

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

Studying my Masters of Divinity through Trinity College Theological School and the University of Divinity has been the single most faith forming undertaking of my life so far.

Prior to enrolling, my application to study theology had been rejected from three Christian colleges in Sydney due to an aspect of my identity I was born with; I am queer. In the evangelical churches I belonged to, I had been excluded from leadership and ministry, as well as partaking in communion. So, when I was accepted into the University of Divinity, I knew the story of a God and a church I did not believe in, but I was not certain of much else.

In my studies, we traversed the complexities, nuances, and realities in which the Bible was written, canonised, and interpreted through history. I engaged with the theology of Ancient and Contemporary Christians, hearing from voices that were never platformed in my upbringing; women, people of colour, Indigenous theologians, queer scholars, and even the high church Anglicans (I jest). In pastoral subjects about abuse and trauma, I found language for my own experiences and lessons on how to heal. I also loved the ecumenical diversity. That foundational understanding in each classroom that people brought differences, prompting us to be more critically engaged with our faith.

My Masters degree culminated in the writing of my thesis, where I executed a re-reading of a text which had been used against me as a queer person; Matthew 19:12. In the life of the eunuch, traditionally interpreted as a model of celibacy, I discovered a figure who transgressed gender binaries. These gender-expansive figures modelled the life of God's alternative kingdom community. It was in writing my thesis that the final shackles of a harmful theology fell off and I felt truly free.

It is not an overstatement to say that I found my faith in God again and a story I believe is genuinely good news for all. My Masters has given me the tools to bring my full self into the life and story of God. But not just me, for so many others.

I have since established and co-pastor an independent church in Sydney's inner city, called New City Church. I am a university chaplain with the Uniting Church, and I have just launched an online training, resourcing, and speaking business. I want to spend all my time using the tools which transformed my life to help others discover the same.

Finally, a thank you - to my teachers, supervisors, administrators, and fellow students. I am so grateful for all I have received from each of you. You have poured resurrection into my life, and it has been a truly divine experience.

Thank you.

Steff Fenton, Master of Divinity 2022

