

What an exciting time for your congregation and those of you who are graduating! I'm Bishop Connie Mitchell Shelton, the resident Bishop of the NC Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Graduates, you have reached this incredible milestone! Think of all that God has brought you through to receive the grace of graduation. You've worked hard, and you've been supported by so many - family, teachers, administrators, friends, and your church family! Thank you, congregation, for all the ways you encouraged, prayed, cheered, and made a way for your graduate. Don't stop!

The journey continues in their next season of life - whatever that looks like for you! It is different for each person, so you, graduate - discern well with others as you listen to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Know that your North Carolina Conference's Board of Higher Education is offering the possibility for a student to receive a scholarship! Congregations, please revisit your most recent Charge Conference forms and add the names of your graduating high school seniors and their anticipated college. We will let you know if they are chosen to receive a scholarship!

We celebrate today all of the new beginnings before you. Let's join together now and pray for our graduates.

*O Lord, we are so grateful for your faithful and steadfast love. We are so thankful for each graduate who comes to this moment with expectancy, anticipation, and hope. We ask that your Spirit will be near each one to displace fear and anxiety and uncertainty and give a double portion of faith and joy.*

*May this congregation continue to support and pray and uphold the graduates so that they know that they are not in the world alone but they are connected to the body of Christ, and that they can bear witness to your love in the world.*

*For the families who are having difficulty releasing graduates, give them peace that passes understanding and help each one of us know our role in this next season of the graduate's life. Thank you for this congregation who continues to form young people, and we pray that you heighten their awareness, even this day, of young people around their community who may not know they belong to God. May this congregation be a welcoming palace for students, for children, for all people, so that each one knows they are your Beloved.*

*We ask this in your strong name, Jesus. Amen.*