

**Synod of Bishops  
September 2021  
Communiqué**

*“I wish you to be shepherds with ‘the smell of the sheep’” - Pope Francis*

The Synod of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa held our September meeting over two days on a virtual platform this year. The previous day the Synod spent a difficult but rewarding day in discerning the mind of Christ to fill two vacant Dioceses. We are glad to announce that Bishop Brian Marajh will assume the episcopal seat in Kimberley and Kuruman, and the Revd Dr Vicentia Kgabe has become the Bishop-Elect of Lesotho. The Bishops also agreed to the translation of Bishop Vicente Msosa of Niassa to the newly-established Missionary Diocese of Zambezia. The Synod of Bishops also, albeit reluctantly, agreed to the retirement of Bishop Luke Pato of Namibia.

This Synod of Bishops was a special occasion in the sense that it was the last time that the Bishops from our Portuguese-speaking Dioceses shared with us in our deliberations. We were joined by the Vicars-General of the newly established Dioceses of the *Igreja Anglicana de Mozambique e Angola* (IAMA).

Great gratitude and appreciation were expressed to Vicars-General who all excelled in providing leadership in vacant Dioceses, a number for unusually long periods during coronavirus lockdowns. The Bishops voted unanimously in favour of them being conferred with the title of Honorary Provincial Canon. The Synod of Bishops reflected on the implementation of the new Canon 4. In six elections that used the new provisions, only one Diocese was able to elect a Bishop. It was agreed that more fine-tuning to Canon 4 is needed if it is to serve the ACSA more effectively. A motion to this effect was passed by Synod and will now serve before Provincial Synod. The motion will ask Provincial Synod to approve the increase of the number of ballots from eight to ten before an election is referred to the Synod of Bishops. This arrangement will be valid only until the next Provincial Synod in 2024.

The Synod of Bishops discussed and endorsed a report proposing that the Diocese of Natal consider multiplying by establishing new, smaller Dioceses. Synod noted the positive experiences of Dioceses in other regions which have multiplied in the past, and the solid case which the Diocese of Natal presented for multiplication. It resolved to support the consideration of a motion on the matter at Provincial Synod. It also noted the need for a formal motion from the Synod of the Diocese of Natal to Provincial Synod in order to meet the requirements for due diligence.

Advocate Pansy Tlakula, Chairperson of the Information Regulator (South Africa), and a team from her office addressed Synod on the complexities of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and its implications for ACSA. Synod of Bishops learnt that as long as personal information is used for the purpose for which it was gathered we should not have problems. ACSA is to ensure that each Diocese and each parish must see to the appointment and registration of a POPIA compliance officer. The

golden rule to adhere to in order to ensure compliance is G-O-D: personal information is to be Gathered, Organised (kept safe), and Destroyed when appropriate.

The Synod of Bishops learnt from Bishop Dintoe Letloenyane, Liaison Bishop for the youth, of the positive spirit amongst our youth. They seem to rise to opportunities in the midst of the COVID pandemic. Their ready use of online platforms to celebrate children and young people; the development of liturgies that are used to great effect on virtual platforms; their consistent messages to their peers not to be tempted to take part in the looting and arson in South Africa in early July; and their call to refrain from alcohol and substance abuse which the lockdown experiences seem to encourage are all positive and encouraging signs.

We rejoiced at the news of the publication of an abridged version of the Anglican Prayer Book in the Kwanyama language (indigenous to Namibia).

Canon Rosalie Manning from the Safe and Inclusive Church Network reminded the Bishops about the need to have on file from clerics (and bishops) any possible adverse information as to their conduct relating to the different categories of abuse. The Synod of Bishops was deeply saddened when it needed to confirm a Diocesan Tribunal sentence of degradation of an accused priest. The charges included sexual harassment.

The Bishops received a challenging report from the working group on Guidelines for Couples in Same Sex Unions. The need for a possible pastoral response was again emphasised and it was referred to Dioceses for further study. One of the slides in the presentation summed up our present situation: "Human Sexuality: our *discomfort* in talking about it. Our *difficulty* in learning about it. Could result in our *misunderstanding* of it, render us *impotent* in responding to it."

Canon Manning gave us an update, on behalf of the ACSA COVID-19 Provincial Advisory Team, on our legal obligations in terms of the COVID-19 protocols. She also shared statistics and the impact of the pandemic and how it has brought about other challenges, for example, in areas such as mental health and Gender-Based Violence. Synod agreed to endorse the call for all to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Chairperson of the Task Team on Discrimination in Anglican Schools, Professor Mary Metcalfe, gave a progress report. The team have started to engage with heads and other representatives of Anglican schools. The engagements are a way of seeking collaboration to address discrimination at our Diocesan schools. The Bishops and Vicars-General were encouraged to take leadership in these initiatives.

Professor N Barney Pityana, who heads the Archbishop's Commission on the College of the Transfiguration, Theological Education and Ministerial Formation, spoke powerfully on the challenges and opportunities which COVID presents to the Church when he referred to the special spiritual and theological moments which we are presented with during the pandemic. Deep questions about who and what we are must be reflected on in theological terms. At present our focus on Mission and Evangelism is

compromised and we seem to shy away from grappling with and exploring the difficult questions which our present context presents.

Synod of Bishops received a report from Bishop Carlos Matsinhe of Lebombo on the development of the new Province of IAMA. We noted the consent of the Primates of the Communion to the establishment of the new Province, the adoption of the Constitution and Canons in the first Provincial Synod held on the 1st of September 2021, the creation of eight new dioceses, and the appointment of Vicars-General. The Bishops endorsed the process and commended it to Provincial Synod for final approval.

We gave thanks for the sterling work of the outgoing director of Growing the Church, the Revd Trevor Pearce and welcomed the appointment of his successor, the Revd Bruce Woolley. The Bishops pray that the Province will share their excitement about the upcoming Anglicans Ablaze Conference. ACSA will be hosting an international conference, so it will be good to see solid support from home.

Membership of the Provincial Order of Simon of Cyrene was to be conferred on Ms Di Oliver and Advocate Ronnie Bracks. The Revd Courtney Sampson and Revd Rachel Mash were to be bestowed with the Archbishop's Award for Peace with Justice. We noted with pride the Lambeth decorations in the form of the Cross of St Augustine for Services to the Anglican Communion to the Revd Dr Rachel Mash and Bishop Luke Pato, and the Langton Award for Community Service to the late Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya.