

Yale Divinity School Class of 2020

*Congratulations & Well Wishes from the YDS
Alumni Family*



May 2020

Dear YDS Class of 2020,

Shortly after the announcement that we would not be able to have a normal commencement on the Divinity Quadrangle and Old Campus, we made plans to celebrate your entrance into the YDS alumni family in a virtual way. We invited our alumni to send us their personal words of congratulation, and for the past few weeks, my inbox has been filled with rays of sunshine. We have received over 170 messages from seven decades of graduates, spanning 39 states and six countries, which we now share with you, in the order received.

It is a momentous accomplishment to complete your degree requirements and graduate from Yale Divinity School. It is also the start of a new phase of your life, as a YDS alum, making you part of a global community of over 7,000 people.

To give you a sense of what you'll see in this collation of congratulations, I quote Miriam Samuelson-Roberts, '15 M.Div, from Minneapolis, Minnesota:

“Congratulations! Consider our words of encouragement your virtual procession to get your diplomas— you are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who are proud of you, who wish the best for you, who are standing with you in joy even amidst uncertainty and fear.

We look forward in the years to come to learning about the paths you travel and welcoming you back to the Quad. We are proud of your accomplishments and excited to witness what great things you will do.

Blessings,

Debby Jagielow
Director of Alumni Engagement & Annual Giving

“We are proud of you. To graduate under these circumstances may seem “less” than a real graduation; however, this commencement is indeed a beginning of your leadership, the way you will serve with wisdom and courage in the most difficult of circumstances.

- Norma Everest '76 M.Div.
Mason City, Iowa

“Many congratulations on this milestone in your lives. This is not the culmination of your theological education but the foundation. Your real theological education will come after you have labored over all that you have accomplished thus far. The many books you will read; the papers you will either edit or re-write; those will be your real education. I certainly look forward to reading your many works of theological labor.

Pax Christi,
Jerome Strong '04 M.Div.
Phenix City, Alabama

“Fifty years ago, we wondered if we would be able to graduate due to the May Day demonstrations and the early suspension of classes. But we did, minus some of the traditional hoopla.

Your experience seems much more serious than ours was, but we are sure you can weather the storm (or virus). Congratulations on your achievements.

- Jerry Kirkpatrick '70 B.D.
Waco, Texas

“Congratulations to all of the graduates of Yale Divinity School class of 2020. It has been a privilege studying with some of you and I warmly wish you the best of luck and success in your future career paths. Don't let this virus infect your aspirations to make the world a better place. A degree from Yale comes with great responsibility for you to use in the service of God and humanity. I wish you all the greatest success and happiness in your future endeavors.

- Guilherme Brasil de Souza '19 M.A.R.
Silver Spring, Maryland

“Dear Graduates,

May God bless you with joy in the midst of grief, strength in the midst of pain, conviction in the midst of uncertainty, hope in the midst of despair, and love in all and above all things. Trust that God will use you in incredible ways as you step into an unknown future. Take time to love yourself as you love others. Be kind and humble. Persevere, knowing that God goes with you on this journey.

Congratulations and blessings to you, your loved ones, and the people you serve.

- Dan Bell '10 M.A.R., '13 M.Div.
Malden, Massachusetts

“Blessings on your beginning this new chapter in life! Congratulations!

- Dr. Bonnie Scott '69 M.A.R.
Harwich, Massachusetts

“Dear Berkeley Graduates:

I send my heartfelt congratulations, and the deepest gratitude of the Episcopal Church at Yale community for your amazing gifts, which have transformed the lives of so many of our students. At ECY, you have counseled students, led retreats, formed worship leaders, created new evangelism strategies and communications systems, worked on student empowerment and undoing racism initiatives, and so much more. You have served in many roles, including Program Director (Rebecca Ogus), Theologians in Residence (Helena Martin and Peter Angelica), Intern (Charlotte Dalwood) and Mentors (Andrew Ancona, Peter Levenstrong and Grace Rigby) and from ISM, Music Director (Grant Wareham) and a wonderful mix of choristers and subs. Finally, you have helped support our New Haven initiative, participating in the

activities of Young Adult Episcopalians (YAE) and the Connecticut diocesan Young Adult Task Force. Many of you have also been regular or intermittent members of our worship community, trodding the well-worn path from YDS to Old Campus on Sunday afternoons.

We hope, in return, that we have supported you in your commitment and skills for ministering to and with college students and young adults in the church, in a way that will contribute to the next revolution in advancing God's mission, both in local parishes, and in the new communities that young adults will create in an emerging church. May God bless you and keep you in this uncertain time, and as you prepare to lead in a context in which we are called to learn from this crisis, and have the courage to shed any and all ways of being in this world that do not advance God's mission. Well done, good and faithful servants, well done!

- Rev. Paul J. Carling, Ph.D.
New Haven, Connecticut

“Congratulations on this great accomplishment. Prayers with you as you continue your journey.

- Howard Bell '72 M.Div.
Eagan, Minnesota

“I send my warmest congratulations on your achievement and I hope that your studies at YDS will have equipped you well and imaginatively for your ministry

- James Francis '69 S.T.M.
Durham, North Carolina

“When the YDS class of 1993 graduated on a warm spring day I was looking forward to moving into the next phase of my life. Saying goodbye to my Yale friends-- and to New Haven --was hard, but it was the first step in a long journey that has continued ever since. Throughout my career and personal life memories of my time at Yale have informed choices I've made as an academic, as a community member, and as I parent. I remain enriched by the people and ideas I encountered there, and I hope the same will be true for all of the class of 2020, wherever your paths may take you.

Congratulations!

- Derek Larson '93 M.A.R.
St. Joseph, Minnesota

“Hats off to you, the class of 2020! I cannot imagine completing graduation requirements in the midst of a pandemic but you did it! You made history! When the story is told of how this pandemic affected us all, your names will be shared as individuals who overcame insurmountable odds. May you feel loved, supported, and cherished on this day. We are all so proud of you! You represent the best of who we are. You did it! Congratulations!

- Gabby Cudjoe Wilkes '18 M.Div.
Brooklyn, New York

“Congratulations graduates of the Class of 2020!!! I am so proud of you. May you have the 'faith that can conquer anything'.

- Sharon J. Reives '98 M.Div.
Eads, Tennessee

“You are exactly where God needs you to be right now. Many were called, but you were chosen. Celebrate your efforts and your achievement. The world will use your gifts in ways you cannot imagine or anticipate. It is finished. It has just begun. All our hopes and prayers go with you.

- Anne Beatty '77 M.A.R.
Ridgefield, Connecticut

“Congratulations to you all as you finish one phase of life and enter into a new one. I hope your ministries--whatever forms they may take--are filled with adventure and fully rewarding. There will be times when your skills and talents are stretched almost beyond their capabilities, but I know that with trust in yourself and your faith you will rise and serve.

And know that there will also be times of immeasurable joy. Be happy, be well, be safe.

- David Bryce '91 M.Div.

Wilmington, North Carolina

“You’ve completed your degree in this unique and struggling time. I’ve been on the other side of the desk, teaching online, so I have some sense of what you have been going through. Yet despite those difficulties, you are here today, YDS grads. This is truly your commencement - time for you to commence bearing the fruit of your YDS education. The needs for your help are almost beyond expressing. Yale says you are ready. May the contributions you make put the mustard seed to shame!

- Kenneth Share '94 M.Div.

Scarsdale, New York

“Welcome to ministry! Yes, this is a bit extreme to have an entire planet sequestering, and not just from church. But what you’ll learn all too quickly is that thanks to the solid foundation you received at YDS, you’ll be able to face the unexpected with grace. Real world ministry has little to do with what’s taught in the classroom, and everything to do with the good, the bad and the ugly on the outside. In my first ministry, I served as chaplain at eight skilled nursing facilities, where I led as many as two worship services a day, every day. In the beginning, I did as taught in homiletics: prepared my liturgy and a manuscript of my sermon, all carefully rehearsed. It worked the first day. But the second day, something had happened in the facility preceding my visit...perhaps a resident had died?...and so the residents were in a turmoil, and my carefully prepared and rehearsed service were totally irrelevant to the moment. I heard that small voice, not so still, whispering “ditch the script, speak from the heart,” and so began my first real day of ministering to the unexpected. In my first church, I was a solo pastor, and spent many a day mopping out a flooded kitchen and basement, standing in 6” of dirty water.

Memories of YDS blue books would dance in my head in those moments, and I’d wish Miroslav could see me doing the real work of ministry. Good luck to you, and blessings for all you set out to accomplish. Be kind to yourselves, and be patient with yourselves. Let God do the real work.

- Holly Adams '09 M.Div.

Vero Beach, Florida

“Congratulations on the good work you have done at YDS. Now go forth and show the world that the love of God can make a difference in our hurting world.

- Jill Beimdiek '04 M.Div.

Durham, North Carolina

“Class of 2020, Congratulations and Godspeed in these strange and unsettling days.

- E. Byron (Ron) Anderson '84 ISM, M.Div.

Evanston, Illinois

“To the graduates of 2020:

You will always remember your Divinity School graduation. It will remind you that life can be harsh, unforgiving, and sometimes, deadly. But, it will also make you realize that the God we love and praise is always watching over us. He is there--to carry us when we cannot go on. He gives us courage to face whatever may come our way. God provides, in ways we do not always see or understand. Your faith and belief that good triumphs over evil will give you strength.

As you begin your life's work, know that you are not alone. Also, know that you need to share God's love and his redeeming grace.

May His love guide and sustain you,
Jim Carr '74 M.A.R.
Wheaton, Illinois

“It's been a long time since my graduation in 1972. So many things have changed. Many good wishes for your future. The time will really go fast.

- Thomas Hurley '72 M.Div.
Omaha, Nebraska

“Congratulations. I can only imagine how difficult it is to not go through a ceremony. I will always remember the pomp and circumstance of that event. Your time will be different but I hope equally remembered. What happens next for you, I'm sure will be as rewarding personally and professionally as was mine even if you, like me do not go into the ministry. I went on into psychology after graduation filled with all the enthusiasm and excitement and inspiration of all that happened during my time at Yale Divinity. I'm sure that whatever you now choose to do next will be informed and shaped by the experiences you've already had.

Best wishes,
Kenneth Smith, '68 B.D.
Seattle, Washington

“Congratulations on your personal and academic accomplishments. You are poised to make a real difference in our world.

No one could have predicted the crazy circumstances in which we are living. We regret that you have been cheated out of a normal graduation. But you have persevered! With your help we will move into a better time. We stand united.

- Sandy Wylie '70 B.D.
Bella Vista, Arkansas

“Congratulations and many blessings, Class of 2020! You are prepared for what is before you and your ministries will be blessed. Know that your lives matter and that we need you in this world!

- Jan Fuller '82 M.Div.
Burlington, North Carolina

“Best of everything to the class of 2020. YDS changed my life and no doubt it has changed yours. Know you have touched greatness more than most people in this world. Blessing for a fruitful ministry however that unfolds and wherever that takes you.

- Regina A. Boisclair, Ph.D., '79 M.Div., '82 S.T.M.
Hingham, Massachusetts

“Congratulations and God's blessing on your launching at a difficult time.

- Rev. John Long '62 B.D.
Buffalo, New York

“I wouldn’t be surprised if your class has been way ahead of the curve on reframing ministry in light of Covid-19 and requirements for social distancing – I pray that your creativity will help transform the church as a whole and the congregations you will lead. While nothing will make up for the lack of your well-deserved graduation events and ceremonies, I pray you will feel enfolded in the love of the wider YDS alumni community you are now joining, and even more importantly that you sense that divine voice that speaks deep into your spirit “Well done, good and faithful servant.” You’ve been fabulous and will be more fabulous still!

- Kate Heichler ’02 M.Div., ’04 S.T.M.
Newburg, Maryland

“You’ve made it through! That is wonderful, but these are such strange times we are living in. There are many people who are waiting for you to jump into ministry. Your talents are needed. Your insights and learning will bring joy to others. Congratulations on finishing your degree.

My wife Peggy (M.Div., ’85) and I both enjoyed our time at YDS. Such fine scholars we learned from, and many good friends. A number of them were international students who scattered far and wide after finishing up. In fact we just had a visit with one of our best friends (Bati Kirata, Th.M., ’86), a pastor living in the Central Pacific, whom we hadn’t seen since the day I graduated 34 years ago. So, although YDS graduates are not large in number, I don’t think there’s anywhere in the world that you wouldn’t have a chance to run into one.

We celebrate with you, graduate of 2020. May you stay healthy and strong as you share God’s love in all of the adventures that lie ahead!

- Myron Dean Lindsey ’86 M.Div.
State College, Pennsylvania

“While you won’t experience the joy of a Yale commencement, know that there are many who have gone before you who celebrate you, your achievement, your hope and your future contribution to the spiritual health of this world we share! May the Lord bless you and keep you, May He make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you! May He look upon you kindly and give you peace!

- Jim Hazel ’71 S.T.M.
Fredericksburg, Virginia

“Blessings to you on the occasion of your graduation! Though the coronavirus may prevent the kind of graduation everyone would have preferred, your accomplishment is still impressive. I pray that God will bless your ministry -- in whatever form that takes -- over the years and decades to come.

- Scott Gunn ’92 M.A.R., ’96 M.Div.
Cincinnati, Ohio

“Every good wish to the class of 2020 who will be remembered as first among YDS’s virtual alums. From a member of the 1962 class when President Kennedy was honored as the Commencement speaker, saying, “You can now say I have the best of both possible worlds, a Harvard education and a Yale degree!”

- Christopher (Kit) Morse ’62 B.D.
New York, New York

“Dear YDS graduate,

It is a shame that you and your classmates will not be able to savor the good taste of Commencement. I remember my own as a bittersweet, but mostly sweet, day. I wish that the day be such for you in some way. I hope you enjoy the cap of your excellent YDS experience that will be part of you for many years no matter what service you feel called to.

Blessings,
Jack Saarela ’74 M.Div.
Wyncote, Pennsylvania

“Dear class of 2020,

Greetings from the United Kingdom and congratulations on this special day! I guess you need to imagine the sunshine, the glowing faces of your family members, and the sheer joy that fills the Quad every year that people graduate - but other than that, you are receiving an amazing degree and setting out into new and exciting directions.. and - the sun may shine, your family members' faces may glow as they hug each other, and you may find ways to celebrate your time at YDS!

This time is obviously extremely challenging and we do face so many losses - and yet, every day invites us to use it for a well. This requires vision, courage, and foremost, a life of prayer; to mourn what we have to let go and to embrace opportunities of renewal. I have never felt more clearly that the work we do in our religious communities is absolutely essential. You graduate straight into these spaces and you will have ideas on how to transform them. The words you utter, the acts of charity you do, the people you bring together, the blessings that you proclaim are what will paint a glow on the very faces of those you serve. This, is no small vocation.

So, this year, I will be celebrating with you - and I will do so thinking of all the faces that you will see glowing because of your love and dedication. And... I pray that you will mirror these to the Lord of all, always remembering this is where everything begins and ends - your journey at YDS and whatever is ahead of you.

May the Lord bless you beyond your expectations,
Marietta van der Tol '16 M.A.R.
Cambridge, United Kingdom

“I look back on my three years at YDS (1989-1992) with gratitude and joy, remembering great professors and classmates, Friday morning worship at Marquand, daily prayer at Berkeley on St. Ronan St., walks downtown for a cup of tea, the grace and beauty of the campus, and opportunities to hear music in the wider Yale community. My only time back since 1992 was a couple of years ago--for the Merton/Nouwen conference. While I was overcome by the enhancements to the physical plant--like the refurbishment of the (Old) Refectory--the grounds and classrooms still had the same warm feeling.

Now your two or three years are coming to an end and your new ministries beginning to take shape. I wish you Godspeed, with happy memories of this time together at YDS.

- Julia Dorsey Loomis '92 M.Div.
Portsmouth, Virginia

“Blessings upon you as you graduate into the new creation God is breathing into being! It has been an uncertain time in the Church for a while now, but things feel even more uncertain than usual. May the God who led Israel in the wilderness, parted the Red Sea, brought the exiles home, and resurrected Our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead lead you, do miracles for you, create a home for you, and offer new life in this season.

Congratulations on all you have accomplished, and best wishes for your ministry ahead.

- Jordan Haynie Ware '13 M.Div.
Edmonton, Ontario

“Dear YDS Grads!

Heartiest congrats for an achievement that will follow you the rest of your life.

You have earned the respect of faculty, family, friends, and above all yourself. Only you fully appreciate all the late-night labor and the early morning coffee.

Be assured that you have earned a degree that is respected throughout the world. You will now join the ranks of those who will continue to bring honor to YDS. Congratulations!

- Edwin Green '79 Yale University, '83 M.Div.
New Cumberland, Pennsylvania

“To the graduates of Yale Divinity School, Class of 2020. A frightened and beleaguered country awaits the love, compassion and healing that rests within the very soul of each one of you. Likewise if your mission, ministry and work calls you to serve in other countries, then they await you to share with them the empowering gifts given to you by your Yale Divinity School education. You are entering a world overwhelmed by a virus that has changed the world in ways that no one could have imagined when you began your senior year on the Hill.

An interreligious colleague of mine, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks former Chief Rabbi of London wrote; “We no longer need the Bible to explain the universe. Instead we have science. We do not need sacred ritual to control human destiny. In its place we have technology. When we are ill, we no longer need prayer. We have doctors, medicine and surgery. The result is that the 21st Century has left us with a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning.

Congratulations to all of you graduating today. Now, go into the world and “Be The Meaning”.

- The Right Reverend John Bryson Chane '72 M.Div.
San Diego, California

“CONGRATULATIONS, MEMBERS OF THE YDS CLASS OF 2020! After years of hard work, study, illumination, “aha” moments, forming deep friendships, engaging with wonderful professors, and accumulating a treasure house of memories, you are at last graduating. Though your graduating ceremony will be “virtual,” it is the real world in which you will now put the learning and inspiration you gained at Yale to use in creative, loving ways.

God bless you.
Ted Halsted '56, M.Div.
Richmond, Indiana

“Warmest congratulations on your upcoming graduation. Many blessings and prayers as you serve the common good in God's world.

Most sincerely,
Jake B. Schrum '73 M.Div.
Decatur, Georgia

“Congratulations, class of 2020, on this immense accomplishment! Your tireless work, along with the love and support of those around you, has carried you to an important milestone, and you deserve to celebrate and to be celebrated for all that you've done over the last couple of years. It seems to me that, in this time of uncertainty and fear, you are uniquely prepared to engage the world around you with the knowledge and compassion which your time at YDS helped to cultivate. I wish you well and pray that you find joy and hope for the journey ahead.

- Daniel C. Smith '17 M.A.R.
Austin, Texas

“Mazel tov- congratulations on your incredible accomplishment. Having just learned about the cancelation of my daughter's high school graduation- I get it. I really do. Please know that you will carry around the Yale alum title for the rest of your days and you will carry your classmates and friends in your heart forever.

By graduating from YDS, it's obvious that you want to make a difference in the world. Please know that all of us who came before you will be cheering you on and always available if you should need us.

Now, go get 'em! With warmest wishes.
Rabbi Cheryl Jacobs '93 M.A.R.
Plantation, Florida

“Congratulations on your accomplishment! My prayers are with you as you continue your ministries in the world.

- Kerry McCrudden '93 M.A.R.
Spokane, Washington

“You WILL in time join the rest of us alumni in seeing your 2020 graduation as one of the most memorable in the history of YDS. As you begin the next phase of the calling on your life, may you know that this Commencement is just one more declaration that you are special.

Congratulations!
Kwame Reed '79 M.Div.
Minneapolis, Minnesota

“Dear graduates,

This is not what you signed up for and not what you wanted. And I am so sorry.

I hope you allow yourselves a few moments to grieve what could have been—the procession downtown, the smiling faces of your loved ones, the conferral of your degrees, and the toasts in your honor.

I hope, too, that you allow yourselves to celebrate your accomplishments, remembering how difficult your road to graduation must have been at times. And yet you persisted.

Despite the subdued celebration this May, we are so proud of you. You will go on to do great things. You will work to create a more just and equitable nation and world. We need you. And we are grateful.

Cheers to the class of 2020!
- Suzanna Krivulskaya '11 M.A.R.
San Diego, California

“Blessings! You managed to graduate from Yale Divinity School despite all that is going on! The way I see it is this will prepare you for Ministry in the 21st. Century as nothing else could. Hurry up, get out here, we need you!

- M. Joanna White '89 M.Div.
Annapolis, Maryland

“Congratulations as you begin your journey as graduates of YDS. So sorry there was no pomp and circumstance for you, but that doesn't make your graduation less meaningful.

Best wishes in your next endeavor!

- Jeanette Shannon Clarkson '78 M.Div.
Guilford, Connecticut

“Hearty congratulations to the Class of 2020! May God's blessings be with you in your service in future years.

- Graham Rights '69 B.D.
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

“Prayers of joy, thanksgiving, and provision as you move on from YDS towards your next steps. It's clearly not the final semester you expected, but hopefully you remember your time at Yale fondly. Best wishes and congratulations on your graduation!

- Jacqueline Spycher '16 M.Div.
Southfield, Michigan

“Congratulations and blessings on your amazing accomplishment! Peace!

- Evelyn Lasaga '92 M.Div.
New Haven, Connecticut

“Congratulations!! You've made it. Wish you the best at YDS.

- Donald Kim '06 M.Div.
Fort Worth, Texas

“Congratulations on completing the work that you have just done! The world in which you will be working is obviously in a very serious crisis. But such a crisis is also an opportunity. Join with those who will attempt to make this a new beginning of a world which is more just, more compassionate, more caring and more creative. Yours will be the generation that will largely determine whether or not the human family will survive and thrive by finding better ways to care for the creation and one another.

So celebrate your accomplishments and look for the places where you can make your contribution to renewing and refashioning the world that God has given us. May Blessings and joy accompany you on your journey.

- Bruce Rigdon '62 M.A., '65 Ph.D.
Chicago, Illinois

“Take heart, Class of 2020 graduates!

In May of 1985, I still had one paper owing to Prof. John Stroup who help a seminar on existential philosophers down at the Graduate and Professional Students bar, a.k.a. “The Gypsy” - basically an opportunity for bourbon fueled discussion. Unfortunately, I was too busy with unfinished class work to attend! Commencement arrived and I “walked with my class.”

My father, James, a retired Episcopal priest and graduate of Brown University and the General Seminary who was wheelchair bound with M.S. came with my mother Joan to see me walk with my class! It was a profound experience to have them there with me!

I labored up until the last hour of the Summer to submit my last paper on Thomas Mann’s “Dr. Faustus. It would have been an honors paper, but it was late. I received my diploma in the mail in December 1985.

With an M.A.R. I had only one professional job as a Christian Education Director at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Cazenovia, NY where I had by contemporary standards a huge enrollment of over seventy children and youths in my program from 1992-’94. Since then I have made my living as a Restoration House Painter whose last project was to restore the windows in 2018-’20 at St. Paul’s Church, currently in disuse, the oldest Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Central New York. It was built in 1814.

A few days ago I was uplifted by a pandemic inspired video chat with two dear friends and classmates, Ernie Duff and David Neff. Ernie’s in Denver and David is in Chicago. One is a Baptist and one is a Lutheran pastor. We all agreed that our formation at YDS was a watershed and life-changing experience that has enriched and sustained us in myriad ways we never imagined possible! My wife of twenty-four years, a professor of nursing, named Winifred who passed away in 2015, often reminded me in jest, that she never would have married me if I hadn’t gone to Yale! That’s a comment I will continue to “digest inwardly” for the rest of my days!

God go with you, strive to do as we have attempted to do and “make the world safe for divinity!”

- Philip B. Olmstead '85 M.A.R.
Asheville, North Carolina

“Wishing you health, happiness, and a succession of successful professional experiences in the future some of which may be unimaginable now.

- Richard Hall '71 M.Div.
Red Bank, New Jersey

“Wishing you all well on the paths ahead: honesty, peace, gratitude, and courage.
Don’t throw away your books or your notes. You may find them less expendable than your diplomas. Go for the real and share it. Remember the saints. Contemplate the certainty of another Spring.

- Robert Borchers '77 M.A.R.
Middleton, Wisconsin

“Congratulations! What a strange time to be graduating. I hope you know that you have been well- prepared for the significant challenges ahead, that you have been trained to think critically and theologically about joys and challenges no one could have seen coming. I trust you will serve your communities well, and that a bright future is ahead. Congratulations! As your coursework comes to an end, don’t stop learning. Even in normal times, we all have to keep learning to keep growing. But mostly, congratulations! You have done a sometimes-difficult, but always wondrous and important, thing. Bless you in your next steps.

- Steven Andrews '13 S.T.M.
Kansas City, Missouri

“Congratulations on the completion of your Yale Divinity School degree. I hope the academic, intellectual, and spiritual formation that you have experienced there will be as significant in your life and ministry as it continues to be in mine. I would not take anything for my three years at YDS. And may God bless you richly in the ministry to which you have been called.

- Jane Alexander '90 M.Div.
Jackson, Mississippi

“Blessings on your commencement! We graduated with pipe cleaner haloes on our mortarboards and paper wings tucked under the cord on the back of our robes. I’m saddened that you all won’t experience the pageantry, but you won’t get rained out, either =)

More seriously, I am always blessed by the things I learned at YDS/B, in the classroom and outside it, in New Haven, from the faculty, staff, other seminarians and other folks at the university and in town. I am always blessed to return there, to participate in Convocation, worship with the gathered community, visit with present students, connect with my peers and with those who were there before and since. I pray that as you move into a different place in the world and the church, the YDS/B community may continue to be a blessing and place of both growth and community.

And I pray that you continue to be a blessing in whatever community and wherever within or beyond the church your life, work, and ministry find you!

Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey with us, so make haste to love, and be swift to be kind, and may God continue to bless you!

- Kit Wang '84 M.Div.
York, Maine

“Dear YDS Grads! Take your seminary experience and learning, and step out into a weary and challenging world that yearns for voices of hope! Step out into a world that seeks empowerment, especially for those whose voices are trampled or shut down!

Step out to care for those who are wounded in spirit, while reaching for a better tomorrow!

May God’s blessings go with you,
Bill Voigt, '87 M.Div.
Tucson, Arizona

“Wishing the Class of 2020 all courage and hope as they move forward into ministry that has never been more essential than what will be required of the Church and the message of the gospel for our time.

Take heart! And do not be afraid.

- Rev. Dr. Joy K. Bussert, '77 M.Div.
Northfield, Minnesota

“Even in these difficult times, you are facing a most exciting and meaningful period in your lives and ministries! Right now, you have exceptional vision and clarity about yourself, your theology, and the legacy you’d like to end up leaving. Stay true to your vision.

Your fellow 2020 graduates will be among your best supporters as you move out into local churches, higher education, and other settings, so stay in touch. When you feel isolated and misunderstood and even victimized, likely your classmates will be going through similar things and can help you when you need it most.

By virtue of graduating from YDS, you are a person who walks to the beat of a different drummer. Beyond your fellow alumnae/alumni and professors and others, reach out to reasonable allies in your next setting. If you confine yourself to only people with the same vision as yourself, you will be very lonely. There are people from all walks of life who will be eager to engage you in a friendly fashion and walk along the way with you, even if only for a limited time.

For most of you, finances will be limited, particularly at first. Find creative ways to save on expenses and bring in extra income.

If you haven’t yet found your life partner, relax. “Marry in haste, repent at leisure” may be an overused old saying, but it remains true. If it’s meant to be forever, it can wait. Even after years together, there will still be mysteries to explore in each other. Perhaps about the time you give up looking, you will actually find that special someone wandering into your life. Or perhaps you’ll realize that you’re simply not a relationship kind of person, which is as valid a life choice as marriage, even if not as often celebrated.

Be daring, bold, true, and authentic!

- Sam George ’88 M.Div.

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

“Many blessings and congratulations upon your graduation from the Div School!

Joy is still happening in the hearts of many as you complete your studies and venture forth in service as scholars, clergy, musicians and artists, educators, community organizers, activists, and all the wonderful things that Yale Divinity School grads are called and gifted to be in the world.

Commencement 2003 took place in torrential rains. This year our commitment rests with bending the curve on COVID-19, and our concern and prayers go to those enduring and caring for persons who are vulnerable and ill. In any and all conditions, the still small voice speaks. May your voices amplify faith, hope, love, and justice now and for years to come.

Congratulations! Well done!

- Allison Read ’97 M.A.R., ’03 M.Div.

Wethersfield, Connecticut

“Congratulations on your massive accomplishments!!!! My heart breaks for you and how radically different the closing of this chapter looks. I truly hope you can still find time to rest and bask in the joy of the ways your time at YDS has challenged, shaped, changed and formed you. When campus is open again (and it will open again) I encourage you to come back! Visit your peers who are still students, visit your professors, go to Marquand and high five the folks in the Refectory Cafe! You did the thing and it wasn’t easy! I can’t wait to meet you at Alumni events in the future.

Congratulations!!!!

- Angel Collie ’14 M.Div.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

“YDS has always been a great place. Blessings to your various ministries.

- William Murray ’69 M.Div.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

“My heart aches for so many reasons in this pandemic, but one of the reasons is that good folks like you will not be able to gather to celebrate your amazing accomplishments at YDS! I still have the good fortune to be in touch with a number of YDS friends and I hope you will say that in 40 years, also.

Well done and many blessings as you complete your work at the Div School and move into your next vocation,
Wilma J. Reichard '77 M.A.R., '79 M.Div.
Redwood City, California

“You made it! Congratulations, colleagues. Know your journey means much to alumni. You are a part of our shared legacy. Best wishes as you navigate this next transition.

- Christian Watkins '14 M.Div.
Manhattan, Kansas

“In May 1995, we did not face the circumstances you face as recent graduates. You enter a world in which everything you have learned will be tested. We couldn't have imagined this new reality. But that is the calling of this moment, you are poised to learn, re learn, unlearn, adapt, create new knowledge as you respond with compassion, love and the sort of care that is attentive to those who are rendered most vulnerable in the society. This is the moment that you have been preparing, although you might not have had the foresight. May the words of the Gospel song be your anthem: “Order my steps in your Word”. I pray that you step going forth might be ordered by God, that you might experience the “anointing” that enables you to do those things that you did know you could. Godspeed!

- Kaziputalimba Joshua '95 M.A.R.
Walla Walla, Washington

“With trumpet sound, with lute and harp, with tambourine and dance, and with LOUD CLASHING CYMBALS -- I wish you congratulations on your graduation! Together we join to make the most of this special day. Whether your ministry is parish, chaplaincy, academic, nonprofit, music, the arts, or something other, there is no more urgent time for you to be in the world, reaching out to those who need a message of hope. May peace, health and tremendous joy greet you this day!

- Mick Hirsch '03 M.Div.
Townsend, Massachusetts

“Well your graduation won't be quite as “traditional” as Yalies are used to. You won't be gathering at the Old Camp nor later at the Divinity Quadrangle. But make no mistake about it. You WILL graduate. You WILL be prepared to take up the yoke, whether within a congregation or in further academic setting. And make no mistake about it. Those settings will be different also. The Class of '61 did not know about Zoom meetings. Why our wired phones were rotary dialed. (I saw my first push button phone when visiting the home of H. Richard Niebuhr back in the day.)

But you will face your future which will be distinctively yours. We, the YDS Alumni, salute you and honor you. We can't face the challenges you will face; but you're up to it. Your Yale University degree is a thing to be cherished. God bless you.

- Kenneth Neal '61 M.Div.
Williamsville, New York

“What a time to graduate and launch your ministry! Hard to imagine a time when YOU and YOUR MINISTRY was more needed!! Thanks for responding to God's call -- and special thanks for joining the Holy Spirit amidst the mystery of where and in what forms of ministry (some of them, not yet imagined) God may be calling you to serve. Grateful for you and your call... Holding you in prayer.

- Jim Antal '78 M.Div.
Norwich, Vermont

“Congratulations! Keep looking forward to your call to serve. The world waits for your new energy and your new vision. Be patient with those slow to change. Remember, it may be for such a time as this that you were called. God be with you on your journey.

- Amalie Ash '10 M.Div.
Boynton Beach, Florida

“I am 76 years old and still benefiting from my YDS EDUCATION, most recently teaching a course on the ecological spirituality of John Muir. May you have as many years to love what you learned.

- Tom Mann '70 M.Div., '75 Ph.D.
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

“Blessings! You have moved through Library, Refectory, Marquand Chapel, and countless other places that are now Holy Ground to you. Perhaps best of all, you have learned to hold paradox and mystery hand in hand, informing your faith with a questing knowledge, digging below the surface of whatever hits you, and offering it all up to God in the great existential leap of faith. Enjoy dancing with God in whatever form in the places you will be led to in ministry.

- Rev. Richard Collman '69 M.Div.
Northfield, Minnesota

“Dear YDS graduates:

Congratulations on completing your degree from Yale Divinity School. I am so sorry that you and so many graduates this year will not be able to gather with family and friends to celebrate. I hope you have a position to look forward to this summer or fall.

For sure ministry in the current climate is mainly online as well like your graduation.

I am retiring this June from many years of serving in campus ministry and parishes as a United Methodist minister. And I strongly suspect my retirement will also be virtual, hard to imagine over 1,000 New England UMC conference members being able to gather mid-June.

Ministry has definitely changed a lot during my years of service. But my gratitude for excellent classes at Yale never fades. Nor does the need for our world for the good news that God loves all unconditionally.

One very funny memory I have of my years at Yale and graduation. One fellow graduate had a very faithful dog, a yellow lab type that was constantly by his side. One time in our New Testament class a very enthusiastic Dr. Luke Johnson tripped on his dog as the good Prof was pacing excitedly at the front of the classroom. Dr. Johnson was surprised but did not fall and just kept on lecturing. Anyway, at graduation the seminary bestowed a degree on that dog. We all loved it. After all the dog had been to all the classes of his master.

Hope you have some funny memories as well, some great friends and know that my prayers are with you and your classmates today and always. May God bless you as you serve and move into your next adventure!

Sincerely,
Rev. Kimberly Hornung-Marcy, '80 M.Div.
North Ferrisburgh, Vermont

“Congratulations to YDS class of 2020! You are the leaders we are counting on for 'such a time as this.' As a couple who met at YDS—even married in Marquand Chapel!—we send you all of our best wishes. We have been blessed in life and ministry and our time at YDS got us off to a great start. That is our wish for you as well.

- Sue Frost and Mike Bennett '86 M.Div.
Dover, New Hampshire

“Wishing many blessings to this year’s graduates. In these uncertain times, the world needs your ministry, passion and discernment more than ever. You are well prepared to lead and serve. God bless you!

- Brian Stiltner '90 M.A.R.

Hamden, Connecticut

“Dear YDS (Bible) Graduates,

Congratulations to you for this great achievement. I know how hard it is to do those 4 hours of Summer Intensive Greek and Hebrew, followed by about 6-7 hours of practice and drill and homework!! From the perspective of 16 years out, it is so worth all the effort!

Maybe, if you are in your 20’s or 30’s, you are headed on to the PhD level and university teaching, like so many of my classmates. I am thinking of Peter Lanfer at UCLA. Or maybe you are headed for ordination where your Bible interpretive skill will be used by the Holy Spirit to great advantage. Or maybe, if this was an early retirement, career change like me, you will become a parish Bible teacher. There is a tremendous need for trained Bible scholars at the parish or congregational level.

In my first career, I was a high school language teacher. YDS Bible, with Carolyn Sharp, Robert Wilson, Adela and John Collins, and Harry Attridge prepared me so well to teach my parish Bible students and only stoked the fire of my love of Scripture. Now I teach Bible to adults.

My prayer for you is that wherever the Lord God of Israel, Jesus His Son and the Paraclete leads you, you will be a joyful instrument of God’s will and Word and be able to earn your daily bread as well.

May God bless your mission!

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts

Neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa.56:8-11 RSV)

St. Paul, pray for these graduates and all teachers of the Word!

In Christ in the pandemic,

Maryann Knag '04 M.A.R.

Darien, Connecticut

“To Each YDS Graduate in the 2020 Class:

Hearty congratulations on the completion of your studies at Yale Divinity School, and the receipt of your degree. As is true of all of us who are earlier graduates, our time at YDS changed our lives...for the better. As is also true of us all, there were challenges we faced after graduation. However, we all have been better equipped to cope with life’s challenges because of our time at YDS. You will be also.

My YDS graduation occurred 56 years ago. I am now 95 years of age and still enjoying life. Much of my enjoyment in life comes from continuing to read, study, and involve in service as YDS inspired me to do. May it be so for you as you journey through the life ahead of you.

God Bless and Sustain You,

W. Curtis Lee '64 M.Div.

Newburgh, Indiana

“YDS Class of 2020: Soon, like prior YDS Classes, you will all be ‘launched’ onto your continued life- journeys, in a myriad of directions, but the richer for it, because of the Professors/Mentors you had the privilege of getting to know and learn from-and-with, over your years of study---not the mention, as well, the friendships born at YDS with fellow classmates, which have-and-will continue to enrich your life---all for the better!!

The Yale University Chaplain, during my years at YDS, The Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., said, in his day, “You’re young only once, but you can be immature indefinitely”. And: “The smallest package in the world is a person completely wrapped-up in himself/herself.” And my YDS Mentor, Henri J.M. Nouwen, shared, “Be sure to care enough, to care for one person at a time, because too Christian- types like the buzz of the crowd and overlook the beauty of the one-on-one. Ironically, though, the ones who speak best to the many, are the ones who have cared enough, to care for one person at a time.” So much wisdom-and-insight cradled in these statements (& many, many more not mentioned here), which have served, repeatedly, as words of counsel to me in my journey from personality-to- personhood. Like me, I believe you will sense some of your Profs’-and-classmates’ presence in the ‘balcony’ of your lives, at times, praying and cheering you on. And you will be so very grateful that this is so!

I pray you will welcome the indwelling residency of the Holy Spirit in your life, who I have come to call God’s deployed life-shaper, there to bless, empower, equip and encourage you, along life’s ways of travail and moments-of-triumph. Please stay ‘reachable-and-teachable’, embrace humility, and for the long-haul, be a grateful Pilgrim.

Good things take time, and no poll-vaulting is allowed, because the journey of becoming is the very means of growing in maturity-of-personhood and learning the life-defining difference between being productive and being fruitful. The former involves achievement, success and products. The latter involves willing vulnerability and authenticity. The Western world too often over-prizes the former, to the neglect of the latter. Don’t do that---be more than that. Let your being inform so much of your doing, by God’s grace and abiding Presence within you.

With Love & Gratitude,
Joseph M. Freeman ’74 M.Div.
Noblesville, Indiana

“Dear Class of 2020,

You are talented, you are creative, thoughtful, and YES, you indeed WILL change the world with your energy, your gifts and skills.

We believe in you and let the light of Christ shine in you so you can bring hope and healing to our broken world. May God be with you always!

- Karen Schneider Kirner ’90 M.A.R.
South Bend, Indiana

“Congratulations and best wishes on your YDS graduation! And welcome to the YDS alumni family! I am sorry you cannot celebrate your graduation in the traditional way, but I applaud your fine accomplishment of receiving your degree at YDS and know how proud you must be. I wish you God’s richest blessings as you step forth using your new-found knowledge and deepened faith to make our world an even better place, full of God’s peace and justice.

Blessings,
Rev. Nancy Leckerling ’89 M.Div.
Madison, Connecticut

“Hello Yale Divinity Class of 2020,

I knew that everything would be OK when I survived Old Testament. It just gets better after graduation. Wishing you the best that life has to offer!

- Patricia Boozer Ph.D., ’92 M.A.R.
New Haven, Connecticut

“Congratulations and warmest wishes to the YDS 2020 graduates. You’ve worked so hard for this achievement, and I’m sorry you can’t be together with the YDS community on the quad to celebrate. May your memories of other YDS milestones shared with colleagues, classmates and guides to your learning and development sustain you as you reflect on what this moment means to you. I hope you are upheld by a sure and certain knowledge that what you have achieved will serve you well as you continue to serve others, with all that you brought to Yale and all that you take with you from it for your onward journey. Grace and peace, and well done.

- Jana Norman '93 M.Div.
Adelaide, Australia

“I graduated in 1999. We walked through Phelps Gate at Old Campus but we couldn’t have it outdoor at Sterling Divinity Quadrangle due to wet weather. So we had it at Marquand Chapel. I did an alumni program at YDS in 2013 14 years later. Now after another 7 years, we face an unprecedented crisis with lots of unknown. Stay tight. Stay faithful. Keep moving. This difficult period will come to pass.

Congratulations! God bless you all!
- Kah Tan '99 M.A.R.
Singapore

“Congratulations, Class of 2020! My years at YDS were among the best of my life. And I felt they helped me grow in spirit and in truth for my many years of pastoral ministry that followed.

I wish each of you well as you reach out to the world with God’s love.
- Ed Thwaites '57 M.Div.
Westminster, Colorado

“Blessings as you embark on this new chapter in these weird times.
- Jan Hamill '80 M.Div.
Bel Air, Maryland

“Your hard work and dedication cannot be dampened by a canceled graduation. While your time at YDS was cut short, you will always have a home at YDS. I know that first-hand; after 23 years I still return to New Haven, sometimes physically and sometimes spiritually, and I always feel safe, inspired, and spiritually fed. We all grieve with you over your lost time. We all celebrate you for your accomplishments. And we are all with you in this big YDS family.
- Eric Bowman '97 M.A.R.
Peterborough, New Hampshire

“I am so proud and happy for your graduation from YDS, which is a great place of learning and interaction. Be proud of your achievement, keep an open mind, remain hopeful and aim higher still!
- Amos Kasibante '89 M.S.T.
Leeds, United Kingdom

“In this dark time of pandemic, though your physical graduation is cancelled, you will go out into the world carried the torch of truth. Congratulations on your accomplishments and Godspeed.
- Daniel Harry '77 M.Div.
Bethany, West Virginia

“To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven.”
Blessings on your season of celebration! Your ministry, in whatever form it takes, will be a gift in this season of pandemic and beyond. Holding you in prayer for strength, purpose and peace as you graduate from YDS.
- Beth O'Malley '86 M.Div.
Ellicott City, Maryland

“As the interim president of an institution of higher education, I am painfully aware of the disappointment of graduating students who will not be able to experience the traditional graduation experiences. We will have an ‘in person’ graduation at some point but it will not be the same as if it had taken place on the originally appointed time. I encourage you to recognize the current world circumstances cannot diminish your accomplishment. As difficult as it is to understand or see it now, you will celebrate your accomplishment throughout the span of your life every time you share something you have learned with a parishioner, a student, a friend or colleague. You will be celebrated every time one of these persons experience a more fulfilling and worthwhile life because of your efforts and sharing. Congratulations! The stadium lights on our campus will be on in your honor next week.

- Ken Clapp, '73 M.Div.
Salisbury, North Carolina

“Mazel Tov and a happy celebration day to you on this day of your graduation. You have come through the years that have forged your character and have now brought this new bloom into the world. We will be enriched by your presence and your wise contributions. Moreover, we will take a keen interest in your interpretation of how things are. All the best for the work and life that await you.

- Elisabeth Aurand '84 Non-Degree Student
Canajoharie, Maryland

“What a different world it was when I graduated and got ordained in 1983! Churches were thriving, and many new churches were being planted. There were whispers of the social revolutions birthed by the civil rights movement and feminism, but for the most part, things were pretty status quo in our churches. When I was hired by a UCC church, the senior minister told me, “We hired another woman once. She didn’t work out.” Happily, I did.

Even before this pandemic, the landscape of north American Christianity was deeply changed and changing. No one knows what that landscape, or any other, will be like after COVID-19 is a thing to read about rather than live through. So you face a degree of uncertainty that I wasn’t aware of in the mid 1980’s. Thank you for voluntarily entering this confusing and unknown future.

What hasn’t changed: you have been called by a loving God to serve God, the church of Jesus Christ in whatever form, and this world that God loves. You are embracing and embraced by a vision of human life shaped by justice and mercy. The Bible offers the narratives that feed your soul. The liturgical calendar keeps you grounded in a yearly rhythm when no other calendar makes sense. You are called to ministry.

Your journey will be a blessing in this troubled world. May your vocation be lived out in joy, humility, and, of course, with much laughter. CONGRATULATIONS YDS GRADS!!

- Sally Purvis '83 M.Div.
St. Petersburg, Florida

“Wishing you all the very best for your future. YDS changed my life in ways I could never have imagined. I left and became a poet -- go figure, as the young say -- but more importantly, I left feeling the days ahead were wide open and through them my spirit might fly. Godspeed to your own days ahead.

- Marc Harshman '75 M.A.R.
Wheeling, West Virginia
Poet Laureate of West Virginia

“Congratulations to the Class of 2020! I know you will look back at your YDS experience with fondness and love, even though you had to endure these unusual circumstances. This crisis reminds me, once again, how important it is to have dedicated and well-trained spiritual leaders in our communities. May God bless you on your journey ahead!

Yours,
Rev. Jonathan Page '07 M.Div.
Houston, Texas

“Congratulations on your graduation from YDS and welcome to our school’s alumni community! May God guide your next steps in following your call. Godspeed!

- Charles Scalise '75 M.Div.
Shoreline, Washington

“Thank you for following your faith journey wherever that may lead you.

- Jane Splawn '04 M.Div., '05 S.T.M.
Salisbury, North Carolina

“Life will never be the same again and this graduation year will stand out as the one that happened, but not like any in the history of Yale Divinity School (YDS). You will leave ready to take all that you have learned, and put it into action, however, your ability to adjust and adapt will determine the impact and legacy you will have in your communities of service. I celebrate with you knowing your sacrifice and commitment to excellence with everything you have accomplished to get you to this day. Know that the halls of YDS will always hold a special place in your heart long after Covid19 has passed. A day will come when you will enjoy the common room buzz, the harmony of Marquand chapel, and summers on the quad will bring you back to your time spent at YDS.

Congratulations you did it, Class of 2020.

- Jennifer Sheridan '09 M.Div.
Trenton, New Jersey

“Congratulations to you as you celebrate the incredible achievement of finishing your degree at YDS! Although this is not the end that you probably anticipated, I hope you have had a world-shifting experience during your years of study. As you move forward into what comes next, take with you the love of an awesome community, the faith and intellect you have cultivated, and a cloud of witnesses who will be here to support you every step of the way. Go forth with hope and courage into a world filled with possibilities that are beyond our comprehension.

- Jaimie Crumley '15 M.Div., '16 S.T.M.
Los Angeles, California

“I send you my sincere congratulations as you graduate from YDS and embark on your next adventure and all the future adventures that will spring from the experience you are just concluding. The world is in a mess, but there is much beauty and mystery, and many humans and other animals out there to encounter and come to love.

It was long ago when I went to YDS, but I can still recall vividly the feelings of leaving the warm embrace of that community and heading out to places and situations I couldn't know. I spent 32 years in ministry in 3 local UCC congregations, ending up and retiring from First Church Middletown, CT in 2011. Since then I've been focused on environmental advocacy. Now it's your turn to go out and see what you can do. I'm sure you'll make a contribution and touch many people's lives, no matter what form your ministry takes. It's a little scary, and very exciting. All the best to you!

- John Hall, '79 M.Div.
Portland, Connecticut

“Dear class of 2020,

With God's help, you've done it! Congratulations and many blessings on this celebratory day. I join you in feeling disappointment that the commencement ceremony won't happen this year. Hold and cherish the best memories from divinity school and know that your formation has been taking place every day you've been in New Haven. May God bless and use this time in your lives as you move into the world to serve others. Amen!

- Jennifer Creswell '05 M.Div.
Portland, Oregon

“Wishing you well as you step out into a whole New World to carry God’s message into a Future that most of us Have neither anticipated nor prepared for. Your good news Is that God, Yale and tradition have given you a good foundation, and technology has begun to define new ways of doing and of being that will serve you well as you step into your new world.

God’s blessing,
Maggie Gat ’93 M.Div.
Sarasota, Florida

“Congratulations Class of 2020! My heart breaks that you will not get to experience graduation on the quad, but know that we are all rooting for you this spring. The alums know you will do amazing things-- leading us all into a more just and more beautiful future.

All the best,
Rev. Meredith Jane Day ’15 M.Div.
Memphis, Tennessee

“You begin a new life in some sort of ministry. Your path and experiences will be unique. However, there are commonalities. I chose Pastoral ministry, beginning when I was an undergraduate. I served rural churches, a neighborhood church, a university church, a suburban church and large “downtown” congregations. There were times of great jubilation, such as those infrequent occasions when someone said, “Doc, you saved my life!” There were terrible times when persons with malevolence in their hearts set out to sabotage my ministry, but, my congregational ministry gave our children the great (but unchosen) privilege of being reared in the church. Now, one is a retired but distinguished physician. His younger brother is a retired Army Colonel, trained at West Point, who now practices law and crusades for the needy. Older daughter is wife and mother, who has 5 degrees, married a neurologist, practiced law 10 years and is now a Methodist DS, and our younger daughter was a singer who performed with Pavarotti, was on Broadway in PHANTOM, is now a former Prof of Music and is married to an international businessman. All are active Christians and all contend for justice and compassion for the needy. It may be that you will be blessed with children. It may be that you will become famous.

My favorite YDS professor was Roland Bainton. After YDS, we corresponded all the years until he died. His father was a Pastor. Not famous. Served small churches. Bainton’s parents gave the world the greatest Luther scholar of his time. A dear friend, whose birthday is near mine, & who celebrated together for years is a well-known scholar named Walter Brueggemann. Like Rolie, his father was a pastor of small churches. Their son has blessed the world.

It is my prayer for YOU, that you will find blessings after Yale, and in part because of YDS, YOU will BE a blessing to OUR world!

- Robert Croskery ’59 M.Div.
Cincinnati, Ohio

“Congratulations to the class of 2020, and a special shout out to the BDS class of 2020! With you in prayer and sadness and joy in this strange, strange time.

- Robert Laughton ’17 M.Div.
Southport, Connecticut

“Commencements come and go, viruses come and go, but Christ is risen, and such news will never change or be in doubt. Congratulations Class of 2020!

- Gus Succop ’79 M.Div.
Davidson, North Carolina

“Congratulations! Grounded in the hard work of your years at YDS, may your future be filled with JOY!

- Jennifer Riggs ’73 M.Div.
Indianapolis, Indiana

“It is a challenge to compress three (or two) years of soul-work, mind-work and wisdom-learning into the timeframe expected of a Yale divinity graduate under the best of circumstances. In a time of disruption such as you have experienced this year, we are awed by your courage and determination to stick-it-out, absorbing by whatever means all that the Divinity School at Yale could give you in person, on-line, over Zoom and through a variety of technologies inconceivable in times gone by.

Whether the Israelites in on their long sojourn in the wilderness, or the time our Lord spent in the wilderness, learning takes place as God gives affords us the opportunities. Yours has been most unusual. May your time in the heart of YDS-- whether lived out on “the Hill” or experienced further away, be deeply retained in your hearts, souls and minds that you live out that Truth faithfully and fully in all your ministry, work, and lives to come.

Blessings and congratulations to you all!

- John Branson '74 M.Div.
Pittsboro, North Carolina

“To the class of 2020:

Amidst the strangest time of our collective lives, you are graduating into the unknown. When I was a third-year MDiv student, I trained for and ran my first marathon. This time reminds me of that, sometimes - all this talk about how it's a marathon, not a sprint. But when you run a marathon, you train purposefully. You know what you're preparing for. You know how long it will last. You know when to conserve your energy and when to push. In this time, the length is uncertain. What we're supposed to be doing is uncertain. And we didn't go through a 4-6 month training plan to prepare.

While YDS doesn't have “Pastoring in a Pandemic” courses (or at least they didn't in 2011-14!), I do think the training you all have received will serve you well for this time of re-imagining church, rebuilding community, and re-envisioning a just and loving society. Each day I rely on the support of my colleagues in ministry, serving across the country, who I met at YDS. Each week when I plan worship, I use the skills I learned from Nora and Tom in preaching class, and through my classmates and professors in Marquand Chapel, and from our brilliant Reformed Worship class. When providing pastoral care, even in this unprecedented time, it's not just the roleplays I remember, it's the pastoral hearts of all my classmates and mentors.

Class of 2020, you have been training for a marathon. Blessings as you run with pride and conviction and joy. The world, and the church, and the academy are better because of who each one of you are. Congratulations!

- Corinne Freedman Ellis '14 M.Div.
St. Paul, Minnesota

“May God's never-failing love and care inspire and guide you in all you begin and continue to do in your ministries.

- Rev. Dawn Stegelmann '08 M.Div.
Darien, Connecticut

“Congratulations YDS class of 2020! You will be sharing the impact of your YDS experience on your gifts of healing and making our world a better place far into this century. The blessing you will be for future generations is inspiring to consider and a reason to hope.

- Frederick Streets '75 M.Div., Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and former Chaplain of Yale University
Stratford, Connecticut

“Friends: Graduating from YDS is an incredible achievement, and you should be so proud of yourself and your class. You have been prepared well to make a positive impact in the world. The gifts you have nurtured over the last year or more are needed in a world that is besieged by plagues, poverty, and politics. The planet groans under the weight of human greed and extraction. Who will speak for her?

Better yet, who will amplify what she has been telling us for quite some time? The world needs your courageous voices, expansive hearts, brilliant minds, and able hands. I am sending you all light, love, and strength. Well done, but, as I am sure you will agree, the work is not yet finished.

- Jason Craige Harris '12 M.A.R.
New York, New York

“Congrats to the class of 2020. Well done good and faithful ones.

In the midst of this global pandemic we find ourselves discovering new ways of connecting and building the beloved community. We serve a God who walks with us through times of joy and despair and whose love will not let us go. You will never forget this virtual graduation. As you leave the DIV school my prayer for you is that this part of the journey will equip you to lead and to serve, to adapt to the changing world and to be stewards of the earth, to foster change and to accompany the marginalized and outcasts, and to proclaim revolutionary love to a world that needs Gospel hope, peace and love.

Godspeed to you,
Kent Siladi '81 M.Div.
Middletown, Connecticut

“Hello Graduate,

Congratulations on accomplishing your studies at YDS. You should feel proud of this milestone in your life. My hope for you is that your studies and time at YDS gave you a great foundation to build on for the rest of your life. I feel that YDS gave me the tools for thinking deeply which has helped me throughout my career and in my personal life. I hope you will be able to feel this way someday too.

I am sorry you are unable to have a traditional YDS/Yale graduation together with your classmates, but I hope you will find ways to honor yourself and some meaningful rituals to mark this important step in your life.

Congrats,
Elaine Tiller '67 M.Div.
Silver Spring, Maryland

“Class of 2020,

Most of you have your whole career ahead of you. You can take a moment and be proud of all your good work at Yale, but remember this is not the end. It is the start of your career. You have the ability to help make this world a much better place. *I hope that you are able to make much more progress than we did 40 years ago. The next 40 years are yours! Please know how much I admire your lofty goals. Harry Adams use to say to graduates: “You can make a real difference in so many ways!”

With Admiration,
Rev. Ron Hooker '79 M.Div.
Columbus, Ohio

“Congratulations 2020. As you leave YDS. You go forth with the prayers of all that went before you and the eager hearts of all those you will serve. Grace, peace and blessings today and always!

- Cheryl Bundy '15 M.A.R.
Westport, Connecticut

“Dear YDS Scholars,

By earning this degree, you show yourselves worthy of the recognition of your colleagues and of the world. You will never be ordinary, God willing, because you belong to an honorable, and honored, band of scholars. Use your YDS degree as a badge of honor to do good, aid those who suffer, and be gentle to all people.

- Jane Combs Watkins '68 M.A.R.
Bloomington, Indiana

“Heartfelt congratulations!

For me, and for my dear wife and mentor, the late Kate Latimer (M.Div. 1985, S.T.M. 1998), all our time at Yale Divinity School, and continuing relationships first formed there, have been a life-changing blessing. May your own time and success there, signaled by graduation, prove to be forever a blessing for you, and help each in your own special pathway to continue to be a blessing to each other, and to this world so in need of your gifts.

Congratulations again on this accomplishment. Wishing you well always, all blessings, and peace.

- Arthur Latimer '98 M.Div.
Carmel, California

“Dear YDS Class of 2020 -

What a world you are graduating into! My prayers and blessings, and those of the United Church of Santa Fe, are with you in this and in all the years to come. You are facing challenges few other YDS graduates have ever faced. I pray that the gifts your time at YDS has given you will fill you with the hope, courage, and joy your ministries will require in the years ahead. I know I join with other YDS alums and your professors in wishing you all the best and all God's blessings now and always.

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

May you go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Blessings,
Rev. Talitha Arnold '80 M.Div.
Santa Fe, New Mexico

“All our best to you as you step out into a challenging era. Perhaps more than you might think now, YDS has prepared you well. You will make a difference. Congratulations!

- Greg and Kathy Turner '70 and '69 M.Div.
Seattle, Washington

“Enthusiastic and very best wishes to the class of 2020! I hope your memories of the years at YDS will be precious and long-lasting. Memories and lessons of YDS as well as alumni experiences have inspired me for fifty-seven years and counting. I hope this will be true for you as well. Congratulations!

- Robert Peters '63 M.Div.
Frederick, Maryland

“You enter a waiting world, waiting for your service, waiting for liberation, waiting for restoration or health. Whatever. May you contribute your gifts however you can to help end the wait.

- Paul Yount '54 B.D.
Hendersonville, North Carolina

“Congratulations class of 2020! You worked so hard to get here, and have accomplished a great deal. We, the community of alumni you are now joining, welcome you, and are so proud of you! I don’t know what path lies ahead of you - and maybe you’re not sure, yet, either - but I’m sure it will be as amazing as you are.

My heart breaks that you won’t get to graduate with your friends sitting right next to you, and your loved ones cheering you on as you are handed the diploma in person. I’m sure you grieve that loss, too. And yet, this doesn’t take away from all that you have learned, all the ways in which you have grown, and all the love which you have given and received; with or without the cap-n-gown experience, you are taking the most important things with you, out into the world, to be your amazing self. And for that, the world thanks you. Or, I should speak for myself, I thank you.

Good job, class of 2020! Congratulations!

Blessings to you all,
The Rev. Martha Korienek ’06 M.Div.
San Francisco, California

“Dear (almost) YDS Alum,

Now it all begins. Your committing to faith, justice, social responsibility. I never was ordained. Catholic I was, and still amazingly am. But I think that in my years working for peace in Northern Ireland, for LGBTQ rights here, for women on Skid Row I carried out the mission that YDS prepared me for.

In my time working as a journalist, I managed to sometimes focus on stories of people doing good. It’s not all of a pattern. Piecemeal, really. So be open to the good that sometimes will be presented to you. Godspeed. And, yes, have a wonderful life.

- Marylouise Oates ’73 M.Div.
Los Angeles, California

“YDS Commencement is a powerful event by any standard, but I’m sure this year’s virtual ceremony, as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, will be permanently burned into your individual and collective memories! However, Commencement is the mere frosting on the cake that represents years of exciting academic discovery, personal growth and indelible exposure to faculty and classmates, all of which contribute to the unique experiences you now carry forward. A Graduation ceremony is nice frosting to be sure, but the cake is the true substance of your YDS experience! From one whose own Commencement dates back more than fifty years, I want to wish you much success as you pursue a professional life that, no matter your calling, will contribute to the benefit of a society in dire need of healing and to the well-being of your fellow mortals, especially those who are considered the least among us.

Congratulations...and blessings and Godspeed.

- Damon Bradley ’68 B.D.
Chestertown, Maryland

“Best wishes to the Class of 2020 from the Class of 1970. Our class also studied at YDS during difficult years so we have a little understanding of your situation. Our prayers go with you.

I send personal best wishes to two students that I know at YDS--Tim O’Leary ’20 M.Div. and Phoenix Gonzalez ’21 M.Div.

- Cathie Cipolla, Class Agent, ’70 B.D.
Fairfield, Connecticut

“I am proud that you guys are there to carry on the tradition and values of the YDS I know. Thank you for the good work you have done and will continue.

- Scott Wood ’63 M.Div.
Monrovia, Maryland

“Dear YDS Graduates of 2020. First, thanks for answering God’s call into the adventure of ministry! Secondly, congratulations on finishing your world-class education/preparation at YDS for the ministry that God’s designed for your future. You will be an amazing and creative force for God’s joy and life. I treasure my years at YDS, playing ultimate frisbee on the quad, discussing life and theology in the classrooms and lunch room, and enjoying life with an amazing confluence of colleagues set so closely to NYC and New England. You too will be propelled by your special years at YDS into a dynamic yet needy world that will be blessed deeply by your commitment and calling. God’s richest blessings to each of you, my new fellow YDS colleagues, as you celebrate and embark.

In Christ’s hope,
Pastor Fritz Wiese ’92 M.Div.
Peachtree City, Georgia

“Dorella (’77 M.Div.) and I send our best wishes to the Class of 2020. Our religious institutions will need committed leaders like you to lead them in a world transformed by climate change and pandemics.

- Dale Bond ’71 M.Div., ’92 S.T.M.
Ann Arbor, Michigan

“Congratulations on graduating from the world’s best seminary. I graduated from YDS in 1952 and earned an STM in 1953. I have been blessed all my long life by my experience at YDS.

- Richard Stazesky ’52 M.Div., ’53 S.T.M.
Hockenssin, Delaware

“Congratulations to all of you on reaching this milestone! There are many of us who have walked this path before you. In the 27 years since I finished my degree, I continue to count my years at YDS as some of the very best. I hope you also come to experience the benefits of your education for years to come!

- Kristin Godlin ’93 M.Div., ’98 S.T.M.
Champaign, Illinois

“Everyone I know believes his or her graduation from seminary was unparalleled, but yours really is. Congratulations to all of you who will have the most memorable graduation ceremony there ever was. Though you won’t be able to breathe the same air, you will be animated by the same Spirit. Though you won’t be able to embrace each other in the flesh, you will find the divine meeting place in your hearts. Though you won’t be able to go out to eat together afterwards, you will feast on the memories you have made together forever. It sounds a little like heaven, doesn’t it?

Wishing you a little bit of heaven on May 18.

- Barbara Brown Taylor ’76 M.Div.
Clarkesville, Georgia

“Congratulations on a degree well-earned! This world needs the kind of grads who can ask the big questions of life and existence and those who do so thoughtfully, aided by excellent scholarship. I look forward to seeing the kind of impact you will make on this world!

- Tyler Hale ’13 M.A.R.
Portland, Oregon

“You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this! Be bold. Be brave and take your education, your compassion and creativity into the world.”

When you are able, come back and take a picture of yourself with your “besties”, in your cap and gown if possible! It will be ok.

Blessings on you!

- Terry-Thomas Primer ’80 M.Div.
Hopewell, New Jersey

“Even in the best of times, no one knows the future, but you are graduating in the middle of a pandemic whose effects are completely unknown. The chaos and uncertainty may lead to worldwide transformations in ways that may be, in the end, better for humanity. Or not. It will surely be a time of Cross-bearing for many. Witness to the resurrection anyway, and you will be a part of what tips the balance towards new life.

I pray for your strength and courage to speak the truth, to act with compassion, and to make a difference. Congratulations on taking this different path in a different time. May God's love embrace you that you may bear the light and find moments of grace to delight you on your way.

- Susan Klein '77 M.Div.
Camarillo, California

“I know this isn't the commencement you were anticipating but I hope you will celebrate wherever you are with family and friends. My commencement was 41 years ago in 1979. Yes, I do remember the day, both downtown and on the Quad -- but most of all I remember the three years that led up to that ceremony: the wonderful classes; outstanding faculty; wild events like the Women's Center wine auction, the original Taylor House lecture series with themes such as “The Seven Deadly Virtues” and “Anything Goes Just So the Church Grows;” volleyball games on the Quad (when that was allowed); The Fatted Cafe coffee house in Porter Hall (which has been demolished); and most of all deep friendships. I'm still in touch with many friends from YDS years -- indeed, they remain some of my closest friends.

Those friendships are far more lasting than my memories of commencement. Just a few words about the person typing this: I spent 17 years as a parish pastor in Manhattan (including time as campus pastor at Lehman College and NYU), 17 years as Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in NYC, and now retired from full-time teaching but still teaching and preaching in Minneapolis...and enjoying time on the YDS Alumni Board.

Congratulations on completing your studies and heading for virtual commencement! You're graduating at a challenging time which is exactly why we need you and others in your class. God bless you and keep you -- and give you courage to be a bit disruptive, when necessary.

- Barbara K. Lundblad '79 M.Div.
Minneapolis, Minnesota

“Dear Graduates,

Congratulations on achieving your degrees! I know a lot of hard work was involved. You will be sharing the benefits of your excellent education around the world, doing good wherever you are. I wish you success in your ministries and vocations. May they bring you fulfillment and joy and be a blessing to those around you.

With sincerest good wishes,
Janice Vogt, '90 M.Div.
Warminster, Pennsylvania

“My three years at Yale taught me much about being understanding and there for other people. Though I did not enter the ministry, I feel my education at Yale helped me in my subsequent jobs as a pastor's assistant and gain new appreciation for my Christianity and my life.

- Dianne Severance '91 M.Div.
Bridgeport, Connecticut

“Dear graduates,

You are being pressed into service at a critical moment in the life of the church and in our world. You are ready for the challenge!!!!

- The Right Reverend James H. Evans Jr. '75 M.Div.
Rochester, New York

“Congratulations on your graduation from YDS!

I’m sorry that you will not be able to enjoy the usual festivities. Still, it seems appropriate that you would graduate into a hurting world; you are now better equipped to help bring about healing.

“It is the Christian’s vocation to be one of YHWH’s irregulars, dancing mischievously on the edge of chaos.”

- Ron LaRocque ’03 M.Div.
Denver, Colorado

“Wishing you “Congratulations on your graduation” seems to have a hollow ring under the circumstances in which we are living, but as a YDS alum who still looks back at my years there as “grace-filled”, I send you these greetings with heartfelt sincerity. In our home, we have a framed quotation by Corrie Ten Boom which has taken on great meaning over forty years of ministry. It reads, “Every person God puts in our lives, every experience God sends us, is the perfect preparation for the future that only God can see.” In addition to sending well wishes, I pray someday you will look back on this time in which your graduation festivities are dampened by the coronavirus pandemic as a chord in a minor key that is part of a rich composition by which your life and ministry praises the Holy One whose blessings are beyond all we can ask or imagine.

- Richard Israel ’76 M.Div.
Shaker Heights, Ohio

“From the perspective of fifty years, --- forty of them in parish ministry --- I can reflect on my years at Yale as being among the most formative as well as enjoyable years of my life. I hope you have been blessed by that same kind of experience and feel well-equipped to use it in ways that become a blessing to others.

Congratulations! May you cherish your time at YDS through all the years ahead.

- Wayne Conner ’70 M.Div.
Kalamazoo, Michigan

“The conclusion of your time at YDS is unprecedented and will shape your respective vocations in ways that are difficult to foresee on the day of your graduation. The constant in your experience with the generations that have preceded you is a rich, dynamic and ever-changing legacy, one that was shaped by others and that you have shaped, and will shape, for those who follow. It is difficult to describe the form and substance of this legacy, but Roland Bainton’s formulation is as good as any. In 1957, in his book *Yale and the Ministry*, Bainton described that over the centuries first Yale, and now its Divinity School, have displayed to a remarkable degree major themes that are held in balance. At the remarkable institution from which you are now graduating into the next phase of your ministry, in Bainton’s words “theology, piety and social concern did not part company.” May you move forth from this place with all three continuing to give form and substance to your life and work.

- Jeff Oak ’85 M.Div., ’86 S.T.M., ’95 M.Phil., ’96 Ph.D.
Cincinnati, Ohio

“Blessings upon you, even and especially in these tumultuous days, as you celebrate this landmark occasion, which is, of course, both a poignant ending and a new and hopefully invigorating beginning. May you carry with you all the insights you have gleaned from your time at YDS while at the same time continuing to cultivate what the Psalmist calls “a teachable spirit,” that you may keep on growing in wisdom and in faith all the days of your lives. Amidst all the sounds of this world, may you steadfastly listen for the still, small voice of God, which I believe would always lead you to the place where, in the words of Frederick Buechner, “the world’s deep hunger and your own deep gladness meet and embrace”. I rejoice with you.

shalom,
Allen Grothe ’73 M.Div.
St. Louis, Missouri

“May you have fond memories of friendships formed, classes shared, and self-discoveries made in the time you spent with profs, classmates, and field work while at YDS. I’m sure your parents and friends are proud of your accomplishments even with the disruptions you have experienced this last semester at the divinity school.

A similar disruption occurred in the spring of 1970 when the university was shut down during protests over the Vietnam War. Grades the last semester were Pass/Fail. My grade for nine of the twelve hours of classes depended on a paper I wrote for Dr. David Little (social ethics). In addition, I had to write my ordination paper. I was ordained June 7, 1970 on a Sunday morning at Park Church UCC, Norwich, CT. In the afternoon I was graduated at the divinity school. I returned last year for the 50th reunion of my entering class.

I met some of you last October and was so impressed with you and the direction the school has taken. Commencement is a beginning even if there is no formal ceremony. Your joy will come as you further your study or embark on some field of ministry knowing that a cloud of witnesses is cheering you to do what Micah implored Israel to do: “to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” Congratulations and best wishes for your futures.

- Paul Kuntzman '70 B.D.
Vassar, Michigan

“Many the joys and hard the knocks of your dear Yale years, we know. Over the 50 years since my wife and I were on the hill, many more have been endured as well. But clearly, an all too hard and fast halt to your days and now such an unkindly shortened past you have to face a challenging future. Allow us to be among the many and many more who wish you well.

So too we wish you the very best in the future, one that has perhaps begun too fast! In any event, may your Yale years always remain happy memories, and as you continue on, find even more to celebrate year after year. In short, even if your YDS experience was all you could have hoped and gone on right to the last day, may your very best days always ahead of you.

3 Cheers and many blessings,
Ron ('70 B.D.) and Janet Evans
Claremont, California

“Dear Rockin’ Class of 2020:

Well, this novel Coronavirus sure puts our faith to the test. We are out upon the high seas now, subject to wind and wave, storm tossed and battered. I hope and trust that your Yale Divinity School education -- tapping into the spiritual wisdom of millennia -- has resourced you with the ethical, spiritual and theological equipment to navigate this powerful, invisible, and malevolent force. May you know courage and wisdom. May the presence of God equip you to face what lies ahead. You are in our prayers. We believe in you. We are cheering you on.

- Nancy S. Taylor '81 M.Div.
Boston, Massachusetts
Dean’s Advisory Council, Co-chair
Senior Minister, Old South Church in Boston

“To the Class of 2020,

You are graduating at a time that will be examined and written about in history books...

May you find blessings when there seems to be only suffering.

May you minister to as well as be ministered to.

May you feel all of the graduates who have come before you in these words.

Grace & Peace,
Debbie McLeod '09 M.Div.
Houston, Texas

“Dear Class of 2020 -

Graduation from YDS was one of the highlights of my life. I am sorry that this time of pandemic will interfere with the traditions that are such a part of that weekend. However...

You have all worked so hard to get where you are. You have forged friendships and had experiences that have formed you over the past few years. No pandemic can take any of that away from you.

And you will have stories to tell that none of us do. Those of you who are preachers will have all kinds of good sermon material right out of the gate!

And you will still be a graduate of Yale Divinity School with all the preparation and benefits that entails. So...

Go forth into the world in peace.

Be of good courage.

Hold fast to that which is good.

Render to no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the fainthearted.

Support the weak.

Help the afflicted.

Honor all people.

Love and serve God

with gladness and singleness of heart.

Blessings and congratulations to you all!

- The Rev. Elaine Ellis Thomas '13 M.Div.

Hoboken, New Jersey

Rector, All Saints Episcopal Parish, Hoboken, NJ

“Hum that oh-so-well known tune with me...ya know...Simon and Garfunkel's, “Bridge Over Troubled Waters” and you'll have a pretty good idea what all your dedicated academic and practicum studies were all about.

“I'll take your part, oh, when darkness comes

And pain is all around

Like a bridge over troubled water

I will lay me down

Like a bridge over troubled water

I will lay me down”

These lyrics should not deter, but bolster your resolve to proudly bear your newly earned heritage as a Yale Divinity School graduate. Go empowered into the unknown and like our Celtic friends, who named God as before, beside, above, below and behind - shine your imago dei into the darkness and build the bridges needed to further create God's realm!

God's Blessings and my congratulations!!

You've got this!!!

- Pastor Chris Solimene '16 M.Div.

Killingworth, Connecticut

Avon Congregational Church, Avon, CT

“Hold fast to your calling in these perilous times. Remember the best of your time at YDS and the nurture of your faith it has sustained in you. Wishing you all a most blessed and fulfilling vocation.

- Donald Motaka '78 M.Div.

Oxford, Michigan

“YDS Class of 2020: It was a joy to walk alongside of you during your time at YDS! You all are such bright lights and I am looking forward to witnessing the ways you shine your wisdom into the world in the coming months and years. You are graduating in one of the strangest times in history, and while there is much uncertainty ahead of us, I have no doubt that your creativity, imagination, and desire for justice and liberation will change the trajectory of what it means to be people of Love in this changing world. Blessings are you embark on the next stage of your journey. You did it!

- Erendira Jimenez '19 M.Div.
Fairfield, Connecticut

“Dear graduates of 2020,

I am a real old Yale graduate and YDS teacher (STM 1960; instructor and assistant professor 1962-1964) who is still treasuring most valuable insights of my Yale days, spent for the most part in Taylor House. Heartfelt congratulations to you the youngest class entering the fold of that international Yale fellowship. I do hope and pray that you also ingested two basic principles at YDS: First, humankind in our Christian tradition is but one global community not permitting any type of discrimination and second: No individual nor partisan group may ever claim exclusive propriety of an absolute truth. It is my personal conviction that failure to heed both insights fostered greed for money and power and resulted in the ever growing, horrifying split of this world into rich and poor segments. Take my sincere well-wishes and blessings to live up to the most Christ-conform heritage of our Yale tradition.

- Erhard S. Gerstenberger '60 S.T.M.
Giessen, Germany

“I join fellow alumnae/i in sending my very best wishes to every one of you in this year's graduating class. This is a time to celebrate your accomplishments! It is my hope that each of you has been nurtured by all the elements of the YDS community and I pray that you will go forth to this next phase of your lives strengthened by the relationships, knowledge, and spiritual growth that you have experienced during your years at YDS. May God's grace, peace, and steadfast presence accompany you every step of the way.

Blessings and joy!

- Paula Nordhem '86 M.Div.
Burnsville, Minnesota

“Many congratulations to the class of 2020!

You have worked hard and have great reason to celebrate and be celebrated. I hope in large and small ways, you use the powers of creativity honed during your time at YDS to do just that: celebrate.

My concluding time at YDS were also difficult, unusual, and confusing, as my brother took his life just as my final semester was beginning. Despite the unique and challenging circumstances of that last semester, I felt myself cared for, loved, and supported by the div school community. I hope that you have experienced the same: the kind of community of care that names and makes space for heartache and hardship without pressure to move quickly to healing; a community that extends beyond geographical closeness and creates new rituals of meaning that are responsive to new realities.

If you have not experienced this, my graduation wish for you is that you will be the creator of such movements and moments.

I send all peace, wellness, and prayers.
And many, many congratulations.

- Ellen B. Koneck '16 M.A.R.
St. Paul, Minnesota

“Love and congratulations! Dive in ... the water is great, and the world needs you!

Congratulations Class of 2020!

- David Mensah '89 M.Div.

Seattle, Washington

“My sincerest congratulations to this year's graduating class. While you cannot celebrate this milestone and all your achievements in person, those achievements are not diminished by this pandemic we find ourselves in at the moment. It will pass, but what you have gained at YDS and the many things that you will take with you in your memories will not pass. Blessings as you go on to serve the world or for further studies. You will change the world for the better and we are all grateful for that fact.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Anita L. Bradshaw, Ph.D., '91 M.Div., '93 S.T.M.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

“Congratulations!! May you serve with wise heads and loving hearts as you carry forward what you've learned and experienced at YDS.

- Ann Beams '80 M.Div., '91 S.T.M.

Hanover, New Hampshire

“Congratulations, Class of 2020! May God bless you and keep you and uphold you in your ministries.

- Hilary Streever '12 M.Div.

Richmond, Virginia

“Forty-eight years later, my YDS years and friends remain supremely precious features of my life and did some good along the way. May it be the same for you!

- Fr. Kerry Kirking '72 M.A.R.

Seattle, Washington

“Congratulations, Class of 2020.

Oh, the places you'll go.

Oh, the people you'll meet.

Oh, the ideas you'll throw.

Oh, the sails you will sheet.

And as when Chris in the Morning
wanted to sail a cow through the air

in a giant fling,

but for the sake of uniqueness,

had to change to a piano,

and because he was open to change

said so poignantly,

“It's not the thing in the fling,

but the fling itself.”

May you have moments

when the keys of the music

rain down from the sky above

all around you,

and it's beautiful.

- Rev. Dr. Andrew McDonald '80 M.Div.

Saint Paul, Minnesota

“Congratulations on the tremendous accomplishment of completing your degree at YDS! Even more notable is that you have demonstrated resilience and tenacity to persevere during this time of unprecedented change. Truly, you have “fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith”!

Reaching the end of your YDS journey can be both exciting and daunting. To leave a place you have treasured and a community you have called home for multiple years is an enormous step that can both break and buoy a heart. Go forth knowing you will always have roots in a place that, God willing, nurtured your intellectual, spiritual, pastoral, and personal growth - but gave you wings to soar.

You are wrapped in the prayers and congratulatory wishes of the alumni who have gone before you. You stand on the shoulders of giants! Now, go be the next generation of giants on whose shoulders the future of the Church and the world will stand.

- Nicole Perone '16 M.Div.
Wallingford, Connecticut

“Congratulations, Class of 2020! I share with you my “go to” benediction as you go forth into the world:

Life is short.

We have but little time to gladden the hearts
of those who travel this way with us.

Therefore, be swift to love.

Make haste to be kind.*

And may the grace of God attend you,
the love of + Christ surround you,
and the Holy Spirit keep you,
that you may live in faith, abound in hope
and grow in love, both now and forever more. Amen.

* Henri Amiel

- Sue Sprowls '95 M.Div.
Ann Arbor, Michigan

“You’ve already faced plenty of uncertainty and responded with grace. May God continue to strengthen you as you go forward to bless the world.

- Jean Devine '76 M.Div.
Austin, Texas

“Dear YDS 2020 graduates,

Because my son, John Henry Reilly, is a member of your class, I have had the privilege of meeting some of you over the past two years. I recognize in you the same sense of community, commitment, compassion and dedication to learning that informed my years on the Quad and has inspired me in all the years since then.

The world needs your gifts now more than ever. I know you will bring creativity, talent, YDS spirit, and fresh 2020 vision to the journey that lies ahead.

Congratulations and Godspeed to you all!

- Sara Engram '79 M.Div.
Baltimore, Maryland

“Dear 2020 grads,

Congratulations on your achievement, which is not diminished by the absence of traditional markings of graduation celebrations, although the emotional loss of those markings is undoubtedly felt. As you continue to minister in many and various ways in this strange new world, may you be open to the movement of God’s Holy Spirit in your lives and in our world. After 10 these many years, I can tell you from personal experience that the Spirit can and will lead you in directions you could never imagine.

God’s richest, most surprising blessings be with you on your journey!

- Rev. Kathy Schell '79 M.Div.

Chelsea, Michigan

Director of Mission Integration/Chaplain, St. Joseph Mercy Chelsea

“Bumpy roads lead to beautiful places.” The first time I heard that line was when the manager of the Washington Nationals baseball team described his team’s journey from a record of 19-31 in May to become the eventual 2019 World Series Champions. For me sometimes there is wisdom in sports -- always in baseball. Eventually the team credited their historic success and remarkable turn-around for the season by putting in the work and going 1-0 every day. So that is my wish for you - Members of the Class of 2020: Bumpy roads will most certainly lead to beautiful ministries - so wake up, pray, and with God on your team go 1-0 everyday! Keep fighting the fight for justice and peace. Congratulations on your remarkable achievement!

- Lynnea Mumola '96 M.A.R.

Silver Spring, Maryland

“Congratulations to each of you in the YDS Class of 2020!

The Yale University and YDS traditions of graduation exercises are special, unique and memorable -- and I know that the university will do all that it can to ensure that you have an opportunity to gather in person in front of Marquand Chapel at some future time to celebrate your accomplishments and to revel in those traditions!

As a member of the Yale Alumni Association Board of Governors, I want to welcome you into the body of over 175,000 Yale alumni around the globe. One thing that I learned while at YDS and while engaging with other Yalies downtown over the years is that Yale is an experience that lasts a lifetime! You will always carry the memories of your time on the Quad, worship in Marquand Chapel, gatherings in the Common Room, and, of course, your classroom interactions. But now you are also part of an incredibly rich and vibrant community that is far reaching. Be sure to visit <https://alumni.yale.edu/> and look for opportunities to stay engaged with Yale no matter where you find yourself in the world.

Like you, the friendships I made during my years at YDS are among the most important in my life. The shared experiences -- good ones as well as the more challenging ones - bind me closely to my classmates. That is all part of the YDS community that a pandemic cannot take away from you.

God’s blessings on each of you in the great Class of 2020. And again, congratulations! Boola, boola!!

- Jerry Henry '80 M.Div.

Greenville, South Carolina

“Dear colleagues and graduates of the Class of 2020,

What could have prepared you better to follow your vocation than time and study in community at YDS? To every season unforeseen and unexpected aspirations have a way of compelling our attention. The impact of Covid19 make already vulnerable communities even more fragile. Now opportunities to live into what God is doing for good is even more urgent.

The world is hungry for your professional capacities, creativity and compassion. My hope is that your desire to meet that hunger includes pursuing commitments to healthy equity for all, poverty alleviation for the many, and peace-building and common care for our interconnected planet.

As you celebrate from a distance and hold close those relationships that have brought you the greatest meaning, know in your Spirit that you belong to a greater cloud of witnesses; women and men who stand with you, who value and pray for you, who covenant to accompany in acts of solidarity and liberation alongside you.

Be patient with yourselves, but not too patient; be kind to yourselves and recall what you learned most about yourselves; search our new and accountable relationships of intellectual and spiritual support; if you are willing, pledge to repair places where YDS may have fallen short; and, finally persist in always celebrating the fierce and deep, lived-lessons YDS has offered you and with a generous and grateful heart, pass these on to others.

Congratulations on your accomplishments and God in Christ bless each of you in the weeks, months, and years ahead.
Yours in faith,

- Neal Christie '90 M.Div.
Washington, DC

“So, I’m gonna bet this is not what you were expecting. You have visions of caps and gowns marching through campus. You had visions of decorating your mortarboard, your tassel swinging in the wind, and photos with friends and family. Now because of all that has happened, none of that is going to happen in the way you thought it would. While this is not what you were expecting, don’t let that diminish your joy at this moment. YOU FINISHED!! YOU GRADUATED!! YOU ARE A PART OF THE YALE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION!!

What you have accomplished in your time at Yale is nothing short of amazing. You are not the same person that you were when you first set foot on campus. You have grown, learned lessons, matured, made lifelong friends, and have a wonderful time to look back on. You have memories and experiences that are irreplaceable. And yes, you are prepared for the world ahead.

The world you are entering is not like the one I or any other Yale alumni entered. There is no playbook to follow or a well-worn path to walk. It is all-new, just like you. It is a world full of possibilities. It is a world that will need new solutions and compassionate caring people to make it a better place. It is a world that needs you now more than ever. We need your thoughts, your energy, and your ideas to create the world we will need going forward.

So congratulations! It is not what you imagined, but it is your time to shine. You’re gonna do great. After all, you’re a Yalie

- Daryl Williams '01 M.Div.
Bowie, Maryland

“There must be someone to live through it all
and bear witness to the fact that God lived,
even in these times.

Etty Hillesum, Diaries

Greetings, dear ones,

Certain events divide time in two, into a before and an after. They stop us in our tracks. They shake our foundations. After them, nothing is the same, not even those things that continue. A new reality opens up. We cannot go back. How do we respond? Who are we now?

The coronavirus pandemic is such an event. It has divided time in two. It is shaking our foundations. Nothing is the same. Even when shelter in place restrictions are lifted, all will be changed. We will be changed.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic shut down your Commencement and graduation celebrations around the world, the church and world into which you are being called are in many ways no longer the church and world that nurtured you into your calling. With ever-increasing velocity, society has been shifting from shared location to dislocation or trans-location, from rhythmic time to malleable time, from multi-sensory community to on-line community, from religious identity to identity politics. The earth of the Anthropocene is no longer the same earth, changes which have also continued to accelerate, creating their own dislocations and arrhythmias.

The coronavirus pandemic reveals and heightens all these trends. They are fraught with multi-form danger. At the same time, your own vocational paths are entangled in the thickets of questions. What does parish ministry, or teaching, or community organizing, or civic service, look like in our increasingly dis-located, a-rhythmic, dis-incarnate social weave? How do we respond to the tick tock tick tock of scientists' warnings that this is the now or never decade for avoiding catastrophic climate change? And just where will the money come from, in the midst or aftermath of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression?

You came to Yale Divinity School, I wager, because you were drawn beyond sense or reason by a yearning to participate in the Divine Work. You have now been formed for several years by a divinity school community that brings soul and scholarship, rigor and reverence, affection and aspiration together. You have held hands around a persistent wisp of intuition that these dangers and questions are also seed-laden, pockmarked, with the resurrection life God hides in improbable places and refuses to stop giving.

This I believe. In the community of Yale Divinity School, you have life-time traveling companions, some of whom you are graduating with today, some of whom you will meet at other times, some of whom you will never meet. Hold hands with them. Hold hands with us. They will, we will, fortify you for your journey, and for the journey we share. We will fortify each other.

And this I also believe. You are what the world in its distress needs now. Trust that. Trust that you will be given all that you need along the way.

And know that we, the community of YDS alumni of whom you now are a part, are with you.

- Kristin Foster, 1977 M.Div.
ELCA Pastor, retired
Cook, Minnesota

“Dear graduate,

HURRAH! CONGRATULATIONS! BEST WISHES! WHOOPEE! YOU DID IT!

The time has come for you to launch out (possibly again) into a future of a lot of unknowns, especially given the current state of the world.

But I hope that you are able to take the time to bask a bit in a sense of great accomplishment at this graduation. YDS may have been an easy journey, or it may not have been. In either case you leave with increased knowledge, a deeper sense of who you are and what you want to do with your life. You have many years ahead to accomplish your goals, or change your direction. There will be surprises!

Whichever/whatever, I wish you so many blessings for the journey ahead.

I have cherished my time, my studies and my friendships from YDS, and continue to do so these many years later. May the same be true for you.

Many prayers for you to have a full and rewarding life,

Kathy Turner '69 B.D.

Seattle, Washington

“Dear Class of 2020: These are some of the most uncertain and extra-ordinary days any of us living have experienced.

It is right to grieve what is lost. It is right to give tribute to those health care workers, first responders, and policy makers on the front line of this universal epidemic. It is right to lift our hands, our voices, our spirits in empathy and mourning. It is right to admit what we do not, and cannot know. It is right to celebrate your achievements. Your graduation from Divinity school marks you as someone fluent in the study of the long arc of human history; practiced in the art of listening to the fears and hopes that lay under and around utterance; and adept at navigating the gulf between reason, expectation, and the unknown. This may be one of the most important moments in human history for a div school education. Your task now is to be your full self and to build a life of meaning you can be proud of. In an era of physical distancing, we are called--no matter what the role, job, or region of the earth-- to inspire our neighbors to truth and justice. Congratulations. Stay safe and remember that you are loved and important.

- Horace Ballard '10 M.A.R.

Pownal, Vermont



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