

Faith in the Real World

Pastoral Letter from the Synod of Bishops

25th February 2017

Dear People of God,

We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), we met in Synod in Benoni from Monday 20th until Saturday 25th February 2017. The full bench of Bishops was present, including:

- ✠ Those from all the countries that make up our Province of the Anglican Communion – St Helena, Angola, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and South Africa;
- ✠ Those who were Consecrated Bishop on Saturday 25th February – Rt Revd William Mostert, Bishop of Christ the King (southern Gauteng) and Rt Revd Vicente Msosa, Bishop of Niassa (northern Mozambique).

As always our meeting took place in a framework of worship and warm fellowship as we shared our lives and worked on issues facing the church and our communities. At our opening Eucharist we heard the words of Jesus, “All things can be done for the one who believes!” (Mark 9:23) and the response, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). We met as church leaders and people of faith who are deeply aware of the challenges facing our churches and communities and the desperate need for leadership of the highest quality.

Most of our time this week was devoted to receiving training in the basics of Economics and Management, and reflecting on how God is calling us to exercise leadership in today’s economic climate. We were ably led by Prof Martin Büscher (Institute for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management (IDM), Protestant University of Wuppertal/Bethel, Germany) and Dr Bright Mawudor (Deputy General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches). They helped us to understand the prevailing economic theories; challenges of globalisation; the New St Gallen Management Model; financial management and accounting; personnel management; innovation and creativity; and church and property development as mission.

We had an informative and challenging time wrestling with the interface between economics and theology: profit-making and the prophetic; the market place and mission; self-interest and compassion; market value and Kingdom values; personal wealth and community-building; corruption and integrity; free trade and fair trade.

Dr Mawudor said, “When money is lost, something is lost. When health is lost, more is lost. When integrity is lost, everything is lost”. We accepted the challenge to live and lead with integrity ourselves as we demand integrity in our political, business and community leaders. We also recognised the need to work ecumenically in this area.

In our own leadership structures, we affirmed Archbishop Thabo’s appointment of his Management Team:

- ✠ Bishop Stephen Diseko: Dean of the Province
- ✠ Bishop Dino Gabriel: Theological Education
- ✠ Bishop Martin Breytenbach: Provincial Finance Board
- ✠ Bishop Brian Marajh: Provincial Trusts Board

We were saddened by reports of loss of life, injuries and devastation caused by tropical cyclone Dineo, especially in Mozambique. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba wrote a pastoral letter to those who were affected in the Dioceses of Lebombo, Mpumalanga and St Mark the Evangelist. We are working with H.O.P.E. Africa to find ways to assist those who are most affected.

As Bishops we continued to debate, with great concern, the state of higher education in South Africa in the light of the ongoing “Fees must Fall” campaign. We call for the release or charging of Bonginkosi Kanyile who has been incarcerated since September 2016, insisting that there should be no detention without trial. We agreed to write to the government and other stakeholders expressing our concerns.

We gave attention to a number of areas of mission and ministry.

- 1) We heard about steps taken and progress made on issues in the Dioceses of Umzimvubu and Lesotho. We agreed on further action that will be done.
- 2) We received a report on Theological Education, including successes and challenges at the College of the Transfiguration in Grahamstown (COTT). We rejoiced in the progress that has been made and affirmed the importance of having a residential Theological College alongside other training schemes. We recognise that we will need to consider new funding models for COTT and its students.
- 3) We adopted a proposal for the training of new Bishops and the ongoing training of all Bishops. Training includes a course for new Bishops at the International Study Centre at Canterbury Cathedral; a course run by the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA); “Episcopal Accompaniment” sponsored by Us (formerly USPG); and mentoring of new Bishops by those who are more experienced.
- 4) We received a presentation on the proposed establishment of a Youth Academy to equip the church for more effective ministry to children and young people. We welcomed the idea and affirmed the importance of training those who minister to our youth. However, we identified a number of issues that need to be investigated more fully before it can be implemented, and agreed on steps to do this.
- 5) We received a report about the “6th Trumpet of the Global South” which took place in Cairo from 3rd to 8th October 2016. This report highlighted both the commonalities and the tensions within the Anglican Communion at present. We remain committed to being a reconciling presence in the Communion and to engaging with all those involved.
- 6) We committed ourselves to continue to support the training of suitable people from our Dioceses to conduct formal mediation processes – particularly people with a legal background. Retired Bishops Rubin Phillip and Peter Lee have already received advanced training in this area.
- 7) We were deeply disturbed by the death of about 100 mentally ill patients following their transfer from the Esidimeni Life Hospital to NGOs that were not equipped to care for them. One of those who died was the son of a priest in the Diocese of Johannesburg, Canon Joe Maboe. We commended the Bishop of Johannesburg and others who are walking alongside them, and encouraged them to continue to do so.
- 8) We heard about the ongoing pain of those related to the three employees of the Lilly Mine in Barberton who are still trapped underground after a year. We continue to work with the South African Council of Churches to engage with the mine and all those involved.

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- 9) We welcomed the plans of Growing the Church (GtC) to be located in the Dioceses, with the office in Cape Town as a resource and training hub, and committed ourselves to appoint Diocesan GtC Teams to work locally. We started work on identifying the values that should mark Anglican “Fresh Expressions” of Church.
- 10) We received with appreciation a demonstration of the capabilities of “MyAnglican”, our Provincial Church Management System. This powerful, secure system can keep all our membership records, enable bulk emailing, keep service registers, record parish finances, manage conference registrations and much more (It can be accessed at www.myanglican.org).
- 11) We said farewell to Bishop Mazwi Tisani, first Bishop of Kahlamba, who will retire before the next session of Synod of Bishops, and thanked him for his long, faithful and effective service in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.
- 12) We heard stories about the phenomenon of “Sugar Daddies” and “Blessers” and the vulnerability of young women. We are looking at various resources that will help the church to engage effectively with this social evil.
- 13) We discussed the Pastoral Guidelines for ministry to those in same-sex relationships, which are still incomplete. We asked Archbishop Thabo to set up a small group of Bishops to work on completing them, together with others who could help the process.
- 14) We received a request from the Diocese of Angola to change from a Missionary Diocese to a fully-fledged Diocese. This Diocese has grown in numbers and strength and would like to make more of a contribution to the life of ACSA. They are now in 14 of the 18 provinces of Angola, and will soon need to consider multiplication into two Dioceses. We agreed in principle to this request, subject to them submitting the required returns to Provincial Finance Board.

Dear people of God, please commit these things to prayer and offer yourselves to God to serve in God’s mission and ministry. We your Bishops will continue to lead as God’s servants and servants of the church, to the best of our ability.

Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)