

Farewell address

Washington Oloo
12th March, 2006

Dear brothers and Sisters,

Today probably marks my last Sunday service with you at St. Phillips O'Connor church. As most of you aware, I will soon be returning back to my country Kenya on Friday, the 17th March departing from the Canberra Airport at 10.20 am by Qantas via Melbourne and expected to arrive in Nairobi on Saturday, 18th March. Of course, the time here in Australia will be another Sunday morning!

In total, I would have spent exactly 2 years, 2 months and 4 days here in Australia. During this period of approximately 794 days, I have experienced some of the most astonishing moments of my. First, it was a great honour for me to come and study and live in Canberra. I am going back to Kenya proudly walking tall and confident to face some of the challenges back at home for which I believe I have been adequately prepared for the last two years. When I go back, I will be resuming my duties in a government department mandated to design and implement programs aimed at improving overall efficiency in delivery of public services. Most of these programs are designed in collaboration with Kenyan development partners.

Of late, some people have asked me how I feel to go back home after two years in Canberra. The fact of the matter is that my going back is such a 'sweet sorrow'. The sweet part is that I am going back to see my family whom I have missed dearly over this period. I can't wait to see Rebecca who had just finished her primary school to join high school. Now she is in third form, three quarters through high school. Anne was such a little girl and inquisitive as ever. She was very instrumental to urge Mummy to come to Australia and stay with me as she feared that something bad could happen to me if Mummy is not around. She is now two months old in high school. The ever smiling but shy Deborah, she is planning to be a teacher in future is eagerly waiting for me at home. The I don't care Zeddy who plans to be a mechanic one day and of course the little Isack whom I am sure only knows Daddy and Mummy as some mysterious voices who often speaks through the receiver phone are all waiting for Daddy! I am also looking forward to see our three adopted wonderful daughters, Mary, Lucy and Eunice and just to share with all of them whatever we have missed over this period. My old mother must also be wondering whether her only son got lost in the land of far seas!

On the other hand, the sorrow part is that it is not easy for me to say goodbye to you. Over the last two years that I have been with you, I have had a wonderful time with members of this church. Whether as a cleaner or a tea server at the 10 o'clock Sunday service with the ever-supportive Margaret, I have enjoyed every moment of it. It has also been a great honour for me to stand in the pulpit as a reader. You have all been very friendly and I feel as part and parcel of all of you.

Before I came to Australia for further studies, I was told a very sad story by a cousin of mine who had been in Germany for further studies in early 1990s. When he left Kenya, he was a member of the Anglican Church. But the experience he had, made him change his denomination. The first Anglican Church he visited, nobody was willing to sit next to him in the same pew! People sat in other pews several rows away from him. He tried another Anglican church and the reception was the same. He gave up. Later, there was this friendly man who introduced him to the apostolic church. There he was accepted and came back to Kenya as an Apostolic member and currently he is an elder in that church!

I am happy that here in Australia, Catherine and I received a completely different reception. We were not only received in a church that we have belonged to ever since but we have been invited for meals and famous Aussies bbqs in several homes. We sincerely thank the Palethorpes for making sure that the two xmass we had here in Australia were as lively and enjoyable as possible. To Hardy and Hellen, thank you very much for such a wonderful 2004 Christmas breakfast and the gifts, we were touched. To Steve and Rebecca, that was an extremely appetizing Christmas lunch in 2005. Sarah and Tim, I will always remember the several bbqs we had together at the Gowtys' residence. Collins, Pat, Denise, Rob and Sandra thanks so much for the picnics by the lake and making me appreciate the great Aussies sausages. To Elizabeth Silano, thanks so much for giving us a roof over our heads when we really needed it and Denise for the facilitation. We had a wonderful time living with Elizabeth and I will not forget some of your delicious dishes. Thank you also for accepting to be part of our family. To Fred, Doreen, Mitchell, Charity, Jesse, Jordan, Tevin and Chelsea (Bishopess!), thank you so much for giving us the African touch in our lives of late!

I leave Canberra having appreciated some of the Australian culture. I have followed various events that have happened over the two years, whether in politics, social, economics or sports. I keenly followed the Federal elections of 2004 and the nuances that accompany such events. When you lost the 'ashes' to England for the first time in 17 years, I also felt a sense of loss. But recently we celebrated the capitals win together. Now I go back with some ideas on some of your most celebrated sporting games and events. On the politics front, I have followed developments in the Labour, Liberals and the Nationals and the intrigues therein. Socially, the Bali cases and the Van Nguyen case readily come to my mind. The ongoing Cole inquiry and the recent debate on the abortion drug RU486 have also been some of the incidences that have fascinated me. In whole, I have had a holistic life experience here in Australia, whether in church or the wider society.

Turning to my Christian life here in Australia, I would like to reiterate that I have completely enjoyed the church services and activities. I will sadly miss my corner of the pew! When I go back, I will rejoin my church in Nairobi. The church structure at home is basically the same as to what obtains here. However, Christianity as practiced at home might be slightly different from what you have around. The differences might be attributed to the way it was introduced by the early church missionaries such as Ludwig Kraph, Dr. David Livingstone etc. Three kinds of Christians are readily identified. First, there are those who are Christians because they were baptised in church and confirmed. However, their faith is limited to attending church services only on Christmas day and may be during Easter. The second group are those Christians who are regular church goers and will hardly miss a church service, sometimes referred to as good Christians. The last group, which as well might have been the first, are those Christians who are generally regarded as believers. These are people who like Saul on his way to Damascus saw the light and are now Paul. Through their mouths they have confessed that Jesus is King and Lord of their lives. And they tell it on the rooftops to everybody about their belief. They are not lukewarm about their faith in Jesus Christ. They look forward to be with Jesus when they die.

Lastly, although I am leaving you part of me is remaining behind. Catherine, who was plucked from my rib when I was in deep sleep (Genesis 2:21) is remaining behind. She is currently undertaking a course in Nursing at CIT. I am happy and proud of her to have made such a bold move to completely shift her career at this stage in life. As Christian friends, I ask you to continue extending your support to her particularly now that she will be alone here in Canberra.

And with that, **God be with you till we meet again, whether on Earth or in Heaven.**

Thank you very much mates!