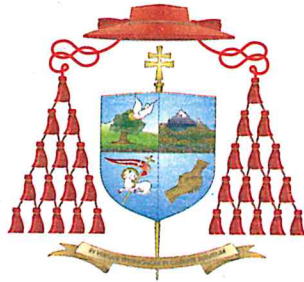


# ARCHDIOCESE OF NAIROBI

## Office of the Cardinal



Your Ref:

Our Ref:

4<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**To all Priests, Religious men and women, Christians and all the people of good will in the Archdiocese of Nairobi:**

### **RE: FAITH AND CULTURE**

*My dear Christians and all people of good will in the Archdiocese of Nairobi:*

During the February Presbyteral Council meeting, a pastoral concern was raised regarding a group taking root in some parts of the Archdiocese, particularly in some areas within Kiambu County. As your shepherd and taking in mind that this is a serious Pastoral concern, I appointed a committee within the presbyteral council whose mandate was to investigate and give a report on **the origin, objectives, extent of operations and effects of the group** on individual Christians, families, the Church and the society at large within the Archdiocese of Nairobi.

The committee submitted its report and among its findings, I made the following observations.

- i. It is true that there is a group calling itself "**Gwata Ndai**" whose operations are concentrated in Ndumberi, Ikinu, Githurai 44, among other areas in Kiambu and some parts of Nairobi County. Another group (whose name is still not known ) with characteristics similar to those of **Gwata Ndai** is also taking root in Kambaa area, within Githunguri Sub-County, with great influence in Lari, Limuru and Mai Mahiu regions as well as Nairobi County.
- ii. The groups claim to be advocating for Cultural renaissance through reinforcing of cultural traditions and practices, men empowerment and reinstating the traditional way of worship.

- iii. The group has had various adverse effects on individuals, families, Church and the society. These groups bear characteristics of a cult and use tactics of instilling fear in order to inculcate their doctrines and enforce their practices upon individuals. Numerous cases of family disintegration and conflicts, and of emotional and psychological imbalances especially upon children and women have been reported. There are also many reported cases of individual Christians defecting from the small Christian communities, ecclesial groups and from the church in order to embrace the teachings and practices of the said groups.
- iv. Teachings of these groups include some retrogressive practices such as female circumcision, male chauvinism and subjugation of women. They instill fear (such as fear of death and calamities if one ignores their teachings) and coercion in recruiting new members.

My dear people of God, we must always acknowledge that evangelization must enter into dialogue with culture if it is to produce any effects on human beings. As Pope Saint John Paul II mentions in his document *Ecclesia in Africa* No 42, our Church “ is endowed with cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole”. We must, therefore, hold dear our Christian values as well as our positive cultural heritage. With this in mind, it is time for all Christians to realize that they can preserve and glorify their past (ie, culture) without reverting to it, but by immortalizing it in lived faith. It is time for us to uphold the old and seize upon the new; when we combine the cultural beliefs and our Christian calling and have vibrancy in our faith. When we reflect on the mystery of the incarnation, we see this understanding better. Incarnation inserted Jesus, the Word Made Flesh and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity into the intercultural dynamics of human history. The Paschal Mystery offers an analogy for the conversion of culture which dies and rises under the impact of evangelization thus becoming more authentic and faithful to its underlying truth.

To you my dear Christians, I exhort you to always remain faithful to the teachings of Christ and of His Church. Concerning our cultural attachments, we particularly need to avoid the danger of syncretism, ie, mixing faith with some of the cultural beliefs that are not in line with the Church’s teachings. We also need to avoid the



danger of idolatry. In the letter to the **Hebrews 10:5-6**, we are reminded that “Christ sacrifice annulled, repealed and ended all other sacrifices.” Even the sacrifices of our fathers in faith, best expressed in Judaism, were only temporary and preparatory and not permanent systems of sacrifice. So, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the most perfect, the most efficacious and therefore the most sufficient for all people.

For you my dear men and women in various ecclesial groups, always openly talk about issues affecting your members amongst yourselves and never hesitate to share such challenges with your Priests. Finally, for you my dear Priests, remember that you are the agents of evangelization. As such, ensure that there is thorough catechetical instructions for the people of God. In a special way, accompany the children and young people and enhance good cultural formation for all the faithful. Be sure of my Prayers as you do this.

For those who may have fallen prey to the teachings of these groups, I wish to welcome you back to the Church and assure you of God’s mercy and forgiveness. I urge the priests who may have such cases in their parishes to re- integrate those who are willing to come back to the Church in to the flock of Christ. This is to be done through the guidance of our liturgical rite after going through retreat (prayer/fasting) and the sacrament of reconciliation.

May the blessings of the Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit come down upon you and remain with you always.

Your Shepherd

*John Cardinal Njue*

✠ John Cardinal Njue

*Archbishop of Nairobi*

