

NEWS RELEASE

‘Youth led into a life of crime can be led out of it’ – UP master’s grad explores the benefits of pastoral care



Thabang Katlego Motale at the 2025 UP autumn graduations.

PRETORIA - “Every dream can be a reality,” says Thabang Katlego Motale from Diepkloof, Soweto, who graduated from the University of Pretoria (UP) with a master’s degree in Practical Theology recently as part of UP’s autumn graduation ceremonies. “It always starts as a thought until it is completed in reality.”

The 27-year-old’s research focused on pastoral care – religion-centred care and guidance – for youth involved in criminal activities.

“I could not sit by and watch young people being murdered and going to jail for crime,” he says.

Motale’s research highlights the importance of pastoral care for youth and addressing their needs before they turn to a life of crime.

“I hope my research equips pastoral caregivers with a pastoral care methodology that will assist them in helping youth involved in crime,” Motale explains. “These young people need to be pastorally cared for in order to understand their challenges.”

His research journey was a bitter-sweet experience, with both challenges and rewards.

“Since the topic was sensitive, not everyone was open to sharing their experiences with me,” Motale recalls. “However, God always finds a way for those who trust in Him. I found participants who were willing to share their stories with me. The stories they shared were hurtful, because they had to overcome many obstacles to be where they are today. People are often prejudiced and judge a person by their appearance without understanding their background. This research taught me that everyone has a story to tell and that everyone is going through different challenges in life.”

This highlights the need for humility – a virtue that humans neglect all too often, Motale points out.

“As clergy, we cannot turn a blind eye, because youth crime is becoming a norm and a challenge in many communities.”

According to Motale, his research shows that “no one is born a criminal”.

“While there is something that leads youth into a life of crime, there will always be something to lead them out of it, too. A mistake is a mistake, and we can all help one another not to repeat the same mistakes.”

While Motale’s study shines a light on youth crime in South Africa, he hopes his research will have global reach, too. He believes that helping even just one or two individuals in a community to stay on the straight and narrow with religion-centred care can have an impact on an entire community. Statistics show that children or youths who are exposed to crime are likely to commit crimes later in their lives, which includes violent behaviour. In South Africa specifically, youths who have been victims of crime are six times more likely to commit crimes after the fact. The heightened unemployment rate also plays a significant role in youth crime, driving youths towards gang activity in search for protection, belonging and a source of income. Other instances of youth crime also include drug-dealing and violent crimes.

“I learned that pastoral care is diverse; it has to reach everyone,” he says. “I am humbled and grateful to God for choosing me to be the hope and inspiration that young people in my community need.”

Motale’s academic journey does not end here – he has enrolled for a PhD in Theology and Religion: Practical Theology, and hopes to focus on “exploring whether deaf people are considered in church”.

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Media enquiries can be directed to Mr Sashlin Girraj - Public Relations & Events Manager

Email: sashlin.girraj@up.ac.za | Cell: +27(0)72 447 3784

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its

administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

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