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In Memory of Fr. Peter Ignatius Gichure

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In Memory of Fr. Peter Ignatius Gichure

The editorial board of the Journal of Social Encounters mourns the loss of our great friend, supporter and fellow board member, Fr. Peter Ignatius Gichure, taken from us too soon this past summer. We offer some reflections on him and we pay tribute to him by republishing a book chapter he co-authored with his friend and JSE co-editor Ron Pagnucco, titled “Solidarity: Catholic Perspective,” a topic of much importance in our times. May Fr. Gichure rest in peace.

AMECEA Mourns Rev. Prof. Gichure of Catholic University of Eastern Africa A Reflection by Sr. Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, FSSA

Following the untimely death of Rev. Prof. Peter Ignatius Gichure, Saturday, July 31, Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) through the Secretary General, has sent condolences message to Kenya’s Nakuru Diocese where the late hails from, describing him a renowned theologian who was committed in his ministry as a priest and a lecture.

“I received with deep sorrow the news about the demise of Rev. Prof. Peter Gichure, a renowned lecture of theology at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and a resource person for AMECEA capacity building programs,” Fr. Anthony Makunde eulogized in a message sent to the Local Ordinary of Nakuru Catholic Diocese Bishop Maurice Muhatia Makumba.

“We will remember Fr. Gichure for his dedication and commitment to service not only to the Catholic University where he was stationed but also in various institutions, conferences, dioceses and formation houses when he was called to assist in pastoral, spiritual and academic matters,” Fr. Makunde recounts the dedication of the cleric who has served for decades at CUEA and its affiliate colleges adding that “His untimely death has left many of us with sorrow.”

Sending his message on behalf of AMECEA Chairman, Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde of Solwezi Diocese, Zambia, the Secretary General condoles with the entire Dioceses of Nakuru, members of CUEA and the immediate family of the late theologian during this sorrowful moment.

Described as a hard worker who readily availed himself to offer his services, the Vice-Chancellor (VC) of CUEA Very Rev. Prof. Stephen Mbugua Ngari said in his homily during the requiem Mass Tuesday, August 3, “Peter blended his academic life with pastoral work and never wanted to lose focus of his calling as a priest.”

“What Christ has given us through him now he becomes, and he lives in that glory and in the benefits of the Sacraments and the witness that he offered us,” Prof. Fr. Mbugua told mourners who attended the Tuesday event at CUEA campus, Nairobi.

Talking on behalf of African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) fraternity where the late Prof. Gichure offered his services whenever he was called upon, the ASEC Kenya director Sr. Joyce Kwamboka Nyakwama said, “We have lost an icon, an ardent supporter of ASEC programs and a strong pillar from the very start of the development and expansion of HESA (Higher Education for Sisters in Africa) programs in Kenya and Africa.”

“He has always been at every meeting and conference that comprised of members from various ASEC partner universities across Africa and in the US and out of these meetings we saw the growth of ASEC and HESA,” Sr. Nyakwama a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame congregation shared with mourners adding that Prof. Gichure played a key role in launching PhD HESA programs last year.

In Memory of Fr. Peter Ignatius Gichure

On his side, the Vice-Chancellor (VC) Designate Prof. David Wang'ombe of Tangaza University College, a constituent of CUEA eulogized Professor as a mentor who guided constituent colleges of CUEA to be mature and strive towards being fully fledged Universities.

"He guided us with compassion, never gave up on us and reminded us to always seek to do the right and the just," Prof. Wang'ombe said on behalf of all the constituent and affiliate colleges of CUEA.

The late Prof. Gichure was laid to rest Wednesday, August 4, in Nakuru Diocese.

<http://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2021/08/06/amecea-amecea-mourns-rev-prof-gichure-of-catholic-university-of-eastern-africa/>

A Reflection by Augustine Kakeeto, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Prof. Gichure was both prolife and pro- social justice. A defiant academic so to say. He refused to be placed into the ideological categorization of today. The demarcation increasingly widening. When one claims to be prolife, they are dismissed as conservative and therefore feel out of place in the liberal claims for social justice. Yet again when one claims to be social justice promoter, they are treated with caution in the prolife ranks. Prof. Gichure managed to be both. He sustained his ministry with Marriage Encounter but still made consistent contributions to the thinking behind the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in Kenya.

Being no theologian, I may not be able to pronounce myself about Prof. Gichure in that area but he was my director in the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics (CSJE) at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). His tenure there had been preceded by service at the Association of Catholic Universities and Institutes of Africa and Madagascar (ACUIAM). While at ACUIAM, the idea of mainstreaming peace studies at various catholic Universities and institutions was born. We at CUEA had already been running an undergraduate program, the ACUIAM decision prompted us to start a Master's Degree in Justice Peace and Cohesion. When he took over as director of CSJE the master's program had just started and was very supportive, including teaching his favorite course on Active Non Violence.

A stickler for procedure and protocol you would be sure all is well when he part of the team. Prof. Gichure will surely be missed. In his place the university might have to recruit three or four people to fill his shoes!

Augustine Kakeeto teaches at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya

A Reflection by Fr. William Headley

I first met Father and Professor Peter Ignatius Gichure at what in retrospect was an historic lunch meeting. We were participants in a major peacebuilding planning gathering held in Bujumbura, Burundi (2010). The event engaged Catholic Church leadership from East African and the Great Lakes Regions. As staff to the conference's sponsor, the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN - CPN.ND.edu), I was present. It was, however, startling to see a cluster of university leaders led by Professor Gichure. He was then General Secretary of the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes of Africa and Madagascar (ACUHIAM). Professor Peter had developed a passion for the inclusion of peace studies in Catholic university curricula. I came over time to know him as a modest, soft-spoken person of strong convictions. Two years later, he invited a CPN team to present our peacebuilding message at a continental assembly of ACUHIAM. Peter's ready smile, commensurate sense of hospitality and human warmth showed again when Dr. Ronald Pagnucco and I taught in an emerging peace program on Peter's home campus, The Catholic University of East Africa. We will deeply miss our beloved colleague/.

Fr. William Headley is an Adjunct Professional Faculty at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana where he works with the Catholic Peacebuilding Network

A Reflection by Ron Pagnucco

I count myself to be very blessed for having known Fr. Peter Gichure for close to 20 years. We first met through my involvement with the Global Solidarity partnership between my diocese, the Catholic Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota, and the Catholic Diocese of Homa Bay, Kenya. I served for a while on the partnership Leadership Team for our diocese and traveled to Kenya as part of a diocesan delegation. My good friend Peter Kimeu, who I met previously in a course we took together at Eastern Mennonite University, and the good people of Catholic Relief Services-Kenya, and our diocesan partnership coordinator Fr. William Vos, wisely arranged for me to meet Fr. Gichure, and I continue to thank them for that. Fr. Gichure and I hit it off immediately. He had a wonderful, dry sense of humor, a quick wit and an impish smile that accompanied it. He invariably made me smile when I talked to him. He was very intelligent, knowledgeable of peace studies and promoted the field in Africa, as Augustine and William noted. He had gone to Notre Dame for his MA in Peace Studies, where I had been Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. Though we were not there at the same time, we knew many of the same people at Notre Dame and valued our experiences there.

Fr. Gichure was a great colleague with which to work. We collaborated on several peace studies projects, an example of the global solidarity in which we both ardently believed. He helped arrange and host a very good visit by me and my students, accompanying us to various locations in Kenya, and discussing issues with us. We hoped to have more such visits, and were exploring student exchange possibilities between our two schools. He was a firm believer in intercultural education, and was quite familiar with the US, which showed when he talked to my students. We also were exploring the possibility of his spending a semester at my school, thought that was very difficult to arrange because of his many important responsibilities in Kenya. Together in 2013-14 we wrote "Solidarity: A Catholic Perspective," a chapter which appeared in *A Vision of Justice: Engaging Catholic Social Teaching on the College Campus*, published by Liturgical Press in the US and CUEA-Gaba Press in Kenya. This was only one of many publications by Fr. Gichure. Through the initiative of Augustine, and with the help of Fr. Gichure and Dr. Joseph Okumu, in 2017, I became a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics at CUEA, teaching a summer graduate seminar on Human Rights and International Justice. I am grateful to Augustine, Fr. Gichure and Joe for that, and hope to return soon as the COVID situation improves. My Visiting Professorship led to the development of the *Journal of Social Encounters* in 2017, through the collaboration of Joe Okumu and the support of Fr. Gichure, who joined the editorial board. Fr. Gichure wrote a review of a book on Restorative Justice for the *Journal*, and was working on an essay on "Social Capital and Fratelli Tutti" for the *Journal* when he died. We looked forward to continuing to work together and discussing peace and justice issues. I will miss him and working with him, and I know many others will too. And among the many things I will miss about him is his humor, wit, and impish smile, a delightful part of our conversations.

There is so much more that can and should be said about Fr. Gichure. These reflections are but a glimpse of his rich, active life. I will close simply with this tribute to him: He was a man of faith and reason, compassion and humor who ardently pursued peace and justice. Those of us who knew him are truly blessed.

Ron Pagnucco is a founder and co-editor of the Journal of Social Encounters, and teaches at the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University in Minnesota.