

# Healing Statement for the Youth of South Africa

## The Bishops' Message for the Youth

### Dear Young People

Using the words of Jesus, the recent Synod of African bishops call us to live and become "...the salt of the earth...the light of the world." (Mt 5:13-14)

### OUR HOPE – "LIVE YOUR LIVES TO THE FULLEST" (John 10:10)

The history of our people recounts many heroic deeds on the part of youth. The 16th of June 1976 stands out in particular as a witness to the struggle the youth waged for our country and their contribution in shaping the path towards the democratic and non-racial elections of 1994. We celebrate such events with pride and we find the courage to continue to face many other challenges with confidence.

Among the challenges ahead of us is addressing the growing gap between those who have and those who do not have – a gap which continues to widen. While some of you tell us of your great hopes and expectations for the future, many others relate to us their experiences of hopelessness and despair.

We note that each one of you experiences the need for healing in one form or another, be it spiritual or emotional healing, healing of relationships, and, for those who bear the burden of low self-esteem, healing which brings a new sense of inner strength.

Our hope is that you will live your lives to the fullest (John 10:10) by coming to know Jesus as the fulfilment of all your potential as young persons, living in the midst of so many challenges and difficulties which you continue to face daily.

### REMEDY – HEALING IN CHRIST

#### *Youth of South Africa: encounter Christ who heals you!*

Pope Benedict XVI wrote to you, the youth, on the occasion of the twenty-fourth World Youth Day 2008, "Make space for prayer in your lives! Learn to pray and thus grow in the experience of faith. Take part in your parish liturgies and be abundantly nourished by the Word of God and your active participation in the Sacraments. As you know, the summit and centre of the life and mission of every believer and every Christian community is the Eucharist."

The Gospel message of Matthew 11:4-6 tells us that through encountering Jesus people found healing. "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me."

Mary Magdalene experienced newness as she wept over the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair, (Luke 7:16ff) and Zacchaeus climbed out of the tree with haste at Jesus' bidding, so eager was he to begin the new life of grace offered to him through his encounter with Jesus (Luke 19:1ff).

The process of healing, which means becoming whole, begins with an **encounter with Jesus**. Pope Benedict XVI stressed this in his address to the Portuguese Bishops in November 2007, when he said "One doesn't begin to be a Christian because of an ethical decision or a great idea, but rather because of an encounter with an event, with a Person, who gives new horizons to life, and with that, a decisive orientation." Such an encounter creates for each of you the opportunity to enter into a personal relationship with Him, nurtured through prayer and the sacraments. In this way you will find the strength to carry your personal cross. When anyone of you accepts to take up the cross, the process of inner transformation develops further. That is why Jesus said "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, take up your cross and come after me." (Matthew 16:24,25).

*An experience of healing through encounter is shared with us by a student: "My name is Shaka, graduate*

student, born in a village in Limpopo just outside Thohoyandou. In 2005 while doing my second year at University I experienced what I could call the greatest loss in my life, on the 22 July three days after celebrating my 19th birthday, my dad passed on after we had been taking care of him for three weeks, and knowing very well that it was just a matter of time before God would take him. When it happened my life came to an absolute standstill.

I remember having to go back to University two days after my dad's funeral, hardly a minute passed by without the thought of my mother and my sister's well being. When I got back to campus I received amazing support from fellow ACTS members and chaplains. It was through talking to them that I started putting together the broken pieces of my life; but my life took a step back again when I failed three modules out of four and only made the minimum requirements in the module I passed but it was through talking to people and meditation that I found myself again.

In December of that year I attended a youth conference where my chaplain accompanied me on a retreat. Being alone, I spent the entire day meditating and writing down my experiences and every evening the chaplain and I had a fifteen minute reflection on the day. Though it was hard staying by myself and reflecting on my life experiences with my dad, I developed a more intimate relationship with God. I wrote an average of five pages a day on my life experience and at the end of everyday I felt my burden become lighter.

I discovered that I experienced healing by talking to people and sharing my experiences. It's more like confession, though most of us are reluctant and not willing to go for confession, we all know how "light" and free we feel after confession. The same applies to healing, I spoke to people. I wrote many pages, I meditated and developed an intimate relationship with God "in silence" and through that I was healed. Healing is like a like climbing a ladder, you always take it one step at a time, with God, with friends, in silence and also through talking."

## **DEVELOP AND EXPERIENCE A 'YOUTH SPIRITUALITY IN CHRIST'**

### ***Youth of South Africa: you are called to follow Jesus!***

The young man of the Gospel could have become a hero: Jesus recognised his potential to become just that, but he thought the price was too high, so he walked away into oblivion. (Matthew 19:16-22). James and John wanted to become heroes, one on the right side of Jesus and the other on his left and they said that they were prepared to drink the cup that Jesus would drink. (Matthew 20:20-23). The parable tells of 12 bridesmaids, six of whom made it into the banquet hall, because they kept themselves ready, (Matthew 25:1-13).

The prophet Isaiah (40:30) tells us: "Even those who are young grow weak; young people can fall exhausted. But those who hope in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed".

A 'Youth Spirituality' means precisely that: recognising in the daily circumstances of life the invitation to encounter Jesus and go forward with him. The Gospel teaches us that Jesus' healing touches the whole person: spiritually, emotionally and socially. Christ in you gives birth to a new hope which means you "take ownership of your lives" – you experience the fullness of life (John 10:10), - you are empowered to overcome all hopelessness and all inner-woundedness.

Young people, filled with the hope that Christ brings, "*Take ownership –'eyethu'- of your lives in Christ*" and through self-mastery, which includes self-knowledge and self-acceptance – celebrate the "gift of self".

We call on you, our Catholic youth, to show the way forward by living a new lifestyle in our country and working for the healing of the woundedness and hopelessness so many young people experience.

A Christian lifestyle which also embraces the cultural values embodying the spirit of *ubuntu* means:

- *thanking* God for the gift of life – your life, the life of others and the life mother earth nourishes;
- *uniting* with, and *working* with all who share the same values;
- *nurturing* a healthy self esteem in Christ;
- *fostering* a culture of education;
- *sharing* resources and information;
- *caring* for the marginalized;

- *respecting* the rights of people;
- *upholding* a culture of Human Rights;
- *preserving* our planet; and
- *ploughing-back* gained skills into our communities.

## EDUCATION

### ***Youth of South Africa: encounter Christ who educates and forms you!***

We invite you who are learners to approach Jesus who can heal you and the situations in which you live and study. Much has been done over the past fifteen years to address the imbalances caused by the history of discrimination. Much still needs to be done especially to foster a culture of learning and appreciation for what is offered to us. There is much you can contribute by a commitment on your part to developing a culture of education through dedication, discipline, hard work and appreciation – these are values which affirm a person.

## HIV AND AIDS

### ***Youth of South Africa: encounter Christ who brings life in abundance!***

We earnestly seek the healing embrace of Jesus in the midst of this most urgent crisis of our time: the HIV / AIDS pandemic which is decimating our communities and especially our youth. Everyone recognises that the only answer to this is to change your behaviour and your lifestyle. One who has encountered Jesus and his healing power recognises that this means adopting those behaviours which Jesus taught. We are greatly encouraged by the number of young people who are taking greater ownership of their lives, their bodies and, ultimately, of themselves.

We believe that only after a meaningful encounter with Jesus and through the constant assistance he offers, through prayer and the sacraments, can you make choices which affirm you as people living the life that Jesus won for us. The SACBC promotes a programme for youth which assists you to change your behaviour, **'Education for Life'** and a campaign, the **'ABCD Lifestyle Campaign'**: A for 'Abstain', B for 'Be Faithful', C for 'Change your Life', and D for 'Danger' if you do not change your behaviour.

We encourage you to reclaim the virtues of chastity and virginity which express the ideals that Jesus promoted and which help us to become faithful to that person whom each one will eventually choose, out of love, to be a wife or husband for life. Jesus can also be asking this of you by following him in chastity as a diocesan priest, religious priest, religious brother or sister.

## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

### ***Youth of South Africa: encounter Christ, the carpenter, who compassionately accompanies you!***

Jesus offers those many of you who are unemployed, many of you without school-leaving certificates and without any recognised skill, a new hope by coming to your aid in this situation which leaves you vulnerable and which wounds your self-esteem.

True wealth lies within you, and in the use of your God-given talents. We encourage you not to succumb to hopelessness, but rather to take ownership of yourselves and your situations, and so try, with God's help and strength, to use your talents to become more entrepreneurial – creating your own work and work for others.

## AWAKENING THE POTENTIAL OF THE YOUTH OF SOUTH AFRICA

Dear young people of the Catholic Church, the healing which Jesus brings to each of you who encounter him, will empower you to be agents for change helping to awaken the potential of all African youth so that the renewal of the African continent by moral regeneration will become a reality in your lifetime. *"Rise on wings like eagles; run and not get weary, walk and not grow weak" (Isaiah 40:31)!*

In a spirit of togetherness and co-operation, build new and united communities which become signs of hope to our country and Africa at large – indeed the rest of the world. Take up the struggle as young Christians of Africa, grounded in your faith and realising the wisdom of your traditions, by responding to the ‘signs of the times’, by facing the challenges, *the divides*, and in this way make a contribution to transforming and healing South Africa and, in fact, the continent of Africa.

### **MARY, OUR MOTHER AND OUR FORMATOR**

We urge you to turn to Mary as your mother and the one who forms you. She will form you in the same way as she formed her Son, Jesus, in the home of Nazareth. She is the mother of this unique Healer and she will help you take courage to ‘do whatever he tells you to do.’ (John 2:5)

***Christ yesterday, today and forever makes you “. . . the salt of the earth . . . the light of world.” (Mt 5:13-14)***