

# The Anglican Church of Southern Africa

## Diocese of George



## 58th Session of Synod

## Synod Charge 2016

by

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*Theme: Restorative Grace*

We speak to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Greetings and welcome to all of you in the Name of our Triune God who has reconciled us to himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord and King. We meet together in Synod as people of faith to talk rationally about the work of God (informed by Scripture, guided by Tradition and governed by Reason as participatory knowledge) particularly within our Diocese and less formally about the life and work of the wider church. Our words are measured, weighed and uttered in love for one another and spring forth from our love of God.

The Church is the body of Christ. This understanding of the nature of the Church is particularly emphasised at gatherings of this type. Whilst we are an episcopally led church it would not be possible to function effectively without many contributions from many people. Today I wish to extend my personal thanks as well as our corporate thanks to the many who have enabled the effective working of the Diocese of George. It would be remiss of me not to note first and foremost Glynis Kuscus who has retired after 17 years of service as the Bishop's secretary. Both my work and hers has been aided by the Dean, Archdeacons, Clergy, Churchwardens and Chapel wardens, Bishop's Council, The Administrator, the Diocesan Office Staff, the current Bishop's Secretary, the Chancellor, Lay leaders of Organisations, Members of the Trust Board and Finance Board and particularly the Chairpersons of these Boards who have made themselves available as and when required. The work we are doing over the next few days has been the result of work done by the Synod Agenda Committee for which they, too, are heartily thanked.

Since last meeting in Diocesan Synod a number of clergy have retired. We wish the Reverend Kevin Abrahams and the Reverend Simon Booi a happy retirement.

One priest has returned to work in the Diocese, namely the Reverend Jerome Prins.

One priest has taken up chaplaincy ministry in the Correctional Services, namely the Reverend Sandile Mila.

We have invited two clergy to join the stipendiary ministry: the Reverend Gregory Jantjies and the Reverend Adolph Laws.

Among the newly ordained priests in God's Church we welcome the Reverend Sydney Philander, the Reverend Morton van Rooyen, the Reverend Johan Fillies and the Reverend Neil Weber.

It is with great joy that we note the increase of persons made deacon within this diocese. These are the Reverend Deon Manuel, the Reverend Jo-Anne Claasen, the Reverend Wilhelm Oktober, the Reverend Simphiwe Mhobo, the Reverend Robin du Plessis, and the Reverend Wilton Muller.

Since our last Synod we have said farewell to the Reverend Roland Prince and the Reverend Rudy Marais as they have moved out of the Diocese.

We have also released the Reverend Peter Groenewald, who in retirement has graciously offered his services as Interim Rector of St Matthews, Riversdale. We pray that God's abundant blessings will rest upon him.

Our faith is one of triumph and victory over sin and death. Whilst we who are left are sad, we look forward to that day when we are re-united in the presence of God. So we record those clergy who have left us for higher service, and especially those who has left us since our last Synod, namely: the Reverend Canon Nancy Charton and the Reverend Colin Edwards. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

We are most grateful to the Right Reverend Frank de Gouveia, Bishop of Oudtshoorn, for being so supportive over the past few years and for being willing to lead our Bible Study and the closing of our prayers every morning of Synod's meeting. A warm welcome is also extended to those representing our CUC partners and our other ecumenical partners recognising that at the local parish and archdeaconry levels there continues to be active meeting and engagement. We earnestly pray that the vacancy at our local Greek Orthodox congregation will soon be filled by an in-coming priest.

Anglicanism has been closely associated with civic authority since its inception. Our mother church in England is still legally recognised as the state church. Continuing in this tradition we are particularly glad of the presence and honoured to have here this evening the Mayor of our See City of George. We also welcome our invited guests who have given their precious time to be with us.

Lastly, in this litany of sweet remembrance, we recognise the contributions of the spouses and families of all who have been alluded to, giving thanks for their kindness and patience over the years as they have shared their loved ones with us. To stretch the paradigm a little, it could be said that, the Church as the bride of Christ is a fitting reminder of the role they have played.

With such a long list of names and offices it is quite easy to forget that we are in the process of saying thank you to one and all of them for their services rendered to this Diocese as together we have sought to grow the Church of God in the Diocese of George. Thank you, again.

Synods do not traditionally have a theme although sometimes a particular subject may be felt to dominate the proceedings. This synod does have an over-arching theme: Restorative Grace! Those of you who are so inclined will not find the topic in the reference pages of older theological works. It is a composite idea. It is partially related to the current debate within our country of restorative justice but equally it is considered to be more than giving or being forgiven. Restorative grace requires of us an acceptance of God working in and through us by his mercy and grace. He is active in us as he restores us to what he created us, individually, to be, by –

restoring my nature; restoring my giftings; restoring my circumstances; restoring my heart;  
restoring my memory; restoring me wholly, completely and absolutely as his child.

Not I alone but all those who love the Lord Jesus in heart and mind. This gracious gift of God, this grace must be repeated in our own care for and of all God's creation. The jewels of our humanity are generosity and forgiveness. We fail to forgive when we scream for mob justice and/or revenge. This is not the way to heal or mend relationships. Not to get too carried away by this thought it must be noted that justice in order to be real justice must be more than a juridical approach to the law and ought to include the sense of being recognised by both the innocent and guilty as being just.

Despite the fantasy of fiction regarding time travel we cannot undo the past. What we can do is to forgive. This requires that we name wrongdoing and rightly condemn it but, in addition, we need to show a generosity of spirit as we release genuine debt. We may forgive for someone else's sake but we, in turn, benefit from the result. Our eyes and ears need a heart ready to receive truth, God's reality rather than the comfort offered by false gods. We co-operate with God not the other way round! Our lives have been given to us in order to effect this. God's gifts, his grace –

obliges us to faith – empty hands for God to fill; obliges us to gratitude – expressing in appreciation;  
obliges us to availability – to be used for his purposes;  
obliges us to participation – working in harmony with God and his creative and redeeming work.

In the words of Martin Luther “God never works in us without us” or as the Letter to the Hebrews has it “I will never fail you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

The only justification for a gift is need. Christians are givers – it is our new nature – we have been transformed. Our giving is in order to benefit others. Within the Christian context everyone is a giver just as everyone is a receiver. Every gift is a social event and not an entity or an act of itself. It takes place between two, or more, persons as they seek to create, nourish or possibly re-create relationships. By definition gifts benefit others. We also know that relationships can never be mended without real forgiveness.

We forgive by making God's forgiveness our own. Forgiveness has to include

release from debt; release from punishment; release from guilt;  
release from blame; release from shame; release of remembrance.

Here is one of the many contentious moments within this charge. Some might say “I can forgive but I will not forget”. If we do not forget we are not forgiving. The slate must be clean. As our heavenly Father has done for us so must we do for one another. We know God to give to the ungrateful and to forgive the unrepentant. In praying the Lord's Prayer daily, can we have any doubt about the veracity of the forgoing exposition?

However, in our desire to fulfil the requirements of caring and sharing we may find ourselves providing gifts for the wrong reasons. We can give selfishly whereby we seek to gain an advantage or our own honour. We can give with pride resulting in self-adoration or self-congratulation. We can give slothfully which is not so much giving as non-giving and certainly is without due care. We know and believe that God gives freely. As has been stated earlier, in putting on Christ and therefore imitators of God we are givers. Giving and forgiving requires commitment. Giving and forgiving need to include the component of mercy. All these ideas are embodied in some form or another within the baptismal rites of the church. The commendation of the congregation following the signing with the cross in our APB 1989 says it all:

*Fight valiantly under the banner of Christ against sin, the world, and the devil  
and continue his faithful soldier and servant to the end of your life.*

Restorative grace challenges us to embrace more fully our Trinitarian dignity – being bearers of God's image - and in turn through God's restoring grace recognise and accept the Trinitarian dignity of others. This for us, as God's daughters and sons, means in essence that we live with Baptismal dignity, dignity that comes from the One in whose Name we are baptised; from the God in whose image we are created; from the Son who became human and who showed to us the human face of God; from the Spirit who dwells in us and in whose company we live moment by moment.

We thank God that we have Trinitarian, baptismal dignity, as daughters and sons of God. (1)

We thank God, that as a result of this our children's journey need not be or cannot be, one-

from baptismal font to jail cell;  
from baptismal font to drug and alcohol abuse;  
from baptismal font to failure at school;

from baptismal font to gang violence;

from baptismal font to sexual abuse;

from baptismal font to absence of parental care;

from baptismal font to inadequate or lack of food and water, housing, health care, education, employment, safe environments, leisure opportunities, employment opportunities;

from baptismal font to promiscuity and sinful lifestyles;

from baptismal font to destruction that negates all that are life-giving...

My sincere prayer is that each and every baptised person, young and old, experience that there is *the* caring God of baptismal dignity; that there is a caring church and caring homes and caring individuals of baptismal dignity; and that there is a caring society and caring communities and neighbourhoods that practise baptismal dignity.

Restorative grace challenges us to bear the fruit of costly forgiveness in personal and public life:

remorse and contrition; repentance and conversion; reconciliation and embrace;  
redress; compensation; restitution; restorative justice...

My prayer is, and ours ought to be, that the fruit of costly forgiveness will become more visible in the lives of each and every baptised person.

Restorative grace challenges us to remember the past for the sake of the present and the future.

Restorative grace frees us from wrong remembering...

remembering that keeps us entrapped in the past; remembering that romanticises the past;  
remembering that demonises the past; remembering that makes us neglect and betray the present and the future.

My prayer is, and our prayer ought to be, that each and every baptised person through God's grace will come to fully experience transformation of re-member-ing.

Over the next few days we will find ourselves challenged in our various debates by sin, the world and the devil. Our particular prayer is that God's giving and forgiving grace will enable us to be faithful soldiers and servants as we seek to do his will in this place.

Synod will first seek to get the housework done by tackling the tidying of an existing rule by way of three Measures that constitute a whole. Two Resolutions recall us to understanding the need for growth as chapelries progress in status. Four Motions will remind us of work needing to be done both locally and in the wider church. The Strategic Growth Plan motion will challenge dearly held positions, conceptions and stereotypes. The proposals it contains could be perceived as costly in every sense. The courageous conversation begun in the planning process needs to be continued in this forum by way of Synod dissolving into conference mode before resolutions are placed before the Synod. The Province found it necessary in the early eighties of the 20th Century to devise this means in order to discuss church matters in depth led by persons with competency and not necessarily members of synod. The conversation in conference can properly only take place within a spirit of positive restorative grace as outlined earlier in this charge.

Both Diocesan Council and Synod find themselves constrained by time. It is sincerely hoped that the several reports found in the Second Agenda book will not get 'lost' amidst the other business. They are important and give a fair reflection of what has and what has not been accomplished. You are urged to read them with a discerning eye and a listening heart and to respond to some of the challenges they present. Our individuality can emphasise the Protestant nature of our denomination our social concern will reflect, in part, our Catholicity. May our combined natures be filled with mercy, giving and forgiving as we seek to employ restorative grace in our proceedings.

My brothers and sisters we are in for a busy time as we find the church meeting in Synod here in George. We are called to responsible, informed and lively debate resulting in action so I end with a question from the 1880's hymn:

*Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,  
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?  
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain,  
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?*

We have the answer in the refrain

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul  
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,  
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

**AMEN.**

(1) The concept of Trinitarian, Baptismal dignity, which I have adapted, comes from Professor Nico Koopman (Minister of the Uniting Reform Church, Theologian and Vice-Rector of the University of Stellenbosch).