Mayor Mullinax, Members of the Newton City Council, Newtonians, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I thank you for the opportunity you have given me and my family to be part of this year's Unity Day in your beautiful city. When I received your call about two months ago inviting me to join you here and share my thoughts on the theme of your celebration: "One Community, One Humanity", my mind went to that African philosophical tradition, Ubuntu - and its principle of "oneness of humanity". It reminded me of Confucianism - that great Chinese philosophical tradition - with its "search for an ideal harmonious society". It reminded me of Jainism with its principles of tolerance, harmony, rapprochement, and pluralism. And the Christian injunction: “Do unto others as you wish for thyself”

I was reminded of the popular dictum: "Unity in Diversity", the official motto of many great nations and supra-nations such as the European Union, Ghana, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and South Africa. All these show the universality of your celebration's theme: "One Community, One Humanity".
I am here today not to explain what "One Humanity" is; nor to define for you the meaning of "One Community". You are the living witnesses of "One Humanity" with multiple tongues, "One Community" of different nations and creeds. Somehow, you have learnt how to manage your diversity for the common good of this great city. I'm here to dialogue with you, and to celebrate with you. No less important, I jumped at the invitation because I knew there would be food and drink from different nations and cultures: I was looking forward to the taste of tandoori chicken, bhatoora, ghonto, soul food, jambalaya, ackee and saltfish, rice, beans and pork, tortilla, maduros, gyro, kimchi, galbi, steak and potatoes; all in parade, like the flags of many nations represented here this afternoon. I have even brought my family with me to have a taste of this beauty of diversity, for my children to see their heritage in multiple colors, and the unfolding of the future.

Before I take my seat and enjoy the rest of the program, however, I would like to share some thoughts with you. As someone whose professional calling is using the content of African history and culture to explore the question of the Human Condition, I want to use an African philosophical tradition – Ubuntu - to reflect on your Newtonian tradition of "One Community, One Humanity". I would like everyone to please say U-BU-N-TU.

I want to share with you about how the African philosophy of Ubuntu allows us to grapple with, understand, and be part of the changes of our time and of your city. I want to show how your spirit of oneness, and your quest for harmony is Ubuntu, and how Ubuntu is you.
What is Ubuntu? Ubuntu is an old African philosophy that originated in Southern Africa. It is a philosophy of One Humanity that emphasizes the importance of community, the value of unity, and the priceless quality of selflessness and consideration for others. Ubuntu stands for "I Am Because We Are". It puts the community first. It asks us to understand our individuality from the perspective of our common good, in relation to the diversity of the world we live in. The Zulu of South Africa sum up what Ubuntu is in the following words: "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu", "a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte, 1993:46). In other words, "my humanity is made possible through the humanity of others". This Zulu maxim ultimately recognizes that every person, every life is sacred, irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, religion, and faith. From this perspective, Ubuntu is about respect for differences, individuality, particularity, and historicality (Degenaar, 1996:23; Sindane, 1994:7; Louw, 4). Ubuntu asks us to work towards equity, peace, and harmony as the foundation of building prosperity for each and everyone of us. Ubuntu emphasizes partnership, collaboration, and understanding. Ubuntu recognizes the humanity of all, and charges us to rediscover who we are, to rediscover our own human qualities through our interactions with peoples who are different from us.

I salute the foresight, the wisdom and the leaders of this city in inaugurating "Unity Day". "One Community, One Humanity” is about Living with Differences and also about Diversity without Differences. Yes, we academics have a way of being complicated. You may be asking: How can you live with differences and at the same time have diversity without differences? Let me explain: Once we accept that our differences – ethnicity, nationality, religion, appearance, food, dress, music, drum, etc. -belong to one humanity, the task before us is then to use the diversity of those differences to build a strong community.
You cannot practice Ubuntu and at the same time believe that your own way, your own tradition, your own history, or your way of life is the only way. You cannot practice Ubuntu and believe that your heritage is the only heritage worth celebrating. There is no place for dogma in Ubuntu. "One Community, One Humanity" means there is no place for absolutism. When we speak in absolutist terms, what we do is enforce homogeneity and our own cultural way of life on other people. Our quest for "One Community, One Humanity" ultimately rests on self-discovery and the understanding of the other. Dogma and absolutism do not leave room for true understanding. We need an environment of open-ness in order to achieve self-understanding, knowledge about the others, and unity in our community. Ubuntu asks us to build a community that allows the individual to be herself; and yet to be part of us, and for us to be part of him.

Ubuntu is about individuality, not individualism. Ubuntu celebrates individual competitiveness but the individual does not precede the community. Ubuntu celebrates community without subscribing to the tyranny of conformism. According to Ubuntu, for us to build "One Community, One Humanity", we must lay to rest the self-indulgence of individualism. What has self-indulging individualism given us?: Free market without human face, capitalism without compassion, accounting without accountability, corporate profit without corporate responsibility. What all these do is destroy our community, introduce mistrust, and weaken our unity. All these are against Ubuntu, they are against "One Community, One Humanity". What is more. Self-indulging individualism also gives us citizenship without taxation, religion without service, reckless use of the environment's resources, apathy to the city's infrastructure. All of these are against Ubuntu. They do not build community, they do not build unity, they do not build one humanity.
Ubuntu asks us to seek and share knowledge, to share culture, and to use the knowledge that our diversity has given us to build one community. It is not possible to see yourself in other people if you do not know them. If you do not know their history, their heritage, their travails, their journey. If you do not know their pains, you do not know their aspirations, their joys, their life. Then the person you see is just a worker or a stereotype: a Mexican, a Malian, Norman the Jamaican, those Indians, that Korean family, Japanese people, the Nigerian, those African Americans. Or, you can only see the undifferentiated "white folks".

We must not stop at celebrating our differences. Let us also use the differences to produce new knowledge for the transformation of our community and our self. We must build a new knowledge community in order achieve Ubuntu. We can achieve this when we begin to use our diversity of languages, histories, values and customs to build new knowledge, a knowledge that transcends and transforms all that we have ever known. This means, we must forgo our suspicion of differences. We must create vocabularies of respect, trust, and humanity in our reference to others. In our classroom and public discourse, we will not use the term "tribe" or "primitive" for those who do not look like us. Let us use our diversities to teach our children new knowledge so they can be better prepared for the international and global realities of our time. Let us find the space in our curriculum, in our classroom, in our community centers, in our places of worship, in our public spaces to discover who the members of our community are, in the full glory of their individuality, particularity, and historicality.

This is a trying moment. The current economic situation would confront us with difficult choices. We may be tempted to cut back on multicultural programs such as this. The limited
choices facing us might compel us to withdraw to the familiar: our family and our friends. But there are other options: the Mayor might call on all the different nationalities and ethnicities in this city to have more Unity Days in our classrooms and our community centers.

Let every nationality, every ethnicity, every cultural and lifestyle group donate one hour once a week in each school and in each Community Center telling stories about their homeland, about their culture, their food, their experience, their environment, their mode of dressing, their history. Let us reserve one day to have the public celebration of our diversity and our unity, but let us spend the rest of the 365 or 364 days living this unity in our private lives, our workplaces.

Neither the immigrant nor the native can hold on to the way of the old, and expect to build one community. We must "Cast down our bucket where we are", where we are making a living. We must care. Let the immigrant develop the sense of ownership, of belonging. One's civic responsibility to the new home, the city of our children, must be greater than the responsibility to one's self. We can only do this when we become informed residents. Let us buy in. Let us come forward to share. It is through this everyday sharing that we will achieve Ubuntu, that is "One Community, One Humanity". Don't let us forget that timeless saying of the Zulu: "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu": "I Am Because We Are".

I congratulate you for this celebration. Thank You.