



**SPEECH BY HON. JUSTICE DAVID KENANI MARAGA,
CHIEF JUSTICE AND PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME
COURT OF KENYA, DURING THE GRADUATION
CEREMONY FOR THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN AFRICA ON OCTOBER 19, 2018**

**The Chancellor of The Catholic University of Eastern
Africa, Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde;**

**The Chairman of the University Council, the Rt. Rev.
Maurice Muhatia Makumba;**

Members of the University Council;

The Vice-Chancellor, the Rev. Prof. Stephen Mbugua,

Faculty and Students of CUEA,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Rt. Rev. Kasonde, thank you for the invitation to be the Guest of Honour during this auspicious occasion of the 37th congregation of The Catholic University of Eastern

Africa (CUEA) graduation ceremony. It is an honour to address you graduands today as you celebrate this important milestone in your life's journey.

Getting to where you are today, all adorned in beautiful gowns, hoods and caps that are replete with meaning and history, is not a mean achievement.

When you look back to when you started this journey – was it 16 years ago that you joined Standard One? – there were well over a million of you, little boys and girls huddled in classrooms in different parts of the country. Only a few thousands of you will be graduating this year, or any time soon. This means you are already among the chosen few, and you must be eternally grateful to God, your family, your teachers and all others who have helped you get here today. Always remembering that gratitude is the spice that gives success its alluring taste, say a big thank you to all of them.

University education is a great enabler, way beyond the specific subjects you have been studying. Not only does it open your mind to fit in the complex multicultural and socio-economic global society, it also enables you to secure employment both locally and abroad. In a sense, it makes

you more viable as a citizen of the world. It enables you to even influence global affairs.

As **Nelson Mandela** once noted,

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Education is the key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace.”

Indeed, an enlightened society is a society whose people are prepared to face challenges that confront the world today. In a world where there is unprecedented integration and ever more complex challenges, it is only through education that we can grow to understand our challenges and address them.

As you graduate today, you are going into the world as your own man or woman, no longer cushioned by the comfort of the crowd in the lecture rooms or the halls of residence. That privileged title – Mwanafunzi Wa Chuo Kikuu – is

being taken away from you today, and your first challenge out there will be to create the next title by which you shall be known by your family, your peers, your Church and your community.

What will it be? Will it go beyond “the guy who graduated from Catholic University” or the “the woman who works at the bank”? Will there be something that resounds in your relationship with those around you so that they can count on your value as a neighbour, a colleague, or a member of the Church parish?

If you haven't done so already, I urge you to quickly discover **your purpose in life**, that compelling reason why you do the things you do, aspire for the things you aspire for and behave the way you do.

Mark Twain once said: ***“The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.”***

If you have not found out why you were born, you need to. The Bible is also very clear about the need to find the purpose for which you came into this world:

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10)

Please allow me to suggest three areas of the “good works” that God wants you to do.

1. Professional Excellence

You must always remember that getting your degree today is not the end of your education. If anything, it marks the beginning of a lifetime of exploration as you exercise “the power to read and do all that appertains to your degree.”

As parents, we have noted a serious concern with you young people. The **concern** is the excessive permissiveness that is fuelled by the new media that you are all so hooked to. Cheered on by the new phenomenon called social media, you have turned your values upside down, and every act of decadence is amplified through the myriad of channels until you are left thinking that is what is “cool”.

The sad reality in our society today is that most young people spend a lot of time surfing. If they are students, the little time they are left with is for cramming to enable them pass exams after which they are done with books. Through the phones that each of you have in the pocket right now, at a touch of a button, you have access to more information than at any time in human history. But the flood of information hasn't made us more discerning of the truth, or more informed about the paths, especially the professional paths must follow. To the contrary, in some ways, it has just made you more confident in your ignorance. You assume whatever is on the web must be true. You search for sites that just reinforce your own predispositions. As a result, believe you me, we have young graduates who cannot express themselves in English for a minute before they switch into Sheng and broken Kiswahili.

Let me warn you. If you will not further your professional, career, you will stagnate if you will keep your job at all.

Embracing your purpose means that you will pursue the things that your professional obligations lead you to, but within the context of achieving much more than just getting the job done. This way, you will not saunter through life as a mere statistic described by the school you attended, the university you went to, the job you held, or the estate you lived in for many years.

Let me share with you a few thoughts about how you can achieve wholesome success in the next phase of your life. It all starts with the pursuit of your personal excellence, which must form the foundation for your personality.

Life gives you back what you put into it. If you chase excellence, light, love and peace, God will reward you with these things tenfold. If you chase mediocrity, darkness, hatred and turmoil, this is exactly what you get.

This is not to say that things will necessarily be what you want them to be. Problems, frustrations, and occasional defeats will be thrown at you from time to time. But they must be worked through or else they remain forever a barrier to the growth and development of the spirit. Once you realize this and seek God in whatever you wish to do, your destiny is in your control.

As Napoleon Hill tells us, ***“If the thing you wish to do is right, and you believe in it, go ahead and do it! Put your dream across, and never mind what “they” say if you meet with temporary defeat, for “they” perhaps do not know that every failure brings with it the seeds of an equivalent success”.***

Indeed, life rewards those who keep going. The path to success is paved by resilience, by keeping on going no matter how many obstacles come your way.

Up until now, you have been rewarded primarily for your individual brilliance but this alone is not enough for the next stage of your lives. Someone once said that hard work without talent is a shame, but talent without hard work is a tragedy – the reality of the real stuff you are made of, combining hard work with talent, is about to start showing.

When I was requested to come and talk to you today, my mind went to my own graduation at the University of Nairobi way back in 1977. I asked myself: “What would I have wanted to hear, and what have been my greatest lessons about life outside the lecture rooms?”

It looks clear to me that finding my purpose in life and honouring my God and my calling have been the most significant events in my life since leaving university. It still makes me shudder when I look back and ask: What if I never found myself, what if I'd ignored the inner voice urging me to seek greater meaning in my life, my profession and my engagement with my Church and the community?

Let me first tell you a little about my life's story, and from it you will no doubt see how amazing God's grace will always be.

Having been born into a rather poor family in Nyamira, I got to wear my first pair of shoes when I was admitted to Secondary School, and that was only because it was compulsory. Worse still, I got to wear my first pair of shorts only after circumcision, at the age of **10**. It is perhaps a good thing that those were not the days of today's pervasive selfies and paparazzi, otherwise I wonder what pictures of the Chief Justice as a young man would be circulating in the social media today. **There is one I took with my first car, a Volkswagen beetle which looks interesting. Perhaps I should have it tweeted and I see the reaction.**

Although my parents were not Christians, I was baptized and joined the Seventh Day Adventist Church in 1965 while in Primary School, thanks mainly to the great influence of the SDA in the area.

However, I got into bad company in Secondary School and slipped in the spiritual sense. While in that bad company, I drunk hard and, except for providing for the bare necessities, I ignored my family and literally mark-timed for about 20 years. I did not bother to further my professional career.

But all that time the Spirit of God kept prodding me to return to Church. When I eventually returned, God pointed me to a path of unwavering purpose that has brought me to where I am today. It is after I discovered my purpose in life that I realised I needed to do a masters degree and I went to class after 34 years.

With this new path, some of my friends started mockingly calling me Pastor because I refused to buy them alcohol. In the Seventh-day faith, drinking or giving others alcohol is a sin. I found that I could not continue keeping their company and still be a Christian. I started organizing my life.

Other than a small piece of land I had bought in Nakuru which is my rural home, and changing cars, I made little investment. After I crossed the floor as Parliamentarians say, I realized that I could make some minor investments with the same amount of income instead of drinking. After the change, as a private legal practitioner, I got more and better clients. God blessed the work of my hands and as my involvement with communities increased, so did my growth professionally and materially.

When I joined the Judiciary in 2003, I in no time earned respect from my colleagues because of my Christian principles.

Let me not bore you with the story of my life. But allow me to say this. I am sure I would not have been appointed Judge, leave alone being the Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya today, had I not eventually found my purpose in life and pursued it relentlessly. And in pursuing this purpose, the principle ingredient was ensuring that I was in the service of God, my family and my community in equal measure. In a nutshell, my brothers and sisters, I don't know about you but as for me, I say this: **it is great to be a Christian.**

2. Live a value-based life

The second suggestion I wish to make to you young people is to lead a value-based life. You may not be as lucky as I was to discover your purpose in life when you are still intact as it were. You could ruin your life within a short time from today, or even kill yourself in say a road accident. Let me tell you something that might surprise you: Your country does not exactly have a critical shortage of accountants, sociologists, bankers, lawyers, judges or whatever you are aspiring to be. Kenya is in fact a net exporter of quality personnel to Europe, America, South Africa and many other places around the world. You are graduating when unemployment in our country is at the highest. I hate to dampen your celebration mood but as a parent I feel obliged to tell you this: You might find yourself tarmacking for a while before you get a job. I want to recommend to you the value of patience. Why am I telling you this: Because I have seen many young people go into depression because they have not found jobs. Trust God and keep trying. God will come through for you.

Even when you get a job, I assure you that many challenges lie ahead - most of them unforeseen. The key to success is getting up and going no matter how tough it gets. A river cuts through rock not because of power but because of its persistence.

Do not shy away from challenges as it is within the threshold of this discomfort that true character is built. Growth does not flourish within the comfort zone. There is value in pain if it goes towards expanding your horizons. As M. Scott Peck says,

“It is in the whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has meaning. Challenges are the cutting edge that distinguishes between success and failure. Challenges call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom. It is only because of challenges that we grow mentally and spiritually. It is through the pain of confronting and resolving challenges that we learn.”

I also want to recommend to you the value of **Human Dignity and Truthfulness**. Having discovered your purpose in life, the question you must always ask yourself

is, when you have attained your personal excellence, how will it lend itself to the pursuit of **Human Dignity and Truthfulness**? How will your personal and professional achievements contribute to the good of your society? How will your training help our societies to resolve their most confounding challenges in order to attain human dignity? Let me mention a few of the challenges that we face as a country, which require people of your energy and freshness to resolve.

The first of these challenges is the **absence of integrity and discipline** in our national fabric.

The absence of integrity has allowed **corruption to flourish**. As you all know, this monster is slowly ruining our country and, now more than any other time, Kenya is in dire need of men and women of integrity who will stand up to corruption and other evils that afflict this great country. **You are the people.**

Corruption is like a virus running in our blood. The sorry state of affairs in this country and the reason why those of us who are well educated, or even in positions of leadership and authority, are unable to do anything about it is attributable to a number of factors. One, to say that we are

all selfish is, I think an understatement. Most Kenyans, if not all of us, are corrupt. If the corrupt activities give us a material or professional advantage, we are happy to look the other way.

Secondly, those who are not corrupt sit back and don't want to be concerned with what is happening or think there is nothing they can do about it. Needless to say, corruption impairs human dignity in many ways. And you can never be true to the ideal of truthfulness if you forever decline to speak out against this cancer.

Thirdly, and more importantly, there is serious scarcity of role models, leaving young graduates like yourselves to simply join the bandwagon. Of course you will want to buy flashy cars and live in upmarket estates in the first year of leaving college, because your heroes are likely to be those who have amassed wealth mysteriously. We do not have a tradition of asking hard questions about the sources of inexplicable wealth. We admire it and it motivates us to follow suit.

How will you navigate your way through this decadence to retain the uprightness that this great university has inculcated in you? Be proud and distinguish yourself from such wicked people. Determine to grow to become socially conscious professionals who not only know their trade but also realise and recognise the values and ethics that sustain and advance societies.

It boils down to ethics and values, and I keep saying this not only because of my Christian beliefs but because I am aware of the erosion of the social and cultural values that previously kept us in check as a society.

Good societies do not just drop down to earth from the skies. They are built by public-minded men and women who dedicate themselves to contributing to the eradication of negative practices and introduction of progressive environments that enhance human dignity.

Our decisions and how we live our lives are based on our feelings and how we see things. Rick Warren says, "Everyone's life is driven by something. Some people are driven by resentment and anger; some people are driven by

fear— fear-driven people often miss great opportunities, some people are craven by materialism, other people are driven by need to get approval.” You may occasionally make mistakes. Don’t live in your past. Retrace your steps and move forward.

3. Be of service to God

The last, and in my view the most important suggestion I want to make to you is to urge you to be of service to God. You may ask how you are going to be of service to God. It is by what I have already said. If you are successful in your career and determine to lead a honest value-based life, you will be serving God. You will be doing the good works that I referred to earlier on that God created us for. So I urge you all to go out there and make the best of yourselves, and remember, in everything that you do, God must stay at the top. The Bible tells in the book of **Deuteronomy 28:14** that God will raise to the top those who obey his commandments.

In conclusion, let me say this. You have had a good start. You have been well prepared, having spent this very

significant season of your life in a University that not only ranks at the top in terms of academic excellence, with many outstanding facilities, but also in terms of spiritual wholesomeness. I have seen that in surveys and University rankings carried out in the past few years, Catholic University is deemed to be one of the top seven universities in the region as well as providing benchmarking opportunities to other African Universities.

CUEA has indeed demonstrated its dedication to entrenching values in many ways, beginning with its motto, “Consecrate them in the Truth” and its marketing slogan “Education grounded on values”.

This university is a strong champion of ethics in education and professionalism. I am informed that CUEA has chosen to lead the way in integrating ethics in education by having its senior staff trained as trainers by **Gobethics.net Foundation** so that they too can train other Universities’ staff on the same. To crown it all, today’s graduation theme is “Towards Ethical and Global Citizenry” – no doubt stressing the need for an ethical existence that will

enhance your standing in the global community of human beings.

Having graduated from a University that is such a prominent champion of values, you must ensure you do not leave what you have learnt behind. I urge you to uphold the mission, vision and values of your university as you settle in the job market as employees, and, even as you eventually become employers. Go forth to the world and show us how to live personal and professional value-oriented lives. Finally, your country needs you to give back to society by positively touching the lives of others, especially those of poor in our society. Success is not all about achievement but also fulfilment. Nothing is more fulfilling than serving people. Go forth to the world and live by the Golden Rule.

You have a positive brand and I believe you have the ability to make yourself and the society better. You are in a good place to pursue your dreams and to attain a life of treasured accomplishments. Go ye out there and prove to the world that you are a product whose quality is guaranteed. Go ye out there and be the ambassador of this great university by keeping its flag flying high.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me congratulate you once again on this important achievement, signified by the award of a degree in whichever field you have invested so much time and energy studying.

May God bless you and your families, and may you achieve all that you have set out to do in your life.

Thank you very much.

**Hon. Mr. Justice David K. Maraga, EGH
Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court.**