THE ROLE OF ALUMNI IN THE FUTURE OF ST. CHARLES

BEING THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS PRESENTED AT THE 2018 CHARLEANS IN DIASPORA CONVENTION IN ATLANTA, GA. USA, JULY 27 - 29, 2018.

BY RASHEED ADEWALE RAJI.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

1. PROTOCOLS AND PREAMBLE

2. WHO ARE ALUMNI?

3. SCOPE OF INTERVENTION OF CHARLEAN ALUMNI

4. THE MISSING LINKS

5. WHAT CAN STILL BE DONE?

6. FACING THE FUTURE - WITH APLOMB!

7. QUESTIONS AND OPEN DISCUSSIONS.

1. PROTOCOLS AND PREAMBLE

The starting point should obviously be to thank The President of our Diaspora Group, OB Ghazali Yemi Ajijolaiya and his dynamic team in the Exco, for granting me the privilege of presenting this Keynote Address. I am keenly aware of the scope and depth of experience within and outside our Alumni and feel quite petrified about meeting the expectations of your high bar. The comfort I have is that, even if I don't, I am within the family and it is not our tradition to embarrass family members!

I also have to thank our distinguished members, their families and guests for consenting to listen to me. I will like to reciprocate this courtesy by trying to make my period of engagement pleasurable and worthwhile. If, however, I fail in that endeavor and you transit to dozing off or sleeping, please DO NOT SNORE!

Let me start with a joke; and a Catholic one, given the Catholic origins of the School. It is about 4 Catholic women who were bragging about the accomplishments of their sons.

First Woman - My son is a reverend father and I feel proud when people call him "Father", "Father" when talking to him.

Second Woman - My son is a Bishop and people address him as "My Lord" when speaking with him.

Third Woman - I am the proud mother of a Cardinal and people refer to him reverently as "Your Eminence".

Fourth Woman: My son is a tall, 6ft 4ins, handsome, well-turned-out man. Anytime he appears at a gathering, the ladies gasp and shout "Oh, my God...!!!"

I should thank the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) of Atlanta for the lengths they have gone to, to make our stay comfortable and memorable. Atlanta has always held an allure for me - its beauty, its diversity, its warmth and hospitality and most especially its competitive spirit. I have followed its progress since the mayoralty of Ambassador Andy Young.

However, I am also fond of Atlanta for a different and more selfish reason - Atlanta, through the auspices of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, gave tribute to the indomitable and "Can-do" spirit of the Nigerian. It was here and in other cities in the US that Nigerian football truly came of age - with The Golden Eagles appearing in the final stages of the Olympics for the first time and beating such mighty teams as Brazil and Argentina (on both occasion from some goals down!) to win the cup. The "Golden" was a rebranding from "Green" in acknowledgement of their feat. Brazil, in particular, felt so embarrassed and humiliated that the team did not wait for their 3rd place medals but went straight home! And that alerted the world that you don't mess with Nigeria and do not write it off until the final whistle! I highlight these events to show the "Nigerianness" in us and the "never-say-die" spirit we exhibit.

You can, therefore, understand my surprise and mild irritation, when I visited the Olympics Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland in August 2001 and saw a wall of superlative performances but did not see the name of The Golden Eagles there. I immediately wrote a protest to the Management of the Museum, wondering why they could possibly exclude the team's name on the wall. A few weeks after, I received a response from the Museum, thanking me for my letter and explaining that 'it is, in fact, the plethora of Olympic "moments" that makes it a challenging task for us to ensure that we present a balanced global history of the Games and the Olympic Movement.' It added that it was trying to do just that by creating a "Heroes" section of the Museum although it cannot guarantee that what I called "the herculean feat of the Golden Eagles" will be included. I am happy to report that I recently googled the Heroes section and saw the picture of Nwankwo Kanu (Captain of the Team) being carried shoulder high following the victory in the football final.

Perhaps my most memorable story of Atlanta was the feature piece done by "TOPIC" - the magazine of the United States Information Service (USIS), which I read in the late '70s. Residents of Atlanta were asked about what they loved about Atlanta and one was, in particular, asked where, between heaven and hell, he would go after death and he responded lovingly: "I don't know whether I will go to heaven or hell when I die, but whichever way I go, I will pass through Atlanta!"

Thanks so very much, Atlanta LOC, for being such gracious hosts.

The topic I have been asked to speak on - The Role of the Alumni In The Future of St. Charles - lies at the heart of our relationship with the School. I have taken the intellectual liberty to veer into some other ancillary matters as a way of enriching and expanding the coast of our discussions. I will also probably provoke some controversies to enable us look at the issues more broadly and enable us generate fresh ideas.

WHO ARE ALUMNI?

"Alumni" is the English plural word used for former students (and most times, graduates) of an educational institution. The singular form is alumnus (male) or alumna (female). The plural for women is sometimes shown as "alumnae"

Etymologically, the Latin word "alumnus" means a "foster son" or "pupil" and derives from the verb "alere" which means "to nourish". Schools, colleges and universities, of course, stand in good positions as "nourishing institutions".

Alumni need to be distinguished from graduates - which generally means people who successfully finish a course of study in an institution, often with the award of a certificate or degree. So, graduates are alumni but not all alumni are graduates

Over time, however, the term "alumni" (sometimes shortened as "alum" or "alums") has been expanded to include the former members of a company, group or organization.

SCOPE OF INTERVENTIONS

* Maintaining a beneficial relationship between Alumni and the School;
* Supporting the academic development of students (provision of library books, laboratory equipment, computer center, etc.);
* Provision of Scholarships and Awards for Excellence;
* Payment for Additional teachers for remedial and other programs;
* Payment of examination fees for indigent students;
* Organizing Career Guidance Talks (not often enough!);
* Honoring Outstanding Teachers;
* Provision of Infrastructural facilities - road development, school facelifts, payment for utilities - by various stanzas, branches or the whole Alumni Group; the most prominent being the Alumni Hall, named after one of our distinguished members, Bashorun Rotimi Obeisun, given his significant funding of the project;
* Organizing Conventions and Reunion (like this one in Atlanta!) to share ideas, fellowship and solve problems.

THE MISSING LINKS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Alumni is the ability to stay together over the years for the common purpose of the School, despite the occasional tensions that tend to threaten to tear the team apart. There are, however, some missing links that we need to address:

1. NAME CHANGE - AND COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

* The Government of Osun State, by making the School co-educational, changed its character. Female students were admitted into the School and they have started to graduate! Despite the objections of the more traditional amongst us, we cannot possibly continue to be an "Old Boys" Association!
* I understand and salute the courage of some of our members who went to court t challenge the action of the Government (the lack of consultation itself being part of the vestiges of the incursion of the military into Nigeria's political firmament). I was conflicted and, to some extent ambivalent, about the change. On the one hand, the Government, just by fiat, threw away the reputation and character that took many decades and sacrifice to build. On the other hand, I knew that the Government had the power to do what it did because of its ownership of the School (isn't it said that whoever owns the land owns the building on it?). Also, the School was being opened up to give more opportunities to the female gender, who by some estimates, constitute half or more of the world's population. And, if we consider the influence of the women in our lives - as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, friends, etc. - how can we deny them the opportunity to advance? Besides, we seem to have had a less devastating impact than Fakunle Comprehensive High School, which was obliterated to build a shopping complex. What a faulty and false equivalence! What are the alumni of Fakunle to say or do. And, how fair is it to wipe out the legacy of a foremost and philanthropic entrepreneur who gave back to society by building a place for nurturing future leaders?
* We need to document and co-ordinate the interventions through a central clearing house (e.g. the Central Executive Council - CEC). The current modes of intervention are a bit haphazard and we do not, for instance, have a good record of ALL the interventions made by the Alumni up to date. Such a good record of intervention will be a good reference point and help to avoid duplication/replication.
* We need to build on the achievements of prior administrations to continue the winning story of the Alumni. During my Presidency of the Association (1992 -1994), we bought Library Books, Laboratory equipment and paid for some utilities. We also created the first Directory of Members and the first Newsletter. Further, through the kind assistance of the Royal Dutch Embassy in Lagos, we were able to provide 3 Ventilation-Improved-Pit (VIP) toilets for students. Regrettably, those initiatives were not followed up with updates/additions and the toilets have fallen into disrepair. We should endeavor to avoid the national malaise of poor maintenance.
* Now, the elephant in the room! We should endeavor to close the yawning gap between the Home Front and the Diaspora Group. A lot of the misunderstanding has been due to all kinds of misgivings, personality issues and, sometimes, hubris! There is nothing stopping us from being ONE, UNITED, GLOBAL entity but ourselves and our imagination. I believe that we have the opportunity to start anew and redefine our hopes and expectations. In doing so, however, we must strenuously avoid the kind of short shrift that was paid to the great efforts made by the members of Past President Adepeju's Panel on the reform of the Association. I was surprised by the cavalier approach with which their efforts were dismissed. In all cases, we should remember that our members are not being paid for their services and their contributions, in time and financial resources should not be belittled.
* We must develop a sustainable way of raising funds for the operations of the Association, through Annual Dues and other fund-raising activities. As things stand now, dues are generally raised during the biennial conventions during which members are requested to pay for two years' dues. The effect of this is that the attendees of the conventions are seemingly "punished" for showing their faces because a vast majority who do not attend the convention do not get to pay any dues! One of the ways to enhance this is for the Executive to consider itself as the Management of a "business" with the members being its "customers". It should, therefore, provide customer-centric offerings/ customer retention programs (e.g. publishing and circulating minutes of meetings, furnishing new members with welcome/information packages, organizing or sponsoring investment and financial empowerment/independence seminars, health talks, etc. Every member of the Association, even errant ones, should feel at home under the tent of the Association. The errant ones should, like the Biblical prodigal son, feel a longing for home; for, as they say, "home is where you go when you are beaten by the rain."
* Career Talks for the students should be intensified to help guide the students in making choices. We have not been doing a lot of this and it is one of the most critical and consequential interventions that we could have for them.
* We should include Volunteering and Community Outreach in our programs to reach out to those who may not be as privileged as us.
* Perhaps the BIGGEST CHALLENGE that I feel we have is the establishment of an ENDOWMENT AND WELFARE FUND that will focus on both members and students of the School. I have attached as an Appendix, the 10 high schools with the highest Endowment Funds. The funds provide multiple support and financial assistance to students. The intention of including this is ASPIRATIONAL, as some of the schools were established many, many decades ago. The idea here is to focus on the welfare of members, some of whom have withdrawn their participation because of difficult economic conditions. This is not a new idea. Indeed, during the Presidency of PP Tayo Orekoya (2010 - 2014), when I served as the Chairman of the Networking and Co-ordination Committee, we presented a whole raft of policies for a “HUMILITAS ENDOWMENT AND EMPOWERMENT FUND” ("The Endowment Fund") but the recommendations were not followed up by subsequent administrations. Adjunct to this is the Life Insurance Policy that, for a small annual premium, the survivors of a member who passes on, can use to cushion the pain of death as well as meet some expenses. My Class Stanza, Charleans 715, has been using it to good effect for some of our classmate that died. For an annual premium of N8,000 (couple N16,000) there is a payout of N1 million in the event of the death of the patriarch/ matriarch of a family. We tried to promote this during the Orekoya Presidency but it did not gain traction. I am however, delighted to note that the Global President, Mr. Rotimi Aluko, promoted it a few days ago on our WhatsApp platform and there appeared to be renewed interest.

FACING THE FUTURE - WITH APLOMB!

* Our Association should feel reasonably proud of our accomplishments. Despite the fissiparous tendencies that sometimes tug at us, we have been able to do a lot to make a difference in the School. Indeed, many alumni associations look up to us, wondering about how we are able to achieve what we do. But we can still do more! We need to set lofty goals for the Association . As a starting point, we should increase our interface and interaction with both the Catholic Church and the Government of Osun State to explore the possibility of restoring Boarding facilities in the School. This has been discussed before but not implemented. Of course, members have always been reminiscing about the good times they had in school when boarding facilities were available. Imagine the diversity and ease provided when you had the Atakoumis coming from Kaduna, the Oshodis from Lagos and Asafaa Pokima coming from Port Harcourt. In my view, there is no better way of building unity among the youth than letting them interact competitively in their innocence. There is no way of my thinking of Charles Onuwa Uwadia and thinking first of his coming from Edo State rather than thinking of him as my brother and friend. Regrettably, the current studentship of the School is limited to Oke Aiyepe and Ita Olokan and that is not healthy.
* One of the great advantages that we have not taken is the establishment of business entities among members. The years in school have provided a good "Due Diligence" period for prospective members thinking of doing business together. Let us remember that the giant FaceBook, the most connected platform on earth, was started in a Harvard University dormitory!
* Our members should start to play big in the field of politics. We have all seen the struggle our WhatsApp Platform Administrators go through to restrain our members from discussing politics. Please unchain yourselves and get involved in changing the fortunes of Nigeria. our experience with our rapacious politicians shows that politics is too serious and consequential to be left for politicians! We should minimize Africa's reliance on such kind-hearted initiatives as "Kids In Need of Desks" (KIND) Fund, which is being used by Lawrence O'Donnell, under the auspices of MSNBC Network and UNICEF, to provides desks for pupils in Malawi. The Fund crossed the $15 Million mark at the end of 2017. I believe that if Africa's resources are well utilized, we can adequately provide for the needs of her children.

I want to end on this optimistic note and highlight the dilemma faced by three men of God trying to share the offering between them and God. The first one said that they should share it 50:50; the second man said that they should draw a circle and throw the money up; whatever fell inside the circle belongs to God and whatever fell outside it belongs to them. The third man said that he had the best idea: they should throw the money up, whatever stayed up belongs to God and whatever came down belongs to them!!!

THANK YOU!!!

APPENDIX

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|  | **High School** | **Endowment $M** | **City** | **State** |
|  | Phillips Exeter Academy | 1150M | Exeter | NH |
|  | Phillips Academy Andover | $970 M | Andover | MA |
|  | St. Paul's School(Episcopal) | $602 M | Concord | NH |
|  | Deerfield Academy | $532 M | Deerfield | MA |
|  | Culver Academies | $394 M | Culver | IN |
|  | Lawrenceville School | $372 M | Lawrenceville | NJ |
|  | Choate Rosemary Hall | $371 M | Wallingford | CT |
|  | The Hotchkiss School | $362 M | Lakeville | CT |
|  | Groton School (Episcopal) | $350 M | Groton | MA |
|  | Peddie School | $321 M | Hightstown | NJ |
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|  | Source: Boarding School Review |  |  |  |
|  | [www.boardingschoolreview.com](http://www.boardingschoolreview.com/) |  |  |  |