



SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

**LUTHERAN YOUTH LEAGUE 31ST ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
DURBAN, KZN**

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SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE

CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE YOUTH LEAGUE

31ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE – Keynote Address | ±15 – 30 minutes

03 JULY 2026

Programme Director;

The Dean of the Durban Circuit, Reverend N.S. Sithole;

The Chaplain and all members of the clergy;

Chairperson of the ELCSA Durban Circuit Youth League, Mr Siyabonga Ntombela;

Church leadership;

Government representatives;

Our distinguished guests;

Parents, guardians and elders;

And to every young person gathered here this morning.

Good morning.

Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa for the invitation to join you at this important conference. It is both a privilege and a humbling honour to stand before a gathering of young people who have dedicated the past few days not only to strengthening their faith, but also to reflecting on the kind of leaders they aspire to become in their families, their communities and our country.

Your conference theme is drawn from the book of Revelation 21:6, where the Lord declares:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."

What a powerful reminder that the God we serve is both the author of our beginning and the architect of our future. Long before we arrive at our destination, He has already seen the road ahead. Long before we discover our purpose, He has already placed gifts, talents and potential within us. That is why I believe this conference could not have come at a more important time.



As young people, you are navigating one of the most defining seasons of your lives. Some of you are completing your studies, some are beginning your careers, others are searching for employment, while many are still discovering the path that God has prepared for them. Yet despite the different journeys represented in this room, there is one truth that binds us all together: every single one of us has been created with purpose.

It is for that reason that I would like us to begin today's conversation somewhere deeper than opportunities.

Before we speak about employment, entrepreneurship, education, funding or the National Youth Service, we must first speak about purpose. Opportunities become meaningful only when they are connected to purpose, because without purpose even the greatest opportunity can be overlooked, while a young person who understands their calling is able to recognise possibilities where others see only obstacles.

Far too often, young people begin to define themselves by the difficulties they are facing. A graduate who has spent months searching for work begins to believe that unemployment is their identity. A young entrepreneur who has been turned away by banks or investors begins to doubt whether their dream is worth pursuing. A learner who struggles academically starts believing they are incapable of success. Before long, circumstances begin to speak louder than purpose.

But I want to remind you today that your current situation is not your permanent identity. You may have experienced disappointment, but disappointment is not your destiny. You may have faced rejection, but rejection does not determine your value. Your identity has already been established by the God who created you with intention, dignity and purpose.

My young brothers and sisters,

We cannot ignore the reality facing many young South Africans today. Across our country, millions of young people wake up every morning carrying the weight of uncertainty. Many possess qualifications but cannot find employment. Others have innovative business ideas but lack access to finance, mentorship or markets. There are young people in our townships and rural communities whose greatest challenge is not a lack of ambition, but simply a lack of access to information and opportunities.

These realities are painful, and as the National Youth Development Agency we encounter them every single day.

We meet graduates who have submitted countless applications without receiving a single response. We meet young entrepreneurs whose businesses have the potential to transform communities but require support to grow. We meet talented young people who possess extraordinary gifts but have never had anyone tell them that their dreams are possible.

Yet despite these challenges, I remain deeply optimistic about the future of South Africa. I have seen young people who began as volunteers become respected



leaders within their communities. I have seen unemployed graduates become successful business owners who now employ others. I have met young people who transformed a simple idea into a thriving enterprise that now provides an income not only for themselves, but for entire families.

These stories remind us that opportunity does not always arrive as a miracle. More often, it arrives through preparation, perseverance, discipline and the willingness to keep moving forward, even when progress seems slow.

There will be moments when you question whether your hard work is making any difference. There will be applications that receive no response, interviews that do not result in employment, business ideas that take longer to succeed than you had hoped, and dreams that require more patience than you imagined.

Do not mistake delay for denial. God's timing is rarely the same as ours, but His faithfulness never changes.

The prophet Isaiah offers another powerful encouragement:

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

Notice that Scripture does not promise a life without challenges. Instead, it promises renewed strength to overcome them. That is an important distinction, because resilience is one of the greatest qualities any young leader can possess. It is resilience that enables us to rise after disappointment, to learn from failure, to persevere through uncertainty and to continue believing in the future even when the present appears difficult.

My message to you this morning is therefore a simple one: never allow your circumstances to become greater than your calling. Continue investing in yourself. Continue learning. Continue serving. Continue growing in your faith. Continue preparing for opportunities you cannot yet see, because preparation has a remarkable way of positioning us to recognise opportunity when it finally arrives.

And it is precisely because so many young South Africans are preparing for that opportunity that institutions like the National Youth Development Agency exist - not merely to provide programmes, but to walk alongside young people as they discover their purpose, develop their potential and translate their God-given gifts into meaningful opportunities that transform lives, strengthen communities and contribute to building the South Africa we all want to see.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the greatest misconceptions about opportunity is that it is something we simply wait for.



We often speak as though opportunity is a knock on the door that arrives unexpectedly one morning, changing everything overnight. Yet if we examine the lives of the men and women whom God used throughout Scripture, we discover that He rarely called people who were standing still. He called people who were already serving. Moses was tending sheep. David was looking after his father's flock. Ruth was gleaning in the fields. The disciples were at work when Christ called them.

Service has always preceded significance.

That is why I believe there is a profound connection between our Christian faith and the National Youth Service. Long before governments across the world began speaking about volunteerism, civic responsibility and nation-building, Jesus Christ demonstrated that true leadership begins with service. He taught His disciples that whoever desires to become great must first become a servant of others. In God's Kingdom, leadership has never been measured by status, but by our willingness to uplift those around us.

The National Youth Service is built upon that very principle.

It is far more than a programme. It is an opportunity for young people to discover that they already possess something of value to offer their communities. Whether you are helping to improve a school, participating in environmental projects, supporting community initiatives or developing practical skills while serving others, National Youth Service reminds us that meaningful change does not begin in boardrooms. It begins wherever ordinary people decide to become part of the solution.

Many young people ask me, "Chairperson, why should I volunteer if I am looking for a job?" My response is always the same. Because service develops the very qualities that employers, communities and society need most.

Service teaches discipline. It teaches responsibility. It teaches teamwork. It teaches humility. It teaches leadership. Most importantly, it teaches us that our value is not determined by what we receive, but also by what we are willing to contribute.

These are not simply workplace skills; they are life skills. They are the qualities that transform young people into leaders who can be trusted with greater responsibility.

My young brothers and sisters, as you pursue your dreams and ambitions, never lose sight of another value that Scripture consistently teaches us: the importance of honour.

In Exodus 20:12, God commands us:

"Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

This commandment carries a remarkable promise, but it also reminds us that success is never achieved in isolation.



Every one of us stands on the shoulders of someone who came before us. Behind every graduate is a parent who sacrificed. Behind every successful entrepreneur is a teacher who believed in them. Behind every leader is a mentor who offered guidance. Behind every community is a generation of elders who preserved values, traditions and wisdom so that we might inherit a better future.

Honouring our parents and our elders is therefore about much more than obedience. It is about recognising that wisdom is one of life's greatest inheritances.

As young people, you are called to be innovative, courageous and forward-looking. You must embrace new technologies, new ideas and new ways of solving old problems. But as you move forward, never become disconnected from those whose experiences can guide your journey. The strongest societies are not those where generations compete with one another, but those where generations work together.

Young people bring energy. Older generations bring wisdom. Together, they build nations.

As the National Youth Development Agency, this understanding shapes everything we do.

Our role is not merely to respond to youth unemployment after it has already become a crisis. Our responsibility is to walk alongside young people as they prepare for the future long before opportunity arrives. We believe that every young person, regardless of where they come from, deserves access to information, skills, mentorship and opportunities that enable them to participate meaningfully in the economy and in society.

Perhaps there is someone sitting here this morning who has a business idea written in the back of a notebook but has never shared it because they believe it is too small.

Perhaps there is someone who dreams of becoming a farmer, a software developer, a teacher, an artisan, a filmmaker, an engineer or a social entrepreneur, but who simply does not know where to begin.

Perhaps there is someone who has already graduated and feels discouraged because months have passed without securing employment. I want you to know this morning that your journey does not end where your uncertainty begins.

The NYDA exists to ensure that young people do not have to navigate these journeys alone.

For aspiring entrepreneurs, we provide business development support, entrepreneurship training, mentorship and grant funding that assists young people to transform ideas into sustainable enterprises. Across the country, we have witnessed young entrepreneurs who began with little more than determination grow businesses that now create employment opportunities for others. Their success reminds us that



entrepreneurship is not merely about making a profit; it is about solving problems, creating value and contributing to the economic growth of our country.

For young people seeking employment, our work extends beyond simply encouraging them to submit applications. We assist with career guidance, work readiness, CV development and connecting young people with opportunities that improve their employability. Through initiatives such as Phanda Thursday, we are intentionally taking services directly into communities so that young people can access career support, CV assistance, opportunities from SETAs, government departments and employers, without the barriers that often prevent them from reaching opportunity.

This is important because opportunity should never be determined by where you live.

A young person in Newlands West, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu or any rural village deserves the same chance to succeed as a young person living in the economic centres of our country.

Opportunity must travel to young people. Young people should not have to chase opportunity for the rest of their lives.

That conviction also underpins programmes such as YouthBuild, where young people are equipped with practical skills while simultaneously serving their communities. YouthBuild demonstrates that development is never only about acquiring technical skills. It is about building confidence, restoring dignity and reminding young people that they are capable of creating lasting change wherever they find themselves.

As our world continues to evolve, we must also prepare ourselves for opportunities that did not exist a generation ago. Artificial Intelligence, robotics, digital technology, the green economy and the creative industries are rapidly reshaping the global economy. While these changes may appear intimidating, they also present extraordinary opportunities for young people who are willing to learn, adapt and embrace lifelong learning.

The future will not belong to those who know everything. It will belong to those who never stop learning.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I draw my remarks to a close, I want to leave you with a thought that has remained with me throughout my own journey in public service.

Every generation is remembered for something. There was a generation that fought for our freedom. There was a generation that built our democracy.

The question that history will ask of us is this: What will this generation be remembered for?



My young brothers and sisters, your generation possesses something no previous generation has ever had. You have access to information, technology and innovation at a scale unimaginable even twenty years ago. A young person with a smartphone today has access to knowledge from the world's greatest universities, can market a business to thousands of customers, can learn coding, digital marketing or artificial intelligence from anywhere in the world, and can connect with opportunities beyond the borders of South Africa.

Never underestimate what God can do through a young person who is prepared to keep learning.

That is why I encourage every one of you not to become spectators in your own lives.

Become active participants in shaping your future. If you are still at school, pursue excellence with diligence. If you are studying, complete your qualification with determination. If you are unemployed, continue improving your skills while you search for opportunities. If you have a business idea, have the courage to pursue it. If you have already found success, reach back and help another young person rise.

Because success that is never shared can never transform a nation.

To the Congregation - The Church has always been more than a place where people gather on Sundays.

Throughout our history, the Church has been a place of refuge, of learning, of healing and of hope. It has produced teachers, nurses, entrepreneurs, public servants and community leaders. It has comforted families in times of grief and strengthened communities in times of uncertainty.

Today, I believe the Church has another important calling.

To become a bridge between young people and opportunity.

Imagine what could happen if every congregation identified just five unemployed young people and committed itself to mentoring them, exposing them to opportunities, helping them prepare their CVs, connecting them to businesses, encouraging entrepreneurship and reminding them that their lives have value.

Imagine the difference we could make if every successful professional in this congregation mentored one young person.

Imagine if every young entrepreneur committed to helping another entrepreneur succeed.

Imagine if every graduate reached back to help someone else navigate the journey they have already travelled.



That is how nations are built. One life at a time. One act of service at a time. One opportunity at a time.

As the National Youth Development Agency, we remain committed to walking this journey with you. We cannot promise that every dream will be realised overnight, but we can promise that we will continue creating pathways through which young people can develop their skills, grow their businesses, serve their communities and participate meaningfully in building our economy.

But ultimately, no institution - not even the NYDA - can dream on your behalf. Only you can decide whether you will use the gifts God has entrusted to you. As I conclude, allow me to return to the Scripture that has guided this conference.

The Apostle Paul offers one final encouragement in 2 Timothy 1:7:

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Walk boldly into your future. Do not be afraid to dream beyond your circumstances. Do not be afraid to lead. Do not be afraid to serve. Do not be afraid to fail, because every lesson learned becomes part of the leader God is shaping you to become.

When you leave this conference, leave with more than memories of the hymns you have sung, the friendships you have formed or the discussions you have shared. Leave with a renewed commitment to become the generation that serves with humility, leads with integrity, works with excellence and builds with compassion. Leave determined to honour your parents and your elders. Leave committed to supporting one another instead of competing against one another. Leave believing that your greatest contribution to South Africa still lies ahead.

Because the future of this nation will not be built for young people.

It will be built by young people.

May God bless you. May God bless the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. And may God continue to bless our beautiful Republic of South Africa.

I thank you.