

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY

41ST GRADUATION, JUNE 29 2019

Acknowledgements

The Chancellor of Daystar University, Prof. Mary Murimi
Our Guest of Honour and Chair of Daystar Company, Rev. Dr. Macmillan Kiiru
Daystar University Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Laban Peter Ayiro
H.E. The Governor of Makueni County, Prof. Kivutha Kibwana
H. E. The Governor of Nairobi County, Mike Kioko Mbuvi Sonko
Your Excellences Ambassadors and High Commissioners
The Chairman of Daystar US Board, Dr. Frank Lloyd
The Board of Daystar University Alumni Association
The Chairman, Commission for University Education, Prof. Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha
The Chairman, Higher Education Loans Board
Vice-Chancellors of Other Universities
Archbishops, Bishops and Members of the Clergy
Faculty, Staff and Students of Daystar University
The Graduating Class 2019
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen...

MONTHS OF LISTENING

Congratulations to the Class of June 2019! And the Glory is His!

As part of my getting to know and understand Daystar University, I have spent much time listening to staff and ^{students} through formal and informal consultation processes at all levels of the university. The healing sessions have also been a valued addition to my understanding the intangibles that inter-twined Daystar life. The consultations across the University, have offered me a unique opportunity to understand where our greatest strengths lie – as well as a frank assessment of what challenges and risks we face. These challenges and risks are considerable.

The questions raised through my interactions go to the heart of our work:

- How do we maintain and enhance the infrastructure needed for our research at a time when funding avenues are diminishing?
- How do we give our students the best experience we can – from offering appropriate financial support, to ensuring their academic and personal wellbeing needs are fully met?
- How do we put in place the right incentives and supports to sustain and expand our excellence in teaching?
- How do we ensure that all our staff – in academic, administrative and assistant roles – are fairly rewarded, and appropriately encouraged in their professional development?
- How do we nurture a truly welcoming, diverse and inclusive environment for students and staff?
- How do we remain a global university, open to talent and to partnerships around the world, even as we grapple with the uncertainties of Educational reforms and Economic downturn in Kenya?

Across the University, work is already underway to address many of those priorities. I have witnessed teams across the University intensely engaged in serious efforts to make Daystar the university we all want it to be.

Further strengthening Daystar research

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In the realm of research, perhaps more than most others, we might rightfully apply the truism – that we must run as fast as we can just to stay in place, and if we wish to go anywhere, we must run twice as fast as that.

Continued and expanded excellence requires that we build on existing strategic research initiatives and centers by identifying and fostering new areas of exceptional Daystar research strength, and by addressing the new research questions that excite, challenge and trouble our societies.

Seeking new sources of sustainable funding, at greater scale, is an imperative. It will also require that we continue to enhance administrative support for research funding applications. Apart from being excellent, Daystar must be more nimble in responding to emerging opportunities for collaborative research both in the Kenya and abroad. So, I have proposed the creation of a modest seed fund to support promising early-stage research clusters. This will allow us to be more effective as we seek to gather some of our finest minds to address issues of global importance, such as how to move rapidly towards contribution to the SDG's.

Further strengthening our teaching and learning

No matter how good we are at research, no matter how many Prizes we win – we can only truly call ourselves a university because we offer students quality education. In order to continue providing quality, it is essential that we give as much attention to our teaching and learning provision. I will continue to push for further progress on staff recognition schemes, and for appropriate rewards for teaching. In the short term, we must also continue to encourage diverse forms of assessment beyond traditional written examinations.

Supporting our students

We cannot be truly great as a university if – even inadvertently – we are not open to the social and cultural diversity of the world around us.

I would go as far as to ask: can we call ourselves a place of excellence if we are not fully inclusive of the most diverse talent?

We shall be focusing on ensuring that students at Daystar have the best experience possible, and that they are not deterred from participating in the richness that Daystar has to offer.

Valuing our staff

We are an excellent university because we have excellent people. And in the years ahead, we must take further concrete steps to demonstrably value our staff.

So, valuing our staff will begin with improving the total reward package for academic and professional services staff.

One of the other concerns raised through my consultations is that the current system for academic progression is opaque and slow. We are working to fully implement a new system that is faster and fairer.

Being truly Christian and global

As a Christian university, we are deeply committed to nurturing relevant and meaningful spiritual values.

We also intend to further strengthen efforts to recruit international students whom we greatly value and appreciate. We will continue to do our utmost to reaffirm your confidence in the choice of Daystar as the place where you will get an excellent education and a Christ-like mission for serving fellow human beings. International students are integral to a global university like Daystar, they enrich classrooms and supervision rooms with diverse perspectives, and at the post-graduate level they help to bolster international linkages. And they become our alumni, who are our best ambassadors the world over.

Streamlining our processes

To say that there is among colleagues an appetite to simplify the University's decision-making processes, and to strengthen the professional support it offers, would be... an understatement. I have heard deep frustrations expressed again and again throughout the consultations in this area. So, some serious thinking is currently going into ways of streamlining over-complicated processes, and my aim is that we are a university defined by its purpose and its principles, not by its processes.

Ensuring financial sustainability

I realize that much of the work mentioned above can be only fulfilled over the next five years with enhanced resources.

One of the principal tasks for the Council and the Management over the coming years will be to ensure the University can run a balanced operating budget without undermining our mission or compromising our key principles.

Securing Daystar's financial sustainability will entail careful stewardship of our assets, protecting our existing resources, and tapping new sources of revenue – all while improving our financial planning and ensuring greater efficiency in our work.

A key concern for me will be to balance the necessary investments in capital expenditure and expenditure on the University's primary resource: people. These are not exclusive of each other. The truth is we must invest in both. But we cannot invest in everything, and so we face difficult decisions about how many eggs we put into which baskets, and when.

Construction of the Chapel

Our biggest mission in the next three years is the construction of the chapel. Alumni 1999 thank for sponsoring the chancellor's forum and agreeing to be the burden bearers' of the chapel initiative. All of us let us build the chapel.

To the class of 2019. Once again Congratulations!

I am confident that Daystar has implanted in you the value of excellence in whatever you will undertake to do; a transformational mindset and a servanthood disposition in your interaction with fellow human beings. I trust that you will safeguard those unique elements that have made our university an exemplar of learning, values and scholarship globally. *My charge to you, therefore, is that you will exhibit the following elements as you sojourn on this earth:*

- A fundamental commitment to critical thinking, innovation and academic concentration;
- A well thought out worldview that will foster and facilitate productive dialogue;
- A pragmatic temperament that will include, and benefit from, diverse viewpoints;
- A spirit-filled life grounded within the Christian theological teachings;
- A robust and enterprising approach to life for the benefit of, you, the individual and society;
- A common recognition that a Daystarian must be an adherent to the servanthood dedication of living and leading.

The class of June 2019, I fully recognize that balancing these distinctive elements will be challenging – but the pay-off from achieving this balance will be worth the effort in your life.

I will never express regret for wanting Daystar to be anything other than excellent by global standards – and in that sense, an elite Christian university. Nor will I hold back from reaffirming a commitment

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to the highest degree of integrity and openness in everything we do. I expect the same from you in all your endeavours as you go into the world.

US president Theodore Roosevelt hit the nail on the head when, speaking about leadership, he said: *"Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care."*

To my grandaunts, outside of our gates, beyond this Worthy University, people won't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

So, we have to be better at listening to our society. We have to be better at sharing the knowledge we create. And we have to be better at telling the story of what we do, how we do it, and why. Above all we must espouse Christian values that will be a measure of our Christian teaching and standing at Daystar.

I ask that you join me so that together we make Daystar not only a university that reflects the society it serves, but one that is able to challenge conventional wisdom and help make our world caring, more inclusive and fundamentally more decent. Allow me to narrate to you one of my favourite poems by an unknown author titled ***My prayer for you.***

*May your wishes come true,
May God always be with you,
May your hands always be busy,
May your feet always be swift,
May you do for others so that they may also do for you,
May you have a joyful heart always,
May your song always be sung,
May you remain forever young!*

Prof. Laban P. Ayiro,
Vice Chancellor
Daystar University