



Spirit Inspired
Worship

Standing Ovation

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As soon as the graduates began to walk out, the crowd began cheering. People in the back stood up to catch a glimpse, and excitement filled the air. Cell phones, set for either video or photos, were lifted high, preserving the moment. The stage handlers made sure everything was ready, and the ceremony began with a choral performance. By the end of the first song, the whole audience was nodding and tapping to a fan favorite until it reached its crescendo, "Now I know my



ABC's; next time won't you sing with me!"

Fifteen minutes later, the preschool graduation was over, and it was time for cookies and juice. I don't know if it were touch-and-go for any of the graduates, but it appears most everyone made it to kindergarten, including my grandson.

Graduation ceremonies are in full swing. Thanks to cell phones and Facebook, I'm celebrating these milestones with friends across the country. From high school to Masters of Divinity to doctorates, degrees are being conferred on people I love and respect. In a few days, I'll head to Oregon for a family

member's college graduation.

So, I offer my congratulations to all who are marking these accomplishments in learning! We recognize the persistence and sacrifice it takes to advance your education and the value it offers society.

My grandson received a framed certificate noting his transition to kindergarten. I've been musing about whether we might do something similar in our churches' adult education classes. After a particularly challenging Bible study, could we invite the congregation to a graduation ceremony, especially with the promise of cookies and punch afterward? Could we confer degrees or titles like the one my grandson received: Excellent Encourager? Or perhaps we recognize those who write our newsletters, the Persistent Punctuators? Those who share their love of the gospel with a notecard: Faithful Friend.

As Presbyterians, our history and our polity are premised on a love of learning for the betterment of all. In our global mission efforts, we did not simply plant churches. We formed schools. Duncan Ferguson (former president of the Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities) [explains](#), "Presbyterian/Reformed Christians take educational mission seriously. We value *informational* education, learning about the world and how it functions. We value *vocational* education, developing God-given talents in order to fulfill the vocation to which we have been called. And fundamentally we value *transformational* education, as the Brief Statement of Faith says: 'The Spirit gives us courage . . . to witness to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in church and culture, to hear the voices of people long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.'"

Today, Dr. Cindy Gnadinger serves as Chair of the Board of APCU, as well as President of Carroll University, a Presbyterian university in Waukesha. Along with Rev. Elizabeth McCord (chaplain and director of spiritual life), Carroll is merging informational, vocational, and transformational learning. Our ecumenical campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin (Milwaukee), under the direction of Aaron Shoppa, is striving to do the same in a secular context. So, just as we celebrate our graduates, we honor the educators and leaders who bring learning to life. Thanks be to God!