

**Keynote Address – “Reflections on Fatherhood”**  
**on the Occasion of the Vice-Chancellor’s Fathers’ Day Brunch**  
**Sunday, June 19, 2016**

**Dr Michael E. Scott**

Salutation: VC, etc. All protocols having been adequately established I duly observe.

A Special Welcome to us all and a customary HAPPY FATHERS’ DAY and most of all, for all those who believe upon God Almighty, praise be to the Father of Glory who has kept us to this day and is present in Spirit.

When I was first given the assignment with set criteria to identify two men who are fathers I thought it would be the easiest task to accomplish in a big Faculty as Social Sciences, but I was mistaken, I came up with one father, since the men were very few and the fathers surprisingly not there or have become un-reproductive or not given recognition for their productive role as is increasingly the case in this gender-centric (including gender neutral and gender sensitive) scientific age. Those are quite serious propositions to ponder. However, this for me seems an easier task having been given the free licence to reflect on fatherhood.

Immediately, my mind wandered expansively even considering the fatherhood of some of my very good friends here, the classification of fathers on death announcements of all things which tells the “dead truth” of child fathers, foster-fathers, step-fathers, god-fathers or surrogate fathers as routes to fatherhood. Today there are the sexually reassigned, the absentee father, the visiting father and the supposedly unknown sperm donor father. Which leads me to ask rhetorically: Are these the basis of the doom of the traditional/normally known father?

However, I do believe that in utmost respect to the eminent VC and Principal of UG, a man and leader with a complexion of credibility; countenance of integrity and charismatic capability it behoves me to set some standard at this signal occasion and seminal event. I take this opportunity, Sir, to publicly and formally welcome you and your wonderful spouse, Fran, and as current FATHER of UG in your many UG roles, an especial Father’s day greetings to you in your onerous and unenviable role. May your transformative thinking bear fruit as we fathers give you the genuine support to achieve your vision that is now ours as well.

So my very good friends, you need not worry, there will be no “tantalise” for today is a Sunday, a blessed and good day. Furthermore, I know that at this stage of your respective lives you are comfortable and at ease with yourselves having now the proverbial skins as thick as that of the rhinoceros.

The easy task for me is to reflect upon myself as father with some allusions. Mindful of this brunch I will reflect on four elements in short order considering the occasion for which we have gathered.

When Edith Clarke in her seminal work wrote of “My Mother who Fathered me” she tacitly acknowledged the indispensable and important fathering role which can be ‘played’ but not ‘performed’ in its fullness as a “male” father would or should. In a gender multiplying world where the male gender role is slipping down the ladder and it seems no longer a monopoly of the male. Furthermore, as elements of that traditional gender role is diminishing rapidly in the wake of the unorthodox competition and scientific capacity to procreate without the male physical involvement and for gender reassignments, in particular, I would suggest that Edith Clarke would have well written a gender neutral text today. Thus, I wish to reflect rather fleetingly on:

### **Fatherhood: Becoming, Being and Behaving against the Backdrop of the Gender Centricity and the Human Sexuality Discourse**

I have chosen to pursue this approach on this significant day, initially meant for male fathering by those who conceptualised it many moons ago, because it is current and relevant to the way we perceive and may relate to Fatherhood. Using an experiential definition, fatherhood in the Guyanese/Caribbean experience, I daresay at this point in time, comprises a male role-set of procreator in a relationship with a woman who bears a child making him a parent, provider, leader and protector. It is not merely fathering – i.e. performing the parental role of a father it is a parent-father role - given greater meaning when there is a complementary role of mother with child.

#### **1. BECOMING – How did you become a father? What was your experience?**

Becoming on the “labour day of truth” in the labour room to share a unique moment of fathering without fainting

Becoming a father as parent vs child-father, some have seen both sides and can reflect on the pros and cons of access to the child etc.

Becoming a disowning father or discovered father

If **Becoming** a father is tough or easy, depending on your perspective, **BEING**

one is the ultimate challenge.

An anonymous writer said a good father is worth more than a hundred school masters; just consider the magnitude of roles, not one but one hundred times over! We must note that the

schoolmaster is: teacher, counsellor, example, guide, guardian, disciplinarian, administrator, etc. a true surrogate parent. As a real parent-father it is an onerous task when considering this description.

I am often bemused by the intense focus by speakers on the Good Book regarding the scenario pertaining to the “prodigal son” as told by the learned Dr Luke. A lot of focus has been on the Father and his long lost younger son and not the ever present elder son who questioned his father’s action. Here a father runs to kiss his younger returning prodigal son who was remorseful on one hand; while on the other hand he met with opposition from an ever-present, self-absorbed and resentful son. How does the father respond? With calm assurance, fathering influence in such myriad situations of relationships that will arise and will challenge our tolerance by being father – Can we assuredly settle matters by saying child you are always with me, why worry your reward is assured for staying the course with me; but we must celebrate your sibling’s return, your sibling and my child who has missed the mark. Thus, our **BEING** must be:

## 2. **BEING**

Being a reservoir and disburser of affection

Being diligently and selflessly devoted – being called a “fixer” as our job to put things in order

Being assertive rather than aggressive in life’s situations for our children’s sake

Being a positive influence as leader to and for them

**Calvin Coolidge** (30<sup>th</sup> US President) said: “no person was ever Honoured for what he received; Honour has been the reward for what he gave.” So continue to be giving so that you will receive in due time. Remember it is not where you sow that you reap; it is what you sow my fellow fathers. We must remember that there is an expectation regarding our role, thus as father’s according to Walter Schirra “we don’t raise heroes and heroines we raise sons and daughters and if we treat them as sons and daughters they will turn out to be heroes and heroines in our own eyes.” Thus make the effort to be there to see them grow and to bring them up. Abraham Lincoln (16<sup>th</sup> US President) once said, obviously adapting it from the Good Book, “there is only one way to bring up a child in the way he should go and that is to travel that way yourself.” Bring yourself up to the mark by traveling with them and showing them the better way in a broken world with all its challenges, pressures and distractions. Whatever way you choose to travel with them as parent-father is the way to their destiny.

As we all advance in time at a different rhythm in our respective lives I have recognised that the first great gift we can bestow as fathers is a good example. That my daughter Sara demands that her father be celebrated on mothers’ day, is a great honour to me. This is about **BEHAVING**: This is not about being more holy than righteous or a paragon of virtue, for all our righteousness

are filthy rags and I am always mindful that mine stinks, so I spend a lot of time and effort on clean-up. It is about you and me in Michael Jackson's "man in the mirror" as well as Charles Horton Cooley's "looking glass self" as the latter pertains to our families, which we need to relate with in these serious times as we see ourselves as men in their perceptions of us. Let us be sure about our fatherhood more so to be sure about it in our **BEHAVING lest God ALMIGHTY turns his face in anger further from us. There is a time and season for BEHAVING right and now is the time!**

### **3. We must be deliberate about our BEHAVING:**

Living a transparent life

Displaying upright moral conduct

Having a healthy, hearty and hopefully holy routine, and

Leading and encouraging from the front

Finally, there was once a time when Fatherhood was only about men, only men can be fathering and become and be fathers, no more. Today we operate against the BACKDROP OF HUMAN SEXUALITY – We're in that muddled zone, which we are still trying to come to terms with as fathers and men. It is not about how we respond to this reality and its challenges but about how we think transformatively about ourselves to strengthen what remains of the gender role we must perform and restore ground lost due to our acts of commission and omission. As the Good Book says as it was in the beginning so shall it be in the end. The world, in the essence of the mind of man has not changed – man had a DNA spelt out Disobedient Naked Afraid when the great Father asked Adam: "a weh yuh deh"? - Adam where are you? His response was I am naked and hiding. It is still a question of locating the man and more so in this time when the "garden" is a complex and complicated phenomenon with myriad dimensions. For the woman "a wah yuh duh"? – What have you done? Those are still the enduring questions to generic man and woman we have come to know, traditionally.

In closing I also reflect upon my 1970s school boy athletic hero, Bruce Jenner, the 1972 Olympic champion decathlete to see in 2015 he is the reassigned Caitlyn Jenner. The new normal of exalting sexual attraction, sexual appetite, sexual appearance, sexual activity and sexual alternatives to the normal are all here with us. As I continue to close with a mix of Guyanese parlance so whither the "maan a maan, maan nah tobacco stick?" How "meh go sing me kweh kweh" about who "lay down and who nah function, wah kine a ????? is dat? We're in a gender sensitive world to be mindful of.

Thinking and reflecting on fatherhood has truly challenged my scope of reflection. Is father a man??? What is Happy Father's day in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Did the inventors and promoters of this

day perceive of this diverse 21<sup>st</sup> century father? However, in exercising my constitutional right of free speech I do believe that it takes a man to be a special dad in the process of fathering for effective fatherhood.

My friends let us each be a man of substance not only a **F**amily **A**nchor **T**hat **H**olds **E**veryone **R**esolutely! Be **D**isciplined **A**ffectionate **D**etermined to lead.

Today we honour good fathers who having BECOME, having BEEN and having BEHAVED, have been TRUE ANCHORS for their families giving of their time, talent, treasure and tolerance to ensure a better life for their children. Thus, as the Good Book said of one commandment with a promise: honour your father (and mother) that your days may be long upon the land ... So even as we celebrate Fatherhood we acknowledge and appreciate our own fathers; but most of all our children, not forgetting our wives, mothers, sisters, aunts who help to enhance our relevance, significance and roles by what we do to bring honour to ourselves.

So Happy Fathers' or Daddies' Day on this special day!!

God Bless You!!!



Attendees at the Father's Day Brunch