

**CHARGE To The Graduating Class  
Commencement 2013  
James Jordan**

To the Class of 2013:

A Note before I begin to the parents and friends of the graduates:

You may detect in the air at this moment an air of uncertainty, a bit of fear of the unknown at this moment. But I must tell you... 'tis not the aura of this ceremony and impending graduation!!!!!!

Perhaps nothing, and I mean nothing, strikes more fear and trepidation in the hearts of students, and yes, perhaps even some of my colleagues, than when I am handed a microphone on tour or in a concert. One student from one of my Chapel Choir tours once remarked: *"You know Dr. Jordan, sometimes your concert speeches are kinda like going down a ski slope with no ski poles."* 'Tis a thrilling thought, isn't it!!!! Just me and this microphone in the Princeton University Chapel with YOU ☺

I have worked with so many of you. In fact, there is one among you who has been in one of my choirs for the past eight years...from High School Vocal Institute through Williamson Voices. Yet there are a few of you I have not have the privilege of knowing, and that is my loss of sorts. But somehow, at this place, you know everyone through this community, so I feel as if I know each of you.

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While I give many speeches, keynote addresses and lectures, there are few things more daunting or more humbling in my life than to be asked to give this charge. I deeply thank you for this privilege.

You will walk out the rear door of this Chapel profoundly different than when you came in today. I can't even begin to describe to you the rush of emotions, pride of accomplishment and the feelings of another mountain scaled and conquered, but be forewarned. The release of the stress of "STRESSMINSTER" is at hand, but you are trading stress for the burden of new Life responsibilities.

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There is an interesting statistic that I have observed over the years. Those students who not only remember what their teachers have taught them, but those who NEVER FORGET their teachers as people, achieve much more in so many ways than those who claim their knowledge has no roots in others. Many institutions line their hallways with pictures of former faculty and students to remind them of those that have come before them. This room is filled with alumni who have come before you.

This is one of the great faculties of the world, passionate teachers ALL. Know that great teachers and great artists stand on the shoulders of those who have come before them and taught them. I am nothing more than Sarah, Elaine, Don, Jim, Wilhelm, Volker, Janet, Gail, Ed, David and Frauke.....Every each day I stand HIGH on THEIR shoulders to teach you and now you, in turn you stand on our shoulders. AND, You need to know that teaching is a great two-way street, and we have all learned from you.

I CHARGE YOU to ALWAYS stand on OUR shoulders, and to share what we have all given you with others. We are all teachers here, and that now includes all of you, no matter what path your life takes.

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My dear friend Weston Noble turned 90 this year. When he retired from Luther College after 57 years of teaching at the same institution, I could not resist asking him a very simple question. The question? “ So after 57 years of teaching and music-ing, what were all those years about?”

Without hesitation, he looked at me with those blue eyes that it seems only Scandinavians have and said, “James, it is very simple. I think all I have ever done and continue to do is AFFIRM MYSELF AND OTHERS DAILY.”

I CHARGE YOU to affirm yourself and others daily. Spend time with yourself each day so you don't forget who you are. For it is truly those affirmations of self and others that is the true hothouse of expression, and more importantly, where deep and abiding honesty begin.

As Parker Palmer stated in one of his great books on teaching: We need a coat with two pockets. In one pocket there is dust, and in the other pocket there is gold. We need a coat with two pockets to remind us who we are.”

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There are many, many choral musicians in the world who have not visited a musical mountaintop, yet alone several. You have filled your own voids with experiences and feelings that you now carry within yourselves at the deepest spiritual level. You all know what it means to be a committed artist in this complex world at the highest level. You shared experiences of a Yannick Nézet-Séguin, a Gustavo Dudamel, a Simon Rattle, and a Paul Mealor.

In the words of Martin Buber, the great philosopher, Community is..... where community happens. The gift of being together on this part of life's journey will continue to nourish and refresh you in the most difficult of times. Use this place as your life's plumb line and remember the feelings of what it has meant to be together to anchor you in unsteady times.

I CHARGE YOU NEVER to be arrogant, but to share in whatever way you can, what you have learned in this place. Yes, certainly knowledge about the art of singing, but more importantly, about how what we do in communities of musicians deeply alters lives and how those experiences can affect the way we live with and love each other in our daily relationships.

I CHARGE YOU to Remember this Community...remember what it felt like in the good times to be together and to make music with one another.

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When I ended my study with Elaine Brown on the last lesson I had with her, a question slid out of my mouth that I had no idea where it came from. Scared....a bit insecure...NO...a lot insecure.....but knowing I wanted to do something good with my life, I asked her... “How can I ever repay for all the things you’ve taught me?” She looked at me over those large glasses (which were in vogue at the time), she wagged her huge index finger at me—and said “Light a candle for others...that will be thanks enough for me.”

I CHARGE YOU to light candles, many candles. For those who seek out your help and teaching and for the many who will cross your path and never know that they need your help, but actually, need it the most,.....Light a Candle.

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You are part of the Harry Potter Generation. What JK Rowling really wanted us (and you) to know is what YOU already know...that magic is a very real thing in our world, and those that believe in such things can change the world around them.

I CHARGE YOU to dream and to make magical things happen that are rooted in your experiences that you have gleaned from this place. Try to make everyone you teach and reach musical wizards who can bring a more brilliant image of what it is to be alive into the world. Be passionate about telling a small truth in your music rather than a Large Lie.

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FINALLY,

Commencement ceremonies are filled with tradition and this one is no exception. Every university has its own ritual for transforming graduands (yes, that IS a WORD!) into graduates. Paul Meador shared with me a tradition that began in 1500 at the University of Aberdeen; that each graduate was touched by the founder’s academic cap as a right of passage. So, perhaps we can begin a new tradition together, the symbolism of “doffing a cap” in the air to the graduates at the end of this charge. With the help of our archivist librarians, I have the academic cap worn by John Finley Williamson to “doff at you.”

The use of this cap reminds us all that we stand on others' shoulders and that you continue in the traditions and experiences of this place.

SO I CHARGE EACH of YOU TO:

Light a Candle

Be Teachers ALWAYS and Stand on Our Shoulders

Dream and Make Magic every day of your life

Affirm and Love Yourself and affirm others daily-

I CHARGE YOU to Remember that when your being is right, your doing will take care of itself.

I CHARGE YOU to Give to others; to give of yourself to such a degree that you become less and others become more.

I CHARGE YOU to Carry this place within yourself as a refuge and place of strength. Let the experiences of this place be your NORTH STAR

I CHARGE YOU to Tear a hole in the sky so you can pull out the heart of the moon for others and give them a great gift.

I CHARGE YOU to Find what you seek and to Continue your journey to its end;

I CHARGE YOU to Remember all those things that have touched your heart;

I CHARGE YOU to Live out your life with the songs you have sung here.

And, A Prayer that is a CHARGE UNTO ITSELF FOR US ALL:

(CAP DOFFING)

In the words of St. Augustine:

All Shall be Amen and Alleluia.  
We Shall Rest and We Shall See,  
We Shall See and We Shall Know,  
We Shall Know and We Shall Love,  
We Shall Love and We Shall Praise  
Behold our end which is no end

Amen and Alleluia!!!!

Consider Yourself Charged!

CONGRATULATIONS MY FRIENDS

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