

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, University staff, guests, and fellow graduates.

This evening is indeed a very special occasion.

My association with the University began in 2004, when it was still the Melbourne College of Divinity. On the suggestion of a friend, I enrolled as a student in the Master of Divinity programme, studying by distance mode. Being able to learn online was a great advancement. (Some of my previous studies had been completed by distance education, whereby I would receive a parcel containing a large pile of photocopied readings and notes. I then had to work my way through the pile, write the required essays and then send them back to the university). Whilst there was still limited interaction with other students, online learning was much better. One of the highlights of studying through MCD was the broad range of subjects and lecturers that were part of the United Faculty of Theology.

Life, as we all know, has a habit of not working out as predicted. When we, as a family, were moving overseas with our work, I converted my Master of Divinity subjects to a Graduate Diploma of Theology, and graduated just as we left.

Eight and a half years later, and having lived in three different countries, we returned to Australia and I was able to return to my studies. This time it was to a Master of Theological Studies with the now University of Divinity. Whilst I was attached to the Australian Lutheran College, I was able to take some units from other Colleges as well. This is one of the great benefits of a collegiate university.

My journey to today's graduation may not have been a direct route, but it has been very worthwhile. I have been challenged and stretched in many ways, none-the-least by trying to balance online studies with full-time work. So, what is next? When I started out, 17 years ago, I was taken by the picture of the fishermen James and John, who were preparing their nets by the side of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called them to follow him (Mark 1:19). As fishermen it was really important that their nets were prepared, so that they would be ready for use whenever they were needed (Who wants to be spending time sorting out your nets in the pre-dawn darkness, when all you really want to do is go out fishing?). This picture has stayed with me, and has motivated me as I have worked through my studies. I, like James and John, wanted to be preparing things, for whenever they might be needed. At this stage it is early days; I am currently exploring what God might want me to do with my learning and qualifications. But, my nets are ready and waiting.

So, this evening I would like to congratulate all of my fellow graduates. Well done on making it this far, to your graduation.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the University and its Colleges, for the opportunity to undertake and complete my studies. Thank you.

Julie Anne Connah, Master of Theological Studies, Australian Lutheran College