

## ADDRESS TO SJTI GRADUATION, 4 MAY 2012

### INTRODUCTION:

Many thanks to Fr Sylvester and the Board of the Institute for inviting me to address you at this graduation. It's an honour and a pleasure. I have a high regard for St Joseph's Theological Institute and so this was an invitation I couldn't refuse.

It is inspiring to see how St Joseph's has developed over the years.

I asked Fr Sylvester to give me some basic statistics of this institution and they are most impressive:

you have 263 students altogether

drawn from 25 countries

21 of those countries are in Africa, and there is one student each from Colombia, India, Mexico and Poland.

There are 213 male students from 12 religious orders and congregations

14 female students from 10 congregations

22 students for the diocesan priesthood from 5 South African dioceses (1 of them from the Anglican Diocese of Natal)

14 lay students, 5 of them women and 9 men.

What wonderful diversity – a diversity which is also enriched by your membership of the ecumenical Cluster of Theological Colleges.

Perhaps it will not be long before we hear of a Cluster of Interfaith Theological Institutions – and maybe a few Imams and Moulanas, Pandits and Rabbis studying at St Joseph's!

And let's hope for a steady growth in the number of women studying theology here.

But I think you can be very proud of the diversity that has already been achieved.

CONGRATULATIONS:

Further congratulations are in order:

1. On your recent re-accreditation for a further five years.
2. On your new accreditation for certificate courses in Development Studies which will enable you to train formators and people working with advocacy groups and NGOs.
3. You have a Research and Development Officer in the person of Rev Dr Stuart Bate, to help with further academic development of the Institute.
4. Your membership of the Association of Oblate Institutes of Higher Learning links Cedara with tertiary institutes in Canada, Kinshasa, Poland, Texas, and the Phillipines where these six institutes will be holding their annual meeting later in May.
5. Finally, a word of congratulations to the "founding father" of the SJTI in its present form – Father Paul Decock OMI – a sort of living ancestor, still very much alive – who this year celebrates 50 years of religious life!

It was suggested by Fr Sylvester that I should speak about another ancestor of this institution, Denis Hurley, the second superior of the Oblate Scholasticate, based at Prestbury in Pietermaritzburg in the early 1940s. On the basis of a suggestion from Fr Sylvester I have entitled my address::

**"DENIS HURLEY – LIFELONG LEARNER: CHAMPION OF JUSTICE"**

I'm always happy to speak about Archbishop Hurley – the only problem may be to stop me once I've started, but perhaps you have ways of dealing with

that problem like ringing a bell – or the tried and tested Vatican method of switching off the mike once the allotted time has come to an end!

Of course Denis Hurley was not only a person of learning and of justice – he was also distinguished by prayer and spirituality, ecumenism, liturgical leadership, seminary reform, wit and good humour, immense enthusiasm for causes, kindness and compassion – to a fault!

#### LIFELONG LEARNER:

But let me speak about Denis Hurley as a lifelong learner. If you look at the bibliography that Professor Joy Brain has assembled in Philippe Denis's book "Facing the Crisis", you will find no less than 25 pages, listing Hurley's writings of all kinds – Joy Brain calls it a 'tentative list' because she knows or suspects that there may be quite a few other writings she hasn't yet seen!

If you consider the whole sweep of Denis Hurley's 88 years you will see that some of his times of greatest satisfaction were in settings where ideas were being intensely debated and there was intellectual exchange. Dialogue and debate were the oxygen of his spirit. And he thought they should also be the oxygen of the Church: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

#### ANGELICUM AND GREGORIAN:

Hurley's studies for the priesthood were done in Rome in the 1930s after he had completed his novitiate in Ireland. He studied at the Angelicum (now known as St Thomas's University) and at the Gregorian. He was critical even then of how dry and impractical the studies were and how remote from the sort of pastoral training he thought a priest needed. Nevertheless by his third year of Philosophy he was totally absorbed in getting to the essence of concepts like truth, beauty, goodness, etc, and he felt that in later life it was a discipline that helped him to get to the essence of the problems that confronted him as a bishop.

I would like to give you FOUR EXAMPLES of how excited Hurley was by learning, by dialogue and debate.

## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING SOCIETY:

While he was Superior of St Joseph's Scholasticate in the 1940s, he did a rather unusual thing for a priest, especially at that time. He joined the Pietermaritzburg Parliamentary Debating Society which met once a week. He revelled in meeting and debating with a wide range of people including atheists and the "Friends of Soviet Russia" who frequently sparred with this lively Catholic priest. No matter what insults they hurled at each other in the debates, they continued to be good friends. Hurley was the "Member for Howick" and for a time, the "Prime Minister" in this "Parliament". He enjoyed the experience so much that he introduced similar debates on topical subjects at the Scholasticate.

## VATICAN II:

Fast forward to the Second Vatican Council which Hurley regarded as the highlight of his whole life. It wasn't really the formal sessions of the Council in St Peter's Basilica, with speech after speech in Latin, that excited him most, though he delivered a number of those speeches himself and they were always well received. No, what really delighted him were informal gatherings of the bishops at that time.

1. There were two coffee bars set up inside St Peter's, one on either side of the basilica popularly known as Bar Abbas and Bar Jonah. These were good places for finding out what was really going on, and for lobbying other bishops – and Denis Hurley was highly active in doing the rounds in those Bars. There he found that he was not alone in being fed up with the endless series of speeches back to back, and, as he put it "the agitation for a change of procedure is fermenting satisfactorily – bishops wander about ... fuming, muttering, turning purple and coming close to blasphemy and other things, in their frustration ... ."

2. There were no formal sessions in the afternoons. So after a good siesta, gatherings were organised by various bishops' conferences where they sat at the feet of leading theologians of the time, getting an updating in their theology. Hurley saw it as a marvellous experiment in adult education.

Some of the speakers had previously been disciplined by the Vatican, but now they were in great demand.

3. A third example of what Hurley really enjoyed about the Council were Sunday evening sessions at the apartment of Bob Kaiser, Time magazine's correspondent in Rome, where bishops and theologians met with journalists to discuss what had happened in the Council during the previous week. Hurley called it "The Bob Kaiser Academy".

#### INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ENGLISH IN THE LITURGY (ICEL):

Hurley wasted no time at the Council. Once he realised that the liturgy was going to be in the vernacular, he got together with a few other bishops from English-speaking countries and they founded what would become the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). Hurley would represent the South African bishops on that structure for 40 years, 16 of them as Chairperson. How he enjoyed the debates between the bishops (representing all the English-speaking bishops' conferences in the world) and the members of their advisory committee: liturgists, theologians, experts in translation. As Chairperson of ICEL, he always wanted to give everyone a chance to have their say, and treated them with respect even if he disagreed with what they were saying. He would question the experts closely, wanting to be sure he had understood exactly what they were saying.

Sr Theresa Koernke who attended some of these meetings said that she had the impression that for Hurley "coming to ICEL was like dessert ... or tea when you have a large chunk of [hot, freshly-baked] bread, lathered with butter and jam. He just couldn't get enough of it, he loved to engage us in conversation."

#### CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NATAL:

And finally, in Hurley's retirement, he was appointed Chancellor of the University of Natal as it was then known. Once again, he was in his element. Not because he liked dressing up in the Chancellor's robes, or the status the role gave him. It was the interesting people he met, and the fascinating discussions he could have with academics of many different disciplines. This

was the atmosphere in which he flourished. One of those with whom he had intense discussions is now the Vice-Chancellor of the Durban University of Technology, Professor Ahmed Bawa. What were they discussing? Very abstract concepts of physics – ‘quarks’ and things like that!

#### HURLEY AS CHAMPION OF JUSTICE:

But now I must move on to consider Hurley as a champion of justice.

He inherited his faith mainly from his mother, Theresa, and his sense of justice from his father, also Denis, who used to tell his children: “No matter where people are, what level they are at, what colour their skin, you know that you are not to treat anybody badly in this house.” Denis remembered that his father was as good as his word, “and never allowed anyone to be treated badly.”

But Denis grew up with all the racial prejudices of young whites of his time and struggled to overcome these. It helped greatly that in Rome, at an international scholasticate, he studied with bright seminarians from around the world including two Sri Lankan Oblates who already had doctorates from Oxford. They gave him a good run for his money.

From an academic point of view his understanding of justice took a great leap forward through a course that he did at the Angelicum. This elective course on social justice was based on a study of the social encyclicals especially those of Pope Pius XI.

Also at that time in Rome, seminarians were very interested in the “See – Judge – Act” methodology of the Young Christian Workers. This wasn’t part of the formal curriculum but Brother Hurley attended several talks given about the YCW and their founder Fr Joseph Cardijn. In this way he became a lifelong enthusiast for the YCW and their SEE JUDGE ACT methodology which he regarded as the ideal way of working on social justice.

At St Joseph’s he had many discussions about the South African situation, with the other young South African professors on the staff. But it was all

still academic and cerebral. Even after he had become a bishop and discussed these matters with other bishops, the discussion remained theoretical - definitely not activist.

It took a long time to persuade the other bishops to issue a statement about the racial situation in South Africa. But at last in 1952 after Hurley had become president of the bishops' conference he persuaded them to issue a joint statement – the first time they ever spoke out jointly about racial injustice.

At that time Hurley and the bishops believed that the way to bring about change was through providing information about what was happening in the country/ raising awareness/ issuing statements and pastoral letters/ going on delegations to the government.

Vatican II gave a great boost to his ACTIVISM which was seen in his response to the forced removal to Limehill just a few years after the Council. We must also thank the late Cos Desmond for involving Denis Hurley fully in that issue. On the day the government was forcibly moving people from Meran to Limehill, he made sure the Archbishop was there with them, helping them to erect tents in their bleak new settlement.

When the government disputed the number of small children who had died as a result of the removal, Hurley and Desmond went up and down the rows of graves in the cemetery recording all the names and dates of birth & death. Hurley took back the lists and gave them to the newspapers, much to the anger of government, who did not like being proved wrong!

From then on there was no looking back in how Denis Hurley's activism grew. Each involvement gave him greater contact with suffering people and the civil society organisations who were doing something about it. Direct emotional involvement with suffering transformed him.

So one began to see Hurley engage himself in a great "ministry of presence, identification and solidarity" which blossomed in the 1970s and came to full flower in the 1980s when he was elected President of the conference for the second time – once again a most crucial time in the history of South Africa. Now he took part in Black Sash poster protests, led the bishops in

refusing to celebrate the republic festival, actively supported the open schools' policy, publicly backed strikes and consumer boycotts, gave evidence on behalf of the accused in courts and court martials, visited political prisoners like Archie Gumede and Terror Lekota and banned people like Cos Desmond and Beyers Naude, went to court to get detainees out of detention, encouraged the use of church buildings for community and worker meetings, openly broke the law by supporting conscientious objectors to military service, published reports on police misconduct in Namibia and in the Vaal Triangle. One could go on and on ...

He was indeed someone who “spoke truth to power” both in the Church and in Society.

His own personal commitment to justice was combined with endless efforts to mobilise the Church to take action for justice. He did not want action for justice to be like a sort of hobby of small groups but something that characterised the whole Church. For this reason, he established a Justice and Peace Commission in his own diocese, founded Diakonia in Durban, helped to set up PACSA in Pietermaritzburg, introduced the Renew Process to the whole Archdiocese, led the SACBC Pastoral Planning, with its motto “Community serving humanity”.

Though he was a man who enjoyed desk work and administration, loved to write long and brilliant papers, he had a clear sense of priorities. If he heard of some crisis or suffering taking place, he would immediately set aside what he was doing if he felt his presence would help.

#### WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

What does all this mean for you? You will be going out from St Joseph's Theological Institute and serving the church all over Africa and in other parts of the world as lay leaders, sisters, priests and some of you as bishops. Will you also, like Hurley, be lifelong learners, learning not only from reading and study but also from debate and dialogue, inside and outside the Church? Will you also be champions of justice, with his compassion and

kindness, courage and prophetic leadership? The People of God are eagerly awaiting this kind of ministry, especially in Africa.

And remember that remarkable, that extraordinary promise of Jesus in John 14:12:

In all truth I tell you,  
whoever believes in me  
will perform the same works as I do myself,  
and will perform even greater works,  
because I am going to the Father.  
If you ask for anything in my name  
I will do it.

May you indeed be counted among those who will “PERFORM EVEN GREATER WORKS”!