



John Wesley Federation of South Africa

Address on Joe Lofafa Memorial Lecture

Rev Joe Lofafa Memorial lecture 31st May 2025 by Rev Thembekile Gqwaka

Executive Committee of JWF, distinguish guests, Leadership from various structures, members of JWF, Methodist people at large, people of South Africa and Mrs Buyelwa Lofafa, children and family at large I greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

We are here gathered in Mthatha, a home to our greatest stalwart Dr Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela, and many of our greatest leaders of our time. We here to celebrate the life of a selfless, strong leader, fine preacher, a great prayer warrior, a family man, a man who stand for social justice Rev Joseph Lofafa, to launch his inaugural memorial lecture, and his legacy foundation.

I greet you all!

The story of Rev Joe Lofafa's life and death can teach us about faith, selflessness, and the importance of sharing the message of God's love and Faith, Lofafa's life demonstrates the struggles of faith in a time of political, economic, and religious upheaval. Rev Joe Lofafa taught that Scriptural Christianity, or holiness, was the goal of Methodism. Rev Lofafa taught that God loves us and forgives us, and that we should share this message with others. Joe's protracted public career, one object alone seemed to have predominated in his mind, and to that, were devoted, unreservedly, all his masterly. When Joe died in 2015 at the age of 59, Joe had preached on Radio for many years, ministering the Word of God.

Millions of listeners from different communities, different languages as he was a bilingual Preacher, Joe when he was consumed by the Holy Spirit he will switch from IsiXhosa to Sesotho and back at that time people were glued on the radio, as he opens imvuselelo there were two (2) songs he will play one by Amadodana KaMangconde "Wandibiza uJesu ndamlandela" when Sibongile sang that song and his group partners umve uJoe esithi xa iphela. "Mphulaphuli Womhlobo Wenene Sizakuthandaza, bantwana bakaThixo hlalani phantsi baphulaphula, masingaphithizeli xa sizakuthetha noThixo, hlalani phantsi baphulaphuli masingaxokozeli ngoku sizakuncokola noThixo" Immediately you take your seat as if he was directly speaking to you and you will hear that prayer and this man had a way of penetrating in people's mind and heart, the second song by Rebecca Malope and Deborah Frazer, I knew ukhumbule kokwabo uJoe as the song finishes he switch in his mother tongue with prayer.

I remember he was very emotional when he was begging Amadodana kaMangconde's group after they disbanded, his actual words were, "You have touched so many people's hearts ngokucula kwenu, khumbulani imigcobo yabantu xa nikhwela eqongeni, kuguquke inkitha yabantu balandele uYesu ngenxa yokuvuma kwenu, nokuba ibiyintonina le yenzekileyo ibingengabinaso na isisombululo, yhini bantwana bakamama lithi ilizwe likwisimo esibi kangaka

nina nithi sizisa imivuyo ebantwini nisuke niyiyeke into eniyiphathisiweyo, ukuba sihlale phantsi sithethe singakhona isisombululo, ndibizeni nam ndibeyinxalenye.” Joe had a way with words a fine preacher, lento ithi ilizwi likathixo lilikrele elihlaba ntlangothi mbini Joe proved that is true. We remember the Giant of faith even when in his final stages of cancer, but he had hopes of grace from the Lord.

But soon Joe would learn that he needs God's free gift of salvation in Jesus to have real faith and the strength to do what, God commands. The story of Rev Lofafa, If those old grey walls could speak, we might know Rev Joe Lofafa's very words. He preached every Sunday night, and though going through pains of cancer, was unwearied with his work. We should learn from the life of Rev Joe Lofafa about selfless leadership. We are delivering a Rev Joe Lofafa memorial lecture at a time when our country and the world are going through a very difficult period, crime, poverty, wars in different countries.

Gender based violence, child mortality, rape, murder and many atrocities faced by the people of this country, all this happens in every sphere of our communities and the church is silent, Hospitals have collapsed no proper services, schools closed because of children numbers, passing rate is so low because the passing mark is 30 %, introducing what they call Maths literacy, instead of having improved education for black people it's worse, because a child will pass a matric with what they call bachelor but still unable to go to university because of the choices of subjects, and still the church is silent, difficult to go to rural areas because there is no infrastructure and people have to carry coffins for km because it's difficult to travel by car, if people got sick they have to be carried by wheelbarrows because there's no roads. Instead of servicing the people of this country they service themselves out of big tenders that produces nothing but filling their pockets and enriching themselves and still when the voting time comes and they will come to the church asking for support, and the church open doors for such people who witnessed people die because of poverty, lack of services and still the church is silent, they will request ministers to do prayers for their political parties and political leaders who don't care about the people of this country, food prices goes up every time, petrol prices goes 3 times or 4 times a year that's also the reason of creating poverty in this country and still the church is silent. Why is the church silent? Because us as men and women of cloth we are looking for the same dirty money of corruption, we are given crumbs to silence us thinking that they care for us, how selfish we become for thinking for ourselves instead of the flock of Jesus Christ, let us stand for the truth whether we could walk with bare foot because we have been deprived soft life, if these old women, old men, and these poor children suffering lets suffer with them for the truth, during the time of struggle the same ministers went through torture, teargasses, their homes were torched by apartheid regime, the likes of Rev Joe Lofafa, Baartman, Mgojo, Dandala, Mogoba, Finca, Russel and father Barkley etc these men and women sacrificed their lives for the liberation of black people, what happen to us if we going to witness the trampling of human rights for the sake of crumbs getting from corrupt government, lets stand against corruption, lies and deceits against people of this country, let us unite as Christians against the new struggle against thieves who continue stealing public purse. As we deliver this Memorial lecture of this giant preacher a prayer warrior, let us remember he fought for social justice and also let us follow in his footsteps and fight for social justice.

Joe's life gives us lessons on the role of leadership when the church is facing a crisis. Challenging Bible principles, by the world, world busy want to change the church for the world, now we no longer fear or goes with the word of God instead we are busy want to be relevant. We allowed the world to change the church of God instead of the church change the world. The immorality is happening in our churches, we kept quiet because we need to be supported by the people of the world instead of listening to God, what happened to discernment as we suppose be attentively listening to God. What we call rights instead of being used properly we allowed the world to exercise rights in our churches. You can't preach without being scrutinized by the people, we preach during the tough period of our lives and we succumb to such pressure, because we want to be relevant. Joe was unwavering in leading for many years, through highs and lows during the transitional period. He was just head and shoulders above all others.

It gives us the opportunity not only to remember and honour such a great preacher but to ask ourselves how well today we are living up to the ideals and principles of Methodism, social justice to which he dedicated his life, and what we can learn from his example.

JWF Member, Joe's family and friends.

Tributes to Joe sometimes use the words "all-round Leader" to describe him, because he was the embodiment of Christianity. "He was a foremost patriot who had his feet firmly planted in the national culture and aspirations of his people. Yet he remained a shining example of true national and believed passionately in the country bonds of progressive humanity everywhere.

"He stood at the head of our Christians for most of its life and was, at the same time, amongst the most respected leaders of the MCSA. More than any other individual, he helped lay the foundations for the life-giving unity between the poor and haves which express itself in today's firm leaders."

He brought into the Christianity exceptional personal attributes and also learnt from the collective experience of the struggle.

These experiences remain a footprint on the nature and character of our church; its conduct in executing the moral regeneration, and the envisaged quality of life for those enjoined for a free, united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

Celebrating his life is not about eulogising. It is our responsibility to learn and emulate the lodestar he was in the pursuance of the Christian particularly we Methodist people, in our present conjuncture of life situation. We memorialise only those who represent the best and the highest qualities among us, in order to elicit such attributes in ourselves.

Joe was an embodiment of understanding Christianity and its responsibility for nurturing the people of God, as articulated by the Book of Luke 4:18ff:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

- **because he hath anointed me;**

- **to preach the Gospel to the poor;**
- **he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted;**
- **to preach deliverance to the captives;**
- **and recovering of sight to the blind;**
- **To set at liberty them that are bruised:**

The six represents are articulated clearly in the pillars of our federation. As a John Wesley Federation, it is critical that we attract the best brains into the leadership of our churches as well our society. The questions, though, that we must answer at all levels of the church:

What kind of leadership are we? Are personal interests, as opposed to people's interests, the basis? Can we elevate ourselves above things that are not assisting, or are we subservient to them?

- What kind of a church have we become? Are we asking ourselves what the people mean when they say the church is no longer the one they used to know, or do we respond in outrage?
- Are we still pursuing the morality and social justice for the people or shifting towards the world relevance, deliberately or by accident? Are we succumbing to the pressure reflecting the global balance of forces?

We must take time to analyse individual leaders and check the quality thereof. The analysis has to include leaders' conduct, understanding and adherence to the strategy and policy.

By far the best way to remember our colleague Rev Joe Lofafa, is to follow his example of Christian leadership, put secondary differences of opinion to the side, reject name-calling of others and rumour-mongering and unite behind the church and its course to take the people of God which he spent his entire life striving for, and move forward to the last breath of his life.

"The role of those who head a church, the leaders, is very great and has a decisive character. That is why they must meet high requirements. The leader must embody loyalty and dedication in the implementation of the line and principles of the Bible and the church ethos and must have the necessary capabilities and determination to bring these lines and principles into effect.

This is not just an internal problem. It impacts on our public work. It dents our hard-earned reputation as a fearless voice of the God and the oppressed majority and limits our ability to take forward the actual freedom people expected to improve the lives of our people and transform society.

Let us assist by electing leaders who have rich experience, foresight and aliveness to the new, a creative, imaginative mind to combine collective leadership with ability to make clear-sighted decisions on the basis of a deep knowledge of the tasks assigned and a firm grip of the

situation ... show a high sense of responsibility, great determination and principled attitude ... must take account and really respect the opinion of others, and calmly listen to the suggestions of the masses even if they do not agree with them.

Rev Joe distinguished himself as principled and ethical. The description given [of] late to those leader par excellence applies fully to Rev Joe Lofafa: "If there is one quality in Rev Joe Lofafa which I would single out before all the others, it was that he was incorruptible ... not only in his public life, but also in his personal life. Rev Joe Lofafa was a man you knew ... would never let you down, never do something behind your back, never deceive you. You always knew where you were with Joe. Sometimes his words were harsh, but they were never dishonest."

This description was applicable to many of our leaders, our predecessors. The question is: is it applicable to us today, at all levels of the church?

Joe always gave constructive responses to criticism and had the ability to seek solutions through consultation.

It is this experience that must guide the Church, this federation, in dealing with problems today. The ease with which we call for alienation of those who seem to be disagreeing with us, and the diversity of ideas within the church [being] seen as divisions indicate that we are not keen to learn from history and experience.

Rev Joe Lofafa inspired everybody, whether ethnicity, tribe, converted or not but everyone admired this eloquent leader. The ensuing local government elections might give us more devastating problems where opportunists and thieves might grandstand against the development and emancipation of our communities. This is the time we need to bring ourselves into the principles and better leaders and voice out our dissatisfaction.

I urge you to go out there and stand for Biblical principles and church ethos without fear or favour and be the guardian of God's people at all times, this is the flock given to you as a shepherd by God. Go and emulate what Rev Joe Lofafa as a great preacher and prayer warrior, a fighter for social justice.

Thank you Very much

God Bless

Rev Thembekile Gqwaka