

POST GRADUATE CELEBRATION (April, 22 2017)

New beginnings

Luzuko Jacobs

Professor Laurence Juma, Warden of the Post Graduate Hall

Mr Eric Ofei, Oakdene Warden

Post Graduate Hall Committee chairs, Mr Andrew Mloki and Ntate Mpho Mafa

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening to all of you. Thank so much for the opportunity to reflect with you, very briefly, on a critical milestone which I would like to refer to as *new beginnings*.

Before I do, let me share with you something that I am very proud of. Seventeen years ago, I was a resident of Oakdene. I am therefore a proud alumnus of this University.

So when our dependable Alumni Relations facilitator, Terry McCarthy, gave me the address to this venue, I realised that some “reshuffle” (and I am using this term advisedly) must have occurred since the time I stayed at Oakdene. The location is very different to the location of Oakdene in 1999. I hope the reshuffle was transparent and that it did not happen in the dead of the night. I hope there

was nothing remotely nefarious about that reshuffle. But then on the bases of available evidence, I am sure it was a commendable development.

Clearly what Oakdene is today, is much, much better than what we had back then. I now realise that this *reshuffling business* is not quite the preserve of those in government leadership after all.

On a serious note, I am back at this University because, I believe in this institution. I have faith in Rhodes University. I am proud of this University and its role in the community of Makana, in this province and country. I am proud that Rhodes continues to be an outstanding institution of higher learning, and an internationally respected university that proudly affirms its African roots. I am proud that Rhodes remains committed to democratic ideals, academic freedom, rigorous scholarship and social responsibility. I know the feeling in this room is mutual. Were it not so, you would not be part of this beautiful gathering.

Programme director, while it should be safe to assume that PhD and Masters Graduates have very high threshold for concentration and tolerance for long speeches, one does not need a Master's Degree or PhD in social etiquette to know that tonight is not about putting this quality to the test. Therefore, I will not make such a mistake.

I am here, on behalf of the University and the Vice Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, to recognise, honour and celebrate your great success and accomplishment. Today we share in your joy and pride. We are here to congratulate each one of you.

You are today what you *chose* to become. You chose to pursue the ultimate academic challenge. You knew that it could be a lonely walk. You saw past the social and personal cost. Through discipline, diligence and dedication, today you join the 'knowledge elite.' You are a living testament to Nelson Mandela's statement that *it always seems impossible until it is done*. You have done it. Hearty congratulations to you!!

In congratulating you, we do not forget those who kept rooting for you throughout the difficult journey. Those who supported you. Those who prayed, who believed, who hoped. Those who lived with the deprivation of your attention and company. We join them in celebration.

We also appreciate the contribution of those who cooked food in the kitchens, the gardeners, janitors and the many 'invisible others' who in various ways, made this day possible.

The graduation week was a momentous one for Rhodes University, a historical one even. On the one hand, we had a very successful graduation. Several long-standing records tumbled. New standards were set in a number of areas, including the numbers of PHDs produced in a single year in one of our faculties. The flame of academic excellence our university is known for shone even brighter across our country, continent and the world over.

It is however hard to ignore the fact that the same week saw some industrial unease on campus with organised labour embarking on peaceful, protected protest. This is happening when we are preparing for a Transformation Summit

in July where, among the items under consideration, the name of this institution will feature. It is also hard to overlook the broader national and global economic picture and the profound implications for financial sustainability of institutions including Rhodes University.

These developments give rise to serious questions and critical challenges which our institution has to grapple with.

If, as Andrés Fortino of Paradigm Research International says, the purpose of scholarship is the ***creation of prepared minds***, then we should look your way for some of the answers to these challenges. If scholarship is a force for good, for social justice and human dignity, then we should safely rely on this cohort of Graduates in ameliorating some of the institutional and community challenges we face today.

The achievement of your academic goal ushers in a *new beginning* in our relations as you join our alumni community. As our alumni, we need and depend on your support. We need and depend on your ideas. We need and depend on your counsel.

Do not turn your back on your Alma Mater now that you have graduated. Your role as a Graduate of this University has assumed an even more critical and indispensable character.

Your University needs you. Your University needs you as an outstanding, loyal, critical and committed alumni.

It is our joint egalitarian commitment and social responsibility to bequeath future generations a better society and a better world. Educating young people

to become agents of social change and societal transformation is the best gift we can give as evidence of socially responsible scholarship.

Education is the only hope for an overwhelming majority in our country who live in grinding poverty and hopelessness.

Our University took a position to make itself accessible to students from poor, rural and working class families. It committed itself to ensuring that no academically deserving but financially disadvantaged student is turned away from Rhodes.

This ideal will remain a distant dream without a solid partnership between the University and its Alumni. This is so because we have to deliver on this commitment in a climate of diminishing State expenditure on higher education. We have to deliver on this commitment when we find ourselves in a financially vulnerable position and facing many financial pressures as a University.

In your chosen careers. In your offices, corporate boardrooms. As you pursue your entrepreneurial endeavours and as thought-leaders, we urge you to contribute ideas, to contribute financially and in kind to help the University help someone realise their dream, to help someone out of poverty and to inspire hope in our community.

We hope you will open doors for us by your word of mouth in talking up Rhodes, and in upholding the strong reputation of Rhodes through the way you live your lives as our alumni and conduct yourselves as principled leaders in your careers.

We will keep in touch with you, to keep you informed about your Alma Mater and to share information about various ways in which you can be part of the *new beginnings* to improve human condition, to advance social justice, to stand up for what is right and fair, to share your light with others.

You will be invited to reunions and events where you will be able to network with fellow Old Rhodians and you will also receive the latest updates from your Alma Mater.

As Director for Communication and Advancement, I will be accountable to you for the stewardship of this relationship. Please do not hold back in giving advice and to criticise us where we do not do justice to our role and responsibility.

Your University needs you, remain part of it. Our relationship with you has reached a new milestone, we call it *new beginnings*.

Raise your glasses and lets us toast your new life as elite graduates of this wonderful University as our proud Alumni.

Asante sana, enkosi, kea leboga, dankie, inkomu.