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## Chuck Norris addresses graduates

Liberty University

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# Chuck Norris addresses graduates

May 10, 2008 | Mitzi Bible

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TV producer, film star and martial arts expert Chuck Norris addressed the largest-ever graduating class at Liberty University today.

LU Chancellor and President Jerry Falwell Jr. said this was a first for LU: “Today is historic because it is the first commencement address at Liberty that will be delivered in cowboy boots.”

Carlos Ray Norris, who is most known for his good-guy role defending justice on TV’s Walker, Texas Ranger, then received an honorary degree, Doctorate of Humanities, from Liberty.

Dr. Boyd C. Rist, LU’s Provost, read a list of Norris’ accomplishments before Norris took the podium.

An outspoken Christian, Norris was met with loud cheers from the crowd. “Chuck! Chuck! Chuck!” filled the air when Norris first appeared on stage.

He first admitted that speaking at a college graduation wasn’t something he had done before.

“I have to tell you I don’t do this very often—in fact, I don’t do it at all,” he grinned. “But I hope that by the time you hear my testimony, you’ll see how instrumental God has been in my life.”

Norris shared his “journey in life,” about being born in Oklahoma to a poor family, being baptized at age 12, and having a mother who was strong in her faith. She always reminded him that, “God has plans for you.”

Norris also discussed having an alcoholic father and spoke about his shyness in school and not being athletic in his younger days.

It was not until he entered the Air Force after high school and was in Korea, that he was introduced to martial arts. That led him to become a martial arts instructor when he came back to the United States and to win many tournaments in the 1960s, including World Karate Champion. Through this, he met Bruce Lee and eventually performed a fight scene for him in a movie. This kicked off his entertainment career.

As he starred in more films, he said, “My career started building and unfortunately I got sucked into the entertainment world of Hollywood, and I wound up drifting from my faith. I had been in films and I had fame and fortune, but I was very unhappy and I couldn’t figure out why. I thought the harder I worked, the happier I’d be. But the harder I worked, the more famous I got, the bigger the hole in my heart became, and I never could figure out why that was happening.”

He wed his wife, Gena, and one day she read the Bible aloud to him. It was at that point, he said, “It was like the Holy Spirit hit me. He said, ‘Chuck, it’s time to come home.’ ... So I did. I renewed my faith. ... I was hot for the Lord and I still am to this day.”

He left the graduates with Proverbs 19:21: “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but the Lord directs his steps,” he said. “The Lord has directed my steps now through the last 10 years. And I hope you’ll let Him direct your steps, because if you do, you can’t go wrong — I promise you.”

Before the ceremony, Falwell Jr. said Liberty has a responsibility to honor men of faith like Norris.

“Chuck Norris, just this week, spoke out publicly against a false religion that is being promoted by a national TV personality. He has been the type of role model to young people that has become rare in the entertainment field,” Falwell said. “He has remained true to his faith and his conservative principles in an industry that is, in large part, hostile to the traditional values of most Americans. If Liberty University does not recognize and honor conservative Christian leaders in entertainment, then who will?”

This was not the first time this year Liberty students had a chance to see Norris — that is, if you count his appearance on the big screens in the Vines Center in a commercial endorsing 2008 Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, who spoke at LU this fall.

In fact, it was during Huckabee’s second trip to Lynchburg, to visit Thomas Road Baptist Church, that Falwell (who gave his personal endorsement of Huckabee) decided he would try to contact Norris.

“I asked him [Huckabee] for contact information for Chuck Norris. He gave me Mrs. Norris’ cell phone number. I called her and introduced myself. We seemed to have much in common with the Norris family. I then sent a formal invitation [to speak at graduation] and the Norris family accepted.”

Falwell said the idea started with LU students, though.

“A student named Joshua Grant started a Facebook group last fall asking that Chuck Norris be invited to speak at LU. Many other students asked me to invite him.”

He said the announcement in March that Norris would be this year’s commencement speaker energized the student body.

“I know that the vast majority of them are very excited. Many have thanked me, and the number who had planned to walk in the ceremony steadily climbed since we made the announcement.”

Outside of his TV and film career, Norris is a six-time World Karate Champion and a renowned martial arts instructor. He founded KICK START, a karate program that helps build moral character in at-risk youth. Other humanitarian works include being a spokesperson for the United Way, the Veterans Administration and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He also writes a column

for the conservative news website WorldNetDaily, talking about political issues and family and faith values.

In addition to campaigning for Huckabee, Norris has also campaigned for President George W. Bush and for his father. He has been a motivational speaker for T.D. Jakes Ministry and has authored Christian books, including his autobiography “Against All Odds,” detailing his faith journey.

With all that he has done in his varying careers — and most importantly as a Christian — Norris was an obvious choice for commencement speaker, Falwell said.

“Liberty’s mission is to train graduates to become leaders in every profession and to represent Christ well in everything they do. Two of our students secured major parts in a Hollywood movie recently. It is not out of the realm of possibility that the Chuck Norrises of the future are among the class of 2008 at Liberty University.”