

# **DANCING IN THE NET OF GOD'S LOVE**

## **A Communiqué of the Synod of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa**

The Synod of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa was held from 14 to 17 February 2022, linking Bishops court and Diocesan Centres through video conferencing.

At the Opening Eucharist, the Rt Revd Dale Bowers, Bishop of St Helena, preached a powerful and thought-provoking homily on the Dance of the Trinity. This dance, which is a sign of God's love, is for us, in us and working through us, embracing us in a mutual love that will not allow humanity to be destroyed but will rather restore hope to the world.

The Synod gave a special welcome to the Bishops-Elect of Mthatha and Mbhashe, to the Vicars-General of George, Namibia and Swaziland, and to the recently-consecrated Bishop of Lesotho, the Rt Revd Dr Vicentia Kgabe. Bishop-Elect Dalcy Dlamini was on retreat ahead of her Consecration and Installation on February 19.

Synod recognised that ACSA has taken a different shape as the result of the formation of a new Province for Angola and Mozambique.

### **The Death of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu**

We acknowledged with great gratitude the life and witness of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, whose remains are interred in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. The Synod sent a letter of condolence and comfort to Mama Leah Tutu OSC.

### **Canons and Church Order**

The Synod was led by its legal officers in an informative reflection on the Canons, in particular those on Ministerial Conduct and Discipline. This gave us valuable working knowledge of the Canons in what has become a highly litigious environment.

### **Liturgical Committee**

The report of the Liturgical Committee was received. Permission was granted to co-opt new members to work on the new Prayer Book. The Committee will give motivations for which Collects and Readings should be included. A progress report will be published on the Provincial website to enable all to engage.

### **Theological Education and the College Of The Transfiguration**

Following a presentation by the Liaison Bishop for Theological Education, Synod recognised the importance of adhering to minimum theological qualifications for entry into Holy Orders.

Synod urged each Diocese to consider sending at least one student per year to COTT in order to keep the College viable as a vital cog in the ongoing mission of our Province.

## **The Archbishop's Commission on Theological Education**

The Commission's report, entitled *Take Thou Authority* was presented by Prof Barney Pityana. Synod will hold a special sitting to engage with the report, reflecting our concern at the current crisis and our unequivocal commitment to excellence in Theological Education and Ministerial Formation.

## **Training and Development**

Our February sessions customarily include input which helps us exercise our episcopal leadership more effectively. This year the Revd Fred Hendricks gave us daily addresses on Contemplative Prayer and Dr Palesa Makhale-Mahlangu gave us inspiring psychological insights and tools to help us prepare for retirement.

## **Theological and Pastoral Matters**

The dance in the net of God's love invited us to wrestle with a range of important Pastoral and Theological matters facing the Church, including the sacraments of Eucharist and Marriage and the issue of who are fit and proper people to exercise ministry.

Lay Presidency of the Eucharist: The newly-revived Southern African Anglican Theological Commission (SAATC) brought to Synod a report on the question of lay people presiding at the Eucharist in emergencies. The SAATC will facilitate a study of the matter and present a progress report to Synod.

Receipt of the Eucharist in One Kind: Restrictions imposed as a result of Covid-19 have revived debate around the efficacy and sufficiency of receiving the Eucharist in one kind. At present Communion in one kind only is permissible. When the Sacrament of the Blood of Christ is again available, only the common cup will be allowed. Bishops were urged to use this opportunity to teach the faithful on Eucharistic Theology.

Marriage: The Synod is hearing of confusion among the faithful around the issue of traditional marriages. Synod recognised that the Church needs to educate its people against the backdrop of Canon 34 on Holy Matrimony.

Isangoma: Synod deliberated on the issue of clergy who are embracing traditional practices such as training to be a diviner (Isangoma) and claiming that this is a call from the ancestors. The issue will be investigated before being further discussed by Synod.

Theological & Pastoral Framework for Ministry to LGBTIQ+ Community: The Bishops took a step towards adopting the Pastoral Standards as outlined in the 2019 Report by the Human Sexuality Commission. Guidelines will be presented at our next meeting to be adopted and presented to Dioceses.

## **Covid 19 Advisory Team**

Synod urged all congregations to embrace and implement the guidelines produced by the Archbishop's Advisory Team to guide us through the pandemic. In South Africa, the prohibitions embodied in the team's guidelines are intertwined with government regulations and are therefore mandatory.

## **Safe Church Matters**

Canon Rosalie Manning reminded Synod of the importance of compliance with Safe Church requirements, pointing out that failure to do so leaves ACSA exposed to legal consequences. Bishops were encouraged to ensure that their Dioceses have submitted Safe Church declarations.

## **Growing the Church**

The new Director of Growing the Church, the Revd Bruce Woolley, encouraged the Bishops to advertise widely GtC's online events and pointed to the availability of facilitators and resources, including Rooted in Jesus and Alpha courses.

## **Youth Report**

Synod received a comprehensive framework for the spiritual development of children and the youth. Bishops were encouraged to workshop the material in the framework in their Dioceses.

## **The Environment**

Environmental concerns were highlighted and referred to the relevant Liaison Bishop.

## **Task Team on Discrimination in Schools**

Synod received a report from the Task Team, which is chaired by Ms Mary Metcalfe, and its work is ongoing.

## **Re-Imagining ACSA**

An external team of facilitators invited the Bishops to reflect on their ministry with a view to identifying which model of church prevails in each of their Dioceses, using the categories identified by the American Jesuit theologian, Avery Dulles: Institutional; Herald; Servant; Sacrament; and Body of Christ. Against that background, Bishops were challenged to consider how they should take advantage of this special moment that God is giving us in the pandemic.

## **In Conclusion**

While we feel intensely the loss of being in each other's company, the Bishops engaged enthusiastically through electronic media, using with dexterity the "mute", "unmute" and "camera" buttons for their deliberations and successfully forming a virtual community. The Archbishop was an ever-present virtual facilitator of proceedings.

We thank God for our fellowship and commend our work to Anglicans in our Dioceses of Lesotho, Namibia, St Helena, South Africa and Swaziland (in Eswatini).

*February 17, 2022*

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