

2020 Virtual Commencement Remarks

By David Roland Finley, Ph.D., North Central Michigan College

Good evening. I'm Dr. David Roland Finley, president of North Central Michigan College. On behalf of the faculty, administration, staff, and the Board of Trustees, I welcome you to North Central's 2020 graduation ceremony. Though this is our 60th observation of Commencement, this evening's event also marks a first for this great institution, as we are celebrating virtually. I am pleased that you are here to share this joyous and yet solemn occasion, as we honor the accomplishments of the Class of 2020.

Graduates, the word "commencement" means *a beginning*. You have achieved a very significant new beginning. That alone is cause for celebration. The new opportunities that will present themselves because of your new beginning are also cause for celebration. But perhaps the greatest celebration is that you have arrived at this moment.

This has been a year of firsts at the College: our first green roof, our first solar panel, and our first electric car charging station. This year saw our first season of Club Running and of Club Skiing. (What better extracurricular activities to pursue in beautiful Northern, Michigan?) We also took our first bonafide steps in the AD/CL Building Renovation Project. However, this year also brought us the first global pandemic in over 100 years.

The adjective unprecedented has been used numerous times to describe the Covid-19 pandemic, and for good reason. Few other adjectives accurately capture how profoundly this event has changed our personal and professional lives over the past two months.

On balance, if I were to choose an adjective to describe your response to this collective new reality, it is inspiring. As is so often the case, our character has been revealed by our response to this adversity. I have never been more proud of — or more inspired by — a graduating class.

Members of the Class of 2020, I shared with you how dismayed I was that the final months of your North Central experience looked so different than the sendoff you deserved. While I never wavered from my position that the safety of our campus community is paramount, the decision to reconsider Commencement and Nurse Pinning was extremely difficult.

Even so, when the pandemic resulted in an abrupt disruption to your living-learning experience, you showed adaptability beyond your years. When you should have been decorating your mortarboards and celebrating with your friends, you were adjusting to your temporary "new normal" with poise and resilience. And when social distancing forced all classes to move online, your grit and determination to finish the semester strong inspired us to

do the same.

That brings us to tonight's celebration. You have persevered and now sit at a major new beginning. There is freshness to new beginnings; there is excitement in the air, and I believe it is invigorating. I hope you hold onto the spirit of this day. I hope you enjoy your new beginning. And I hope you will remember this day — and this College — as you travel your new path.

You will be the College's representatives in many disciplines and many places throughout the world, and we trust that your work will reflect honor upon — and bring greater strength to — North Central Michigan College. You have achieved one set of goals, and now it is time to reach for another. Please remember: Your degree is not an end, but rather a beginning — a catalyst for the inception of what you will become. Go forth and make your mark on this world. Onward North Central. Congratulations to you all!