



GRADUATION ADDRESS | Friday 22 March 2019

Chancellor, I am honoured to present the occasional address at this graduation ceremony of the University of Divinity.

Graduation ceremonies are associated with a rich tradition – they have their origins in the first universities, founded in Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. At that time the graduates were mostly clerics or preparing for the clerical state. Today’s academic dress has its origins in those far distant times and evolved from the clerical robes of yesteryear. Our black gowns are voluminous as they were intended for unheated, draughty but hallowed halls of learning and not for a warm autumnal evening in Melbourne. Tonsured heads were kept warm with a hood or bonnet. Their dress differentiated those in the cleric state from lay people in a university town. Thus, in those times the divide, “town and gown”, was quite literal.

From these origins, this evening we find ourselves celebrating a long-standing tradition and I look across the Cathedral with pride at this evening’s graduates in their finery. Much has changed in the intervening eight centuries but celebrating graduates’ achievements is just as relevant and important as it was long ago.

In European universities of the 12th century, Latin was the language of scholarship. The word ‘graduate’ is derived from the Latin *gradus*, meaning ‘step’. Historically, the first ‘step’ was graduating with a bachelor’s degree and many of our graduates this evening have also made that progression. The second step was the master’s degree, giving the graduate a license to teach or be a master. Today we would say a lecturer.

This evening our graduates have been presented with diplomas, certifying their qualification which we now generally call testamurs. A century or more ago they might have called their diploma a ‘sheep skin’. Rather than being made of high-quality paper, early diplomas were made of hand-bossed parchment, a thin, stiff, paper-like material made from sheepskin, hence the diplomas were dubbed sheepskins.



When the Chancellor entered the Cathedral, he was proceeded by the mace-bearer carrying the University mace. Originally a weapon to protect a dignitary, the ceremonial mace has been adopted by universities as a symbol of the defence of academic freedom and of institutional authority for their awards.

The University of Divinity

Let us move from the history of universities to the University of Divinity, which has own remarkable story. It is the direct successor of the second oldest degree-granting authority in the State of Victoria, the Melbourne College of Divinity. The oldest degree-granting authority, the University of Melbourne, was prohibited from offering theological awards. Thus, a separate entity based on ecumenical co-operation in theological education, namely the Melbourne College of Divinity, was founded by an Act of the Victorian Parliament in 1910. Its founding degree was the Bachelor of Divinity, first awarded from 1913. A century later, following approval by the Victorian Government, the Melbourne College of Divinity was granted university status and is today known as the University of Divinity.

All students and staff join the University through one of its Colleges, which are based in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney and supported by a wide range of churches and religious orders. As a collegiate university, the University of Divinity is unique in the Australian context. As a successful ecumenical endeavour with eleven constituent Colleges from eight denominations, it is distinctive also in the international context.

At a time when Australian society is becoming increasingly secular, the University of Divinity adds a critical dimension to higher education and Australian intellectual life. Further, the long-standing cooperation between the Christian Churches which is the foundation of the University of Divinity represents exemplary ecumenical collaboration not only for the advancement of theology and ministry but also for opening minds and hearts as the basis for building a more open and welcoming society.

Graduation ceremonies, like ours this evening, honour the University's academic excellence, collegiate structure and Christian traditions but, most especially, they celebrate the achievements of our graduates.

What does it mean to be a graduate of the University of Divinity?

The University of Divinity promotes the highest standards of learning, teaching and research. Through its scholarship and critical engagement with Christian theological traditions, it seeks to make a transformative difference in the contemporary world. This is the environment in which our undergraduate and postgraduate students are immersed, in which they undertake their studies or research, so that they emerge as graduates who have learnt and can articulate and communicate the wisdom of ancient traditions, engage contemporary challenges, and put their abilities at the service of others.



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This evening we celebrate a cohort of graduates of whom we are very proud. We rejoice with them and their families and guests on their achievements and congratulate them most warmly. Dedication and much hard work underpin their achievements. I thank the staff of the University who accompanied the graduates during their studies or research. Their animation of the University's mission and values gave the graduates their uniquely UD higher education experience. I thank the graduates' families for their encouragement of and assistance to the graduates during their courses.

Let me highlight two graduates from the University's pioneering Indigenous Theologies program, Aunty Reverend Patricia Courtenay and Naomi Wolfe. In 2018, the University of Divinity commenced offering higher education in Indigenous Theologies taught by Indigenous theologians. Tonight, we celebrate the first graduates of this program which is overseen and increasingly taught by Australian Indigenous lecturers. Initiated by Whitley College, it sees the University developing Australian Indigenous theological scholarship and practice, centred in the person, work, life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, that is also rooted in Indigenous cultures and histories – congratulations, Aunty Patricia and Naomi and all this evening's graduates.

Alumni

The University of Divinity, founded as the Melbourne College of Divinity in 1910, has graduated some 11,000 students since the very first graduation ceremony held on 6 May 1913. Our alumni are found in every corner of the globe and every walk of life – I now welcome this evening's 410 graduates into the alumni family. Plans are in progress to initiate an alumni network formally in 2019. Details of how to become involved in the forthcoming network are provided in your program this evening.

There are different kinds of gifts

In celebrating the graduates' milestone and as they take the next 'step' on their life's journey, let us reflect on the words of St Paul in 1 *Corinthians* 12:4-7:

4 *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

Let me consider St Paul's words from two standpoints – the perspective of the University of Divinity and of the graduates.

What richness the Spirit has bestowed on our community through the enterprise that is this University! Just consider the related but "*different kinds of gifts*" that each of the eleven Colleges brings to the University. "*There are different kinds of working*" in the participating churches and religious orders but "*it is the same God at work*". "*There are different kinds of service*" contributed by the eight participating dominations but each of these traditions is a "*manifestation of the Spirit ... given for the common good*". Let us treasure the gift of the unique ecumenical endeavour that is the University of Divinity – graduates, be very proud of your *alma mater*.



Now let me consider the reading from the standpoint of our graduates. St Paul reminds us each of us has been endowed with gifts and abilities. Our graduates have been blessed with the capacity to undertake their studies or research and gain their awards. The talents bestowed on them have borne fruit so that they can now bring their graduate attributes to building God's kingdom here on earth, to enriching his Church and to serving the wider community.

As we reel from last Friday's tragic attacks on two mosques in Christchurch and seek to engage with many other contemporary challenges, we are acutely aware of how much we need the community-building gifts of people like our graduates. Graduates, take your gifts to the work God intended for you; no-one else has your unique gifts; no-one else can realise the ministry that God intended for you.

Godspeed and our warmest congratulations!

Emeritus Professor Gabrielle McMullen AM FRACI
University of Divinity
March 2019

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Emeritus Professor Gabrielle McMullen AM FRACI
Acting Vice-Chancellor and Council Member, University of Divinity

Following postdoctoral research in Germany, Professor McMullen joined the Faculty of Medicine at Monash University and also became Dean of its Catholic residence, Mannix College, in 1981. She was then Rector of Australian Catholic University's Ballarat campus from 1995-2000 and its Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) until February 2011. From 2011-2017 she was a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

Her community contributions have encompassed education, health, theology and community service boards and currently include the Councils of this University and of Papua New Guinea's Divine Word University, President of the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows, and Chair of Diocese of Sale Catholic Education and of the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research.



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