**EULOGY OF THE LATE JOHN JOSEPH NJENGA, THE ARCHBISHOP *EMERITUS* OF MOMBASA**

**Early Life**

The late Archbishop Emeritus John Joseph Njenga was born on the 25th of December, 1928 in Karambainĩ Village, Tigoni Location in Limuru Division to *Mzee* Kĩmani *wa* Therebũ and *Mama* Maria Wanjirũ. He was named after his father’s eldest brother in line with the Kikuyu naming tradition. Njenga was the last born in a family of eight children. Unfortunately, only five of his siblings reached maturity due to high infancy mortality rate at the time. Those who survived the infant mortality were; Mũthoni, Nderu, Mwaũra, and Nyambura.

**Education**

In 1936, he was enrolled at Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) Primary School Gīthīga. Upon starting formal schooling, he became a follower of the CSM, which is the earlier name of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). He was eight years old, two years older than the standard admission age for the first grade today. Njenga passed the Common Entrance Examination and qualified to join the intermediate level in Kikuyu, then called Thogoto Scotland Mission Intermediate School. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The 100 Kshs annual fee was far beyond what his parents could afford. Fortunately, in 1940, he was admitted at the Catholic School in Lioki that was charging 24 Kshs yearly fee. While in Lioki, he underwent the Agĩkũyũ initiation rites and received the Sacraments of Christian initiation namely: Baptism and Confirmation. Soon, he gained an interest in deepening his faith through frequenting catechism classes. In the midst of this, he exhibited stable signs of becoming a Priest. The dedication of Frs. Austin Lynch and Ted Colleton acted as a powerful pull towards his interest in the priesthood. In 1943, he sat for his final examinations in which it emerged that out of 20 candidates only two had attained the required points for admission into high school. The successful students were John Njũgũna and John Njenga. The Catholic run Holy Ghost College, which later became Mang’u High School, unhesitatingly offered him a place, since as was its tradition then as it is now, the school only admitted the best candidates in the country. At Mangu, his love for God bloomed. He became a member of the Legion of Mary and taught catechism to his schoolmates. His contemporaries at Mang’u included Dr. Lawrence Sagini, Moody Awori (whom he personally taught catechism), Prof. Mwinzi, Titus Mbathi, Tom Mboya, Michael Njenga and the retired president Emilio Mwai Kibaki. Due to his trademark priestly demeanor, his fellow students nicknamed him *kamũbea (a little priest)*. Back in Mang’u, he excelled in Mathematics and the Physical Sciences. In 1947, he sat for the prestigious Cambridge School Certificate Examination and scored a First Division.

**Journey to the priesthood**

John Njenga was admitted at the prestigious Makerere University to study medicine, but instead, he opted to study for the priesthood at the Kibosho Seminary in Tanganyika, old name of Tanzania. His mother whom he loved dearly, was particularly devastated by the news of his decision. She would never see her grandchildren by Njenga! *Mami*, Njenga assured her, *do not worry since I will have many spiritual children who shall fill your life with rare joy*. This prophecy turned to be true. During her long life, Mama Wanjirũ hosted countless numbers of Priests, Seminarians, Religious Brothers and Sisters and Laymen and Women, who often called on her, partly because she was the mother of a thriving Bishop. As part of the preparations to join the senior seminary in Tanganyika, he joined Kilimambogo Junior Seminary as an untrained teacher. The year was 1948 and he was about to begin his journey to the priesthood.

Having successfully completed his priestly training and formation, Njenga was ordained on February 17, 1957 at Lioki Catholic Church by the late John Joseph McCarthy then the Archbishop of Nairobi. Ordination to the priesthood made him a man of many firsts: the first indigenous priest to be ordained in the Archdiocese of Nairobi (previously Fr. Paul Njoroge had been ordained in 1942 for the Vicariate of Zanzibar, died and his remains interred in Rome); the first ordained priest from Lioki Parish; the first local priest to publicly baptize his mother on his ordination day (his father had been baptized few years before). In his letter to Archbishop James Knox, the Apostolic Delegate to the then British East Africa, Archbishop McCarthy described the event articulately. There were 50 priests and 50,000 faithful in *an atmosphere highly charged with pride, joy and reverence*.

**Pastoral work begins**

A fluent speaker of English, German, Italian and French, besides Kiswahili and Gikuyu languages, Njenga’s first posting was at Queen of Apostles Seminary, which in those days was located at Kiserian, where he worked for a period of two and a half years. Afterwards in 1960, he proceeded to Claver House, London, England, to study Community Development and Sociology and later in Rome he studied at the Gregorian University where he obtained a Doctorate in Canon Law (DCL). Upon his return to Kenya, Fr. Njenga was posted to the Catholic Secretariat where he worked in the Department of the Lay Apostolate at Hughes Building along Kenyatta Avenue. In 1964, he was appointed the first African Parish Priest at Our Lady of Visitation Church (OLVC) in Makadara, Nairobi. During his time of service there, the idea of the Church as family matured. While still at OLVC his spectacular contribution to pastoral ministry earned him the title Monsignor, the first to be awarded to a Kenyan indigenous priest. At Makadara, he worked with Frs. George Gathongo, Hilary Kailu, Joseph Kamanũ, Isidore Onyango, Gabriel Kimotho, Joseph Mutuku (now in Machakos Diocese), the late David Njuguna and George Muhoho. In his biography entitled: *Love and Service to the People of God* written by Dr. Ng’ang’a Gȋcũmbi, Fr. G. Gathongo is quoted reminiscing how Njenga was very fair to his Assistants and how his spirit of generosity charmed not a few people. Fr. Gathongo notes how Njenga had *made some arrangement with the owner of a kiosk across the road so that those who came complaining of hunger would be sent to eat there and the bill brought to the church*. He would always justify his style with a beautiful Agĩkũyũ saying, *Ng’aragu ndȋhooyaguo ũhoro* (hunger knows no pleasantries). He soon became the Education Secretary for the Archdiocese of Nairobi and made his primary goal the promotion of education as a way of making Africans ‘own’ their faith by enriching it with outstanding African symbolisms. In Kiambu district, he established numerous primary and *Harambee* (Self-help) secondary schools, which including Njenga Primary School, Karia, Gatitũ Girls, Mūrūria, St. Mary’s Girls Thigio, Mũkũyũ Secondary School … a list is too long to exhaust.

In 1970, he was instrumental in transferring his *alma Mater*, Mang’u High School from its old site to its present location along Thika Super High School. He negotiated with the government for the approval of the A level streams, not only for Mang’u High School, but also for Muhoho High and Loreto Limuru. He also donated the five-acre piece of land where Njenga Primary stands. This parcel of land was a personal bequeathal from his father. He was responsible in sourcing for the monies from Cardinal Richard James Cushing of Boston in USA for the construction of Queen of Apostles.

He was central in the negotiations of the Education Act of 1968, where after difficult negotiations with Dr. G. J. Kiano as the Minister of Education, and with the encouragement of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the Act generated the idea of Church as sponsor of schools it had previously managed. The Act also approved the teaching of religion in schools while at the same time reaffirming the inviolable right of the church to have a role in the running of schools it had founded. As an outstanding champion of Catholic education, Njenga ensured that Catholic ideals were taught in Catholic sponsored schools throughout the country.

In 1970, he negotiated for the creation of the St. Paul’s Chaplaincy through a partnership between the Catholic Church and the University of Nairobi. With Archbishop J. J. McCarthy, he was instrumental not only in the building of the structure itself but also in sourcing of personnel including Fr. Joseph G. Donders as the University Chaplain and a university Professor. He served as Secretary General of Kenya Episcopal Conference (KEC) currently Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1967 to 1970.

**Episcopate in Eldoret**

After the demise of Bishop Emilio Njerū, the then Auxilliary Bishop of Eldoret, on 4th of October, 1970, he was appointed the new Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret. His Principal Consecrator was [Archbishop Pierluigi Sartorelli](http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bsartp.html), the then Apostolic Nuncio in Kenya, thus he inherited an authentic apostolic succession. He chose as motto to guide his episcopate the words, *Upendo na Utumishi Kwa Watu wa Mungu* (*Love and Service to the People of God*). The Diocese of Eldoret under Bishop Njenga comprised the districts of Eldoret, Kitale, Nandi, parts of Pokot and Kakamega. Under Njenga, new *Harambee* schools were established in Eldoret such as; St. Paul’s Lugari, Kimoning, Kamngetuny, Bishop Njenga Girls, Chekalini, Matunda Day, Timboroa, Likuyani, Lukhuna, Nzoia (now St. Anne’s), Turbo and St. Luke’s Lumakanda just to mention a few. Bishop Njenga took up office at a time when the main emphasis was on building a self-reliant church: self- sustaining, self-ministering and self-propagating. The landmark Sacred Heart Cathedral in Eldoret, that was officially opened on June 21 1987 is one of his memorable structural contributions. With the benefit of hindsight, what Njenga achieved in Eldoret, given the relatively short span of time he ministered there, makes it difficult not to invoke the hand of God in his life and mission. Bishop Maurice Crowley sums up well Njenga’s tenure in Eldoret when he says: *…In fact, nobody can stand and accuse him of misusing church funds to enrich himself or spend carelessly in unplanned generosity…* It was in Eldoret that he served the longest period as an ordinary (18 years).

**Episcopate in Mombasa**

On 25th of October 1988, Bishop Njenga was transferred to Mombasa and was installed as the Ordinary on the 12th of February, 1989. On the 21st of May 1990, he was made the first Metropolitan bishop of Mombasa.

After Nairobi and Eldoret, he carried along his charism for education to the then Coast Province and thus in 1990, the construction and rehabilitation of St. Mary’s Teachers Training College in Bura/Taita commenced in earnest. Soon thereafter, St. Teresa Girls Secondary School in Chaani, was established. Also established around this time was Bishop Njenga Secondary School in Taita-Taveta District, Youth Polytechnic in Mikindani, Makupa School for Tailoring, orphanage in Bur-a Mission, Marianist Centre for the training of young boys and girls in carpentry and hairdressing, a street children center in Mikindani and Pwani School of Mentally Handicapped Children, inexhaustible list! He opened a chain of new parishes and re-established some previously suppressed ones. He helped establish perhaps the largest anti-HIV/AIDS strategic unit in the region to help combat the virus domiciled at Mikindani parish. Archbishop Njenga was keen on the theological and professional formation of the clergy, the religious and laity. He shall be perpetually immortalized as the canonical founder of the Sisters of Mary Mother of God of Mombasa, and a hosting bishop of a contingent of religious Congregations and religious personnel that he invited to work in the dioceses that he worked in.

His efforts in helping the victims of the 1997 politically instigated Likoni clashes and his brave reprimand of civil authorities showed that he was a vigilant protector and defender of the afflicted.

Besides his service to respective dioceses where he worked, he also served as the Chairman of the Kenya Episcopal Conference from 1976 to 1982.

Having attained the mandatory retirement age, in July 2005, at the Holy Ghost Cathedral in Mombasa, Njenga gave his final farewell address to the Christians of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa where he served for 17 years.

**Retirement**

Archbishop John Njenga had a peaceful retirement at Queen of Apostles Seminary where he continued working on his memoirs and charitable work via Archbishop Njenga Foundation for the disadvantaged children. On Saturdays, he would help administer Sacrament of Confessions at Holy Family Minor Basilica and on Sundays, when not invited to other Parishes, he would observe his Sunday obligations at St. Peter Clavers. He has been in and out of hospital due to age related health problems. On Sunday, November 4, 2018, 11:45 hrs, at Mater Hospital, Archbishop John Njenga’s soul departed to be with the Lord. May the good Lord who created, nurtured, sustained and vouchsafed Archbishop John Njenga during his earthly life, find him worthy to be counted him among his Saints.