

Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, on the Occasion of the Matric Day Awards and Prayer for Grade 12 Learners of Kwa-Themba

27 March 2017

The Reverend  
All Members of the Kwa-Thema Central Methodist Church  
Fellow Worshippers  
The Kwa-Thema Class of 2017  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I extend my deep gratitude and appreciation to the members of Kwa-Thema Central Methodist Church for inviting us today.

Programme Director, I open my talk by reaffirming the basic beliefs of the Methodist Church: God is one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In God, we Trust. In the Holy Spirit, we receive deliverance. In the Son, we receive salvation. As you recall, the three tenets of Christianity are derived from the fact that:

- People are all by nature **dead in sin** and consequently, **children of wrath**.
- They are **justified by faith alone**.
- Faith produces inward and outward **holiness**.

We come before You, today for on You, God, "rests our salvation and our glory". We pestered You with our tears and prayers during our dark days of gloom and helplessness. We knelt before You during our trying times. We asked You for courage and resilience when the forces of evil threatened our very existence.

However, when the first ray of the sun appeared on the horizon and You performed miracles: When dark cloud that had hovered over our mortal-self turned silver, we instead of praising You turned to the earthly individualistic triumphalist mode. We forgot that our strength as a people is not tested during the best of times. As we know from the teachings of the Holy Bible that we should never turn triumphalist because the sun shines. God, we are sinners. Today, we seek Your guidance. Today, we seek deliverance. Today, we seek the miracles of the Holy Spirit. Please Almighty God, save us from ourselves.

Programme Director, I am in awe of the work that the Kwa-Thema Central Methodist Church does in the area of basic education. You have been a pillar of strength for our youth for many years. You truly understand that basic education remains the only ladder out of poverty, ignorance and possible societal breakdown.

Only basic education has the capacity to equip this generation with the set of skills to navigate the demands and challenges of the 21st century. It is true that basic education underpins the development in all sectors of our society. In this regard, we must do all that we can to protect and promote the education of young people.

Programme Director; this ANC- administration has declared basic education an apex priority. We did so mindful of the fact that it is only education that is an equaliser in the greater scheme of things.

Henceforth, we have invested the lion's share of the national budget towards education. In his Budget Speech, the now former Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan said, "*Spending on basic education next year will be over R240 billion, or 17.5 per cent of the consolidated budget. Allocations for school building increase at 12.5 per cent*

*a year. Spending on learning and teaching support materials increases by 9.5 per cent over the next three years."*

Programme Director; allow me to pause here and say unequivocally that the former Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan is a man of honour. He is the pride and joy that represents the core values of honesty and incorruptibility. We indeed lost a man who epitomises the best values of our yesteryears heroes such the recently departed Comrade Ahmed Kathrada, Albertina Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and many others.

Programme Director, the good work you do for our children as the Central Methodist Church and as members of the community, izakhamuzizaKwa-Thema, will not go unnoticed. Indeed through this important service meant to pray for the Class of 2017, you have greatly helped us in making a huge difference in the lives of our children, your children, the future leaders of our nation, to whom the future belongs.

As we say in our rich African culture, by lending a hand in nurturing and humanising our children, you are also helping yourselves and your families. Indeed you are making it possible for all of us to live in a safe, caring, loving, democratic, value-based and prosperous society. This is precisely what we mean when we say: *Motho ke motho ka batho, Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, You are because we are.*

We welcome all educational interventions from our communities because we firmly believe that indeed education is a societal issue.

My message to you today is that the government cannot educate the nation all alone. All of us must play a role. The learners themselves must take responsibility for what happens in the schools. At the end of the day, they are responsible for what becomes of their lives. The role of parents is to guide the little ones; by teaching them values and respect for the rights of others.

Many challenges we're facing in our schools are exacerbated by the failure of parents and guardians to play a prominent and active role in the lives and education of their children. As parents, we are the first to detect signs of delinquency, anti-social and criminal behaviours among our children.

As we speak, we are confronted by a very worrying trend of harmful religious practices in our schools. For-instance, there is worrying trends of Occult practices that are harmful to our learning spaces and put the lives of educators and learners at risk. Collectively, we must fight against the harmful religious practices in schools that have dominated media headlines recently. There has been escalation in media coverage on the incidents of harmful acts, which have at times proven fatal. The case in point is the incident in the Eastern Cape Province at Bekisizwe Junior Secondary School that occurred on 17 February 2017, where there was a sudden death of one pupil and the hospitalisation of 30 others. It is believed that the incident was one way or the other linked to the harmful religious practices.

Equally, we must work together to stem the tide of violence and criminality in our schools and in our communities. Parents must make means to ensure children are not in possession of weapons or drugs when leaving home for school. We all have a duty to create functional, safe and productive schools where children are prepared for various careers and roles in society whilst they are simultaneously taught the values and ethos of our democratic society. Discipline starts at home, and it is harnessed in church.

I want to use this opportunity to inform the community of Kwa-Thema that on the 28 March 2017, we launched a Charter on Rights and Responsibilities for Religious Conduct in Learning Environments. Our partners in this effort include all Faith-Based Organisations, leading theologians, and leading members of the clergy.

The nut and bolts of the Charter is to ensure that our actions and religious practices are in line with the Constitution. The Constitution states unequivocally that freedom of religion, belief and opinion is an inalienable right for all citizens. The Charter attempts to foster a common ground on how we as a sector we can all walk the tightrope between advancing the Constitutional rights to religion and simultaneously ensuring that our schools are safe and free of any form of harmful religious practices.

We are supported also by the South African Inter-faith Council in this effort that must help us to create a foundation for moral regeneration in our schools.

We must use this Campaign to support the Class of 2017 to study in a safe, peaceful and human rights-based environment conducive for quality teaching and learning. I have the full confidence that these we can do united by the overarching vision of creating a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society.

I want to turn now directly to our learners. As our children and as future citizens of this country, you are our only hope for defeating the scourge of poverty. You are our hope for improving the health and wellbeing of our communities. You are our very hope for building an economically-viable society of educated, enlightened and employable people with the right and valuable skills and knowledge. As the young of South Africa, you are our hope for creating a value-based crime-free society where all live in peace, security and comfort as envisaged in the Freedom Charter.

I want to say to the Class of 2017 that this is your chance, your golden opportunity. Make the most of it or live to regret it for the rest of your lives. Your future as young people is now. All we can do as government, as religious communities and as community leaders, is to help you prepare for a better future.

As your teachers always tell you in class: "You can take a horse to the river, but you can't force it to drink". It's all in your hands. You have to make choices, the right choices. Choose to put your education first. You are left with only seven months before the final exams. It is not too long a sacrifice to make.

Let me re-emphasise some non-negotiables: Choose not to do drugs. Tell yourselves that getting drunk is not smart. Choose a good life and practice safety. Teen pregnancy is a sure disruption to your future. There are diseases out there. Abstain and live long. AIDS kills.

Now, speaking as a parent, a teacher and your Minister of Basic Education, do one thing good for me in 2017. Help the nation to improve on the good pass-rate we achieved last year, in 2016. Let us reach that elusive 80 percent national pass rate.

Once more, I would like to thank warmly the Kwa-Thema Central Methodist Church for the commendable community work you are doing. You have shown a keen interest in the education and future of the African child.

Ke ya leboga.