioning. We hold that it is possible at one and the same time to be both a believer (someone who makes commitments) and a listener (someone who discovers). We hold that people of faith, Christian faith specifically, should be fervent but they should also be searching. People of faith should have a good understanding of their own identity, but they should also be intrigued by the identifies others have chosen. We find what is holy in us, and we discover what is holy in others. We study scripture, and we experience life. We explore science and wander through the arts. We learn to heal, to teach, to do business. We read and compute, we write and paint, we worship and dance, we argue and ponder. And through it all we discover God.

We are urban. As students at North Park University you must (I don't allow this to be optional!) embrace the city of Chicago as both text and context for learning. What I mean is simply this. Chicago itself will be one of the more important text books you will read. And the city itself will become one of the most important classrooms you will learn in. This setting will provide you with life-enriching and profound learning experiences. The obvious examples include the museums you can visit, the concerts and sporting events you can attend, the lakefront you can enjoy. But Chicago is much more than these. Chicago is also a place where you can learn by doing as you volunteer in the community and as you embark on internships and field placement assignments in our city's streets, its businesses and social service agencies, its schools and churches. So go ahead, jump on the L and start learning.

We are culturally inclusive. How could we not be? We live in, and you study in, the most diverse zip code in America. This is just as we want it to be. This mix of ideas and cultures, of expressions of faith and politics, or language and dress, of values and

commitments, is just the right setting to provide you with the challenges and opportunities to discover who you are, as well as who you want to become. But much more than this, we are culturally inclusive because we embrace the whole of the Kingdom of God. To be culturally inclusive is to follow a mandate of the Gospel of Jesus to love one another, and this is the perfect company in which to write the next chapter of your story.

Perhaps you're wondering where all this will lead you. I hope you're wondering this. You are embarking on an adventure-filled exploration that will lead to the rest of your life. Where will it take you? Perhaps you will go around the world or home to Minneapolis or Seattle. Maybe your story will keep you in Chicago. Only you can decide. But I can tell you where the North Park chapter has taken some others.

Erika graduated three years ago with a major in Spanish. She moved to California and developed an HIV-AIDS awareness program in the Spanish-speaking communities along the Mexico/United States border. More recently she returned to Chicago to work with Humbolt Park Social Services.

In the six years since he graduated, Daniel has worked in Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, traveling with a T-rex named Sue whose permanent home is at the Field Museum of Natural History here in Chicago.

For the past ten years Pete has led the kinetic wellness department at New Trier high school just north of Chicago where he also oversees the girls' lacrosse program with 90 athletes and 10 coaches. He has twice been recognized as coach-of-the-year by the Illinois girls' lacrosse association.

Two years ago Stephanie graduated with a degree in biology. Today she is in her third year at Rush University's medical school. Just days ago she returned from a summer in Mexico where she help to start a medical clinic.

Leila graduated a year ago with a degree in psychology and since then has put her talents and heart for service to work to raise over \$1.2 million for children's charities.

Four years ago Craig and Sara started Topiarius as a garden design firm primarily focused on serving customers in urban areas.

Tim graduated two years ago. This year he will be featured in a book highlighting "50 activists, artists, and innovators who are changing their world through faith."

After finishing at North Park, Peter earned degrees in law and business, and today heads a council which works directly with the governors of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, all of which border one of the great lakes.

Chris graduated 15 years ago and this summer began work as the principal at Mather High School just a few blocks from our campus.

Kristi went to medical school and now works as a pediatrician at Lutheran General Children's Hospital here in Chicago.

Just four years ago Ken clerked at the Chicago Board of Trade while still a student at North Park. Today he is a self-employed trader of wheat options on the Board of Trade.

Angela completed a degree in biology three years ago and today works as a lead microbiologist for a major pharmaceutical firm where she oversees environmental monitoring.

Since graduating ten years ago, Ana has worked with children and their parents from 25 countries, all without taking more than a few steps from our campus, at the Albany Park Multicultural Academy.

Michele is a vocal coach, jazz vocalist, and recording artist and is the sole proprietor of a music studio here in Chicago.

Brandon graduated this past year and is now a wide receiver and kick returner for the Chicago Slaughter of the Indoor Football League.

Krist went to law school, then completed an MBA, and now works with one of the nation's largest law firms. Recently a national legal publication recognized him as an "Outstanding Young Health Care Lawyer".

These are the stories written by recent alums as the story of their life is unfolding following graduation from North Park University. What story will you write for this chapter in your life? A few years from now when I greet a new group of students who will be sitting right where you are this afternoon, what story will I tell about you?

Welcome to North Park University. It's time to start writing your next chapter.