

## COMMUNIQUE FROM THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

### ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

September 2022

After the heartening experience of unity we experienced at the recent Lambeth Conference, the meeting of the Synod of Bishops held virtually from September 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> started with a bang at the opening Eucharist. Through the scriptures and the homily, we heard a call to listen deeply to the voice of Jesus at the Lake of Galilee: “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” This was a voice of change, a voice of creation, which called us to listen carefully, since our plans might have to change.

#### **Voices of Invitation**

As we addressed the theme of re-imagining our church, we were stretched by a striking presentation from Archdeacon Terry Lester of Cape Town on the five models of church developed by the American Jesuit theologian, Avery Dulles. Echoing the Lambeth theme, “God’s Church for God’s World”, we were invited to a new way of being church, in which all members have a ministry and in which we recognise that our effectiveness is rooted in creative communication.

Dr Jonathan May of the College of the Transfiguration showed us how the Acts of the Apostles can enable the Church to re-imagine herself for the future by focussing on a “tripod of action”, inviting the community of faith to wait upon God, to be a conduit of continuity carrying tradition forward, and to offer an alternative way of being, committed to justice and equity. The Revd Gina Gcebile, also of COTT, also addressed us, emphasising the centrality of doctrine in how we theologise with contextual issues.

The Bishops were deeply moved when Bishop Moses Madywabe of Khahlamba preached on Luke 9:51-56, on how Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem “passing through Samaria”, breaking down barriers of hostility and discrimination. We too must “pass through the places” that are on the edges of society and are ostracised.

#### **Theological Education**

We deliberated at length on our concerns, opportunities and shared experiences when we considered reports from the Pityana Commission on the future of theological education, the Advisory Board on Theological Education and the Rector of COTT. We applauded COTT’s management, academic and support staff and agreed to organise an indaba on the way ahead, including ecumenical and other partners.

#### **Clergy and African Traditional Religious Practices**

We considered the desire of some clergy and spouses to practise as *sangomas* as well as to minister in the Church. We agreed that priests cannot “serve two altars”. We will hold a colloquium on the matter, consulting also with the Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Episcopal churches on how they are dealing with this challenge.

### **Growing the Church (GtC)**

The new Director of GtC, the Revd Bruce Woolley, is carrying out training in six Dioceses. Bishops were asked to encourage GtC Coordinators to attend a forthcoming virtual conference. Anglicans Ablaze 2023 will be held from 4-7<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

### **Archbishop's Commission on Valuing Diversity in the Body of Christ**

The Revd Dr Andrew Warmback reported that the Commission is calling on Bishops and Dioceses to emphasise the full inclusion of people living with disabilities in all aspects of the Church's spiritual, social and economic life, focussing on what they could do easily to improve over this next year. It plans to create an Advisory Group to advise the Province.

### **Archbishop's Commission on Technology and Ethics Report**

The Archbishop's Commission on Technology and Ethics seeks to "track technological developments, to reflect on them theologically and ethically, and inform the bishops and other church leaders as to what is taking place...". Among the rapid advances we face are the speedy development of Covid-19 vaccines, the quick introduction of virtual technologies during prolonged lockdown and the migration to cashless church income. Digital technology and globalisation present us with what can be characterised as VUCA: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity.

### **Provincial Resolutions**

Bishop Charles May of the Highveld reported on resolutions coming before Provincial Standing Committee on Palestine and Israel. Recognising the discrimination experienced by the Palestinian people, we seek a peaceful solution for the Holy Land embracing dignity, equality, peace, justice and prosperity for all.

### **Liturgical Committee**

Bishop Nkosinathi Ndwandwe of Natal reported that the infusion of new young blood into this Committee has added new vitality and passion to its work. The Committee plans a new Prayer Book and will need to resuscitate teams to translate it into languages other than English. However, the 1989 Anglican Prayer Book will remain in use.

### **Human Sexuality Guidelines**

Synod considered draft Pastoral Guidelines for ministry to members of the LGBTI community living in Civil Unions. The Bishops noted the voices of those who cautioned restraint. Our re-imagining the Church cannot be complete unless it provides pastoral ministry to the LGBTI community and the matter will thus remain on our agenda.

### **Conclusion**

After experiencing the joy of an in-person Lambeth Conference, members of Synod expressed the longing to meet in person. Nevertheless, empowered by the Holy Spirit through the reflections at the beginning of each day, we conducted our business listening deeply to what we heard as we travelled together as the Church of God.

\* \* \* \* \*