

**ADDRESS PRESENTED AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY AT
THE JMTUC – 26th NOVEMBER 2011.**

“PROMOTION TO SERVANT”

Greetings and Acknowledgements

For those who are graduating today, your family and friends, this must be a day of great elation, jubilation, celebration and joy. The accumulated months and years of study and toil in the midst of sacrifices has now finally come to an end, at least at this stage of your studies. Congratulations on your achievement! The tendency must be to think that I have arrived but the real fact is that you have just started. I'm sure that you would agree that it must really feel good to receive a promotion or qualification of some kind. Its better recognition, better positions of importance and in the work place better perks. In the business world, a good job title and description can be extremely valuable. We often evaluate one another, and evaluate our own level of 'successes' by the significance of our title and the importance of our description. But in the Christian experience it ought to be different!

For example, we are told in Acts chapter 9 that the Apostle Paul received his call into God's service in a very dramatic fashion. A few days later Jesus said Paul was "My Chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel (Acts 9:15). With this endorsement Paul could have chosen any title he wished – maybe "God's Chosen Instrument" or "Chief Name Bearer of the Almighty". After all, Paul's new boss was the creator of the Universe. But when Paul introduces himself he describes himself as "the servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an Apostle and set apart for the gospel of God." Why does he go this way? He learns from the example of Jesus himself. In Philippians 2: 1-11 he puts it into perspective for us:

“[Jesus] who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a Servant...”

Today, as you graduate it is important to know that you have been promoted to be servants – you have not earned a qualification to serve yourself but to serve God and God's world. This is expressed well in the mission of JMTUC: *to provide quality, contextual and holistic theological education*

from a Biblical, Reformed and Presbyterian perspective for Christian men and women, to enable them to carry out God's redemptive mission in the Church, society and academy in Africa and beyond in order to realize His kingdom.” It is also captured well in the motto of the College: “*Nditumikira Kristu* (I serve Christ). Our purpose in life, no matter our qualifications, is to serve God and God’s people, and we must never forget that!

Judging by the Mission and Vision of the JMTUC, I would like to believe that the College has taught you what it means to be a *servant of Christ*, a *servant of the Church* and a *servant of the Community* (Society). The number of courses you have done here has helped you to grow spiritually and in the knowledge of the Word of God. It all begins with a true relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility to nurture our spirituality as we maintain the disciplines of fasting, praying and studying the Scriptures. To be a servant of Christ requires that we remain in Him. To be much for God we must be much with God. Unfortunately not too many Pastors and Christian workers today make sufficient time to be with God. We are doing a lot of good things supposedly for God but sometimes not realizing that God may not even be in it. When we realize that we are servants of Christ it changes our perspectives, our attitudes and approaches to ministry and people. We enter into the ministry with a passion and zeal for the Lord Jesus Christ. The College has taught you to be servants. Firstly, servants of Christ!

Secondly, it has taught you to be servants of the Church. It is sad to see that many people use the Church for social status, power and influence. If that is our motivation for study, then we have completely lost it. The Church is not about us, but Christ. It is his purpose and mission we must serve. There are a lot of Pastors and Christian workers out there who have total disrespect for the Church, for its teachings, practices, polity and structures. I know that the Church is not perfect but it is important for us to realize that we are servants of the Gospel and servants of the Church. We are not lone rangers on a solo mission. We are God’s servants working in partnership with the Church and others in spreading the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ – God’s *Missio Dei*. There is no greater title in God’s kingdom than: “Servant of Christ Jesus” – no more significant job description than: “Set apart for the Gospel.” Once Paul understood how Jesus lived and obediently served all the way to the cross, he rejoiced and devoted himself to serving with every last breath: “*I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend*

myself as well.” (2Cor.12:15). Paul caught it, understood it, sometimes I wonder whether we do.

Thirdly, the University College has taught you to be servants of the community. One of the greatest emphases of the University College is to prepare its students to address and confront the numerous challenges in our society, country and world. This is one of the strong points of Reformed teachings. John Calvin once said: “I am saved by faith alone but faith is never alone.” We live in community. We are called to transform society and to make a difference. The world is characterized by complexities, discrepancies, and economic divides and systems which ensure that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Africa, for example, is riddled with political turmoil, poverty, HIV and AIDS, crime, violence, unemployment, natural disasters, religious factions, civil wars, etc. Many of our Political leaders have turned into dictators bent on self-interests, self-glory and self-gain. Even though many of them have proved to be liberation fighters in the past as they fought against colonial systems and powers, they now tend to keep millions under oppression and bondage. They seem to have lost that notion of the “struggle” that once pervaded their hearts and minds. They do not function as servants of the people but as slaves to their own ends of acquiring wealth and power. How do we proclaim the good news in such a context? We need to be producing leaders embedded in good morals, values, integrity and spirituality who are prepared to lead by example in the forefront as they tackle the challenges in our world today. We need to produce leaders who know what it means to serve with dignity, humility and joy.

I am pleased to learn that the JMTUC is now one of the leading theological colleges in Southern and Central Africa, attracting students from Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa. It is also recognized internationally as an institution offering quality theological education and training. We need to both capture and expand on this potential to impact all of Africa and the world. There is no doubt that the Global South is becoming the new centre of Christianity as the West turns to Africa for help in dealing with their growing secularism and Christian apathy. The African concept of “*ubuntu*” which states that “I am because I belong” or “I belong therefore I am” is becoming hugely attractive as we relate to human relationships, issues of the environment and economic and gender justice. We must not underestimate the African contributions to Christianity. The founding of the ACCRA Confession by WARC on the African soil in Ghana in 2004 speaks

of a contribution that has widely impacted Christian thinking and practice world-wide.

Recently in South Africa about 12 Reformed Churches came together to ask: “What does it mean to be African and Reformed?” We asked this question from the background of African Christian styles of Worship, African spirituality, the relevance of Reformed Theology in Africa and Reformed Theology and Public Life. This is a conversation that we must continue as we seek to re-capture the significance of the contributions made by Africans in the early centuries to Christian apologetics, Christology and theology. This University College has the ability to engage research in these fields, produce biblical scholars and teachers who will unearth the riches of the African world-view and its impact on Christian thinking and formation. It’s about time Africa took its place on the world stage, especially in the areas of theology, education and economics. Much is already been done but we must encourage more.

We are noticing in Africa today the increasing focus on materialism and some churches tend to focus on the ‘prosperity gospel’. What do we as Reformed Christians say about this? What are we teaching in the midst of this biblically untenable proposition that seems to capture the thoughts of the young? All of these challenges on the African continent provide opportunities for us to respond in faith, hope and love. I wish to commend JMTUC for its core values of: *spirituality, Credibility and integrity, Gender equity and equality, transparency, Excellence, Servant Leadership, responsible stewardship, Innovation and creativity, and justice*. These are all, indeed, destined to build character and community. You have come a long way since your early beginnings in 1951 and your movement to Lusaka in 1975, my prayer is that you would prosper as a Theological University College as you seek financial sustainability and as you make enormous strides into theological teaching and research. May this University College become a landmark on the African continent as you prepare people for ordained ministry in the Church and as you train Christians to take their place in the market place and community to build a better world so that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

Let me conclude from where I started, it’s understandably difficult to maintain the walk of a servant. All our worldly training tells us to climb higher and achieve more; but God calls us to love him and humbly serve as His Spirit leads- nothing more, nothing less! We have been set apart for the

Gospel and our lives are to be lived as Christ living through us. We always fall short of God's plan when we attempt to promote ourselves and take control. There are many openings in the Kingdom of God but there can only be one job title and only one job description. Our Heavenly Father has called and offered a permanent promotion which far surpasses anything this world could ever offer. He has called us to be His servants in the world. And so, as you graduate today may it be your joy to serve God wherever God leads you! Thank you and God bless!

Jerry Pillay (Rev. Prof.)