

Dear young people on behalf of the National Education For Life team, our diocesan coordinators and all our youth back in our parishes, I welcome you here this evening, on this special occasion as we launch Youth Alive the sustainable link to Education For Life.

A special word of welcome to our bishops, our diocesan youth chaplains, priests, religious, our visitors from our neighbouring countries, overseas and all present. Fr Joe Kizito sends his special greetings from UK where he is on sabbatical and Fr John Selemela sends his sincere blessings from Rome where he is engaged in further study". Both are deeply sorry that they cannot be with us on this special occasion but are holding each and every one of us in their prayers.

Our assembling here this evening is a climax of the journey we have made together over the past four years. It is a unique gathering that celebrates two events namely, the past and our movement into the future.

In August 2003 the Education for Life programme was endorsed by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference as a positive, abstinence response to the ever, fast growing and life threatening HIV/AIDS pandemic. The programme promotes the need for a radical change of behaviour, values and attitudes if we are really serious about finding meaning and purpose in our lives.

Education For Life has tried to go beyond the boundaries of looking at practical ways of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS by bringing young people to a deeper understanding and esteem of themselves so that they come to appreciate their spiritual selves, their relationship with God, their neighbour and their physical bodies. This is the context in which love, sexuality, partnership and marriage make sense. This is what gives full meaning to life-giving and life-sustaining relationships such as marriage.

The Education For Life programme has at its heart the best interest of each young person to whom we come in contact. It provides the opportunity, time and space to reflect upon the reality of our lives and offers the quality of free choice to grow in **freedom** from any behaviour, attitude, thought or feeling that makes us captive and

imprisoned. It is a walk into freedom with the aim of living our lives in a responsible and mature way..... to repeat the words of a wonderful father figure, Nelson Mandela, ***“To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the lives of others.....”*** If you are in harmony with your self, you may meet a lion without fear, because he respects anyone with self confidence, NM. How confident are you?

As national team members, It has been our tremendous privilege to see growth and human development take place before our eyes. It has been a humbling encounter with life itself to watch so many young people grow to maturity and transcend many forceful and challenging behavior. We are all on the journey of conversion and it is ever important to keep before us the need to change, the belief that change is possible, the belief that others can change and most importantly that we are not alone while we embrace change, we do so with the grace of God, the accompaniment of our peers, the prayers of our parents, our guardians and the support of the church.

Initial change on any level of our person is a painful, frightening yet an awesome experience. It can happen in an instant, as it did with St Paul when he fell of his horse, or it can take a long time. But the most important thing is that change is happening and ultimately that change is being sustained. Hence the need for ongoing support.

The purpose of our evening together in the presence of the Lord is to launch Youth Alive. There has been a long lead up to this event, it is spirit driven, it is an opportune moment, it is a sensitive listening to the movement within us as a group that knows it is the right time to launch out into the future with the strong conviction that we are going to continue our journey to transform ourselves, others and our society.

During our launch we will launch our new Youth Alive workbook that looks at issues of topical concern for our youth. E.g. We have encouraged every dioceses in the SACBC region, South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland to invest in buying the workbooks so that in each diocese you will be in a position to form Youth Alive movements to come together and discuss real issues affecting your lives. We are at a stage in the growth of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that we are forced

to look at the reality of life and death. We are in a critical situation where time is no longer on our side, We are in a crisis and need to make a difference. Each one of us convinced of what we have been doing for ourselves and others over the past four years and more are equipped with the armour of Christ to make a difference to our society, Are we ready? Are we convinced? Am I ready? Am I convinced? – these questions beg our generous response to fight for life, to save the future, our children, our nations. We know God is on our side and he has called us and commissions us to change our world –

Choosing Life is certainly the road to follow in order to move away from death and despair, and to move into the future with a new appreciation of our wonderful human dignity and the beautiful gift of human sexuality. Let us have a strong but humble sense of confidence that we can rise to a new way of living and of relating to each other according to the law of God. This inner transformation and moral renewal will gradually lead to the resurrection of our lives as more and more of our young people choose life and live out this choice day by day.

This means that in our daily lives we follow our consciences that are correctly guided and formed not by the values of the world but by the values of the Gospel. As the Bishops of our region has spoken clearly on this important point in their Message of Hope: “So often we blame God or other people for what happens to us. Instead we have to take responsibility for our actions before God.

Tomorrow morning we will be commissioned by Archbishop Tlhagale, the President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, to go out and renew our society as witnesses.

Be assured the members of the National team and the SACBC are behind you all the way.