

**COMMUNIQUÉ FROM THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS  
ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (ACSA)  
27 February – 3 March 2023**

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The Synod of Bishops having last met in person in February 2020, we were excited to gather again in Gauteng for the first time since hard lockdown. We enjoyed a week of joyous fellowship, during which we were also pleased to welcome in person for the first time those bishops who have been elected over the past three years.

The three bishops who are retiring this year, described as “the three Kimberley Diamonds” on account of their birth there, preached at our daily Eucharist on the first three days. The tone was set by an exhortatory sermon from Bishop Margaret Vertue of False Bay, who reminded us at the opening Eucharist that as bishops we remain deacons; instruments in the hands of God to make Christ known through our servant leadership. Despite the vicissitudes we face in the world, we are to hold onto the Truth and be part of doing God's will, for we are to do so with “the eyes of the heart”. It has become imperative therefore that we should be increasingly prepared to deny self and take up the cross of Christ (Mt. 16:24). Lent is not only about self-denial, but challenges us to follow Jesus' example by renewing a commitment to “exercise the preferential option for the poor”.

In his homily, Bishop Ebenezer Ntlali of Grahamstown focussed on Mt. 6:14-15 and reminded us that we are called by Jesus' teaching to model lives built on forgiveness and kindness. He urged us to show tender hearts by forgiving others, adding: “You can't give others what you have not experienced yourself. You have been forgiven, first, in order to forgive others.” He also posited the question whether we as bishops are closest to those who are weakest in exercising their ministry.

Bishop William Mostert of the Diocese of Christ the King, the third member of the “diamond trilogy”, spiritedly encouraged us to act upon the Lord's call to follow our vocation to be compassionate. This was framed succinctly in the prayer, “Lord, give us your eyes to see what you see”. He issued a timely reminder that we need leaders who show their love for their people by seeking them out when they are lost and troubled in order to restore their dignity.

We were privileged also to have Bishop Brian Marajh of Kimberley & Kuruman and Bishop Luke Pretorius of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist preach on the last two days of our meeting.

#### **ECUMENICAL SOCIAL ETHICS**

The Bishops were hugely blessed to have the Revd Mike Vorster, former Bishop of the Natal Coastal District of the Methodist Church, share with us every morning his extended experience over many years of the critical missional focus of Ecumenism. He reminded us that the petition of Jesus in his High Priestly prayer (John 17), “that they may be one”, has not yet been fulfilled and that Ecumenism, sadly often seen as an optional extra, should be pursued by all church leaders.

#### **THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION and the COLLEGE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION**

Theological Education and Formation for ministry remains a high priority for the Bishops, who seek to ground their own thinking on a solid foundation and to inspire theological excellence in the Province. In consequence, we had an animated, excellent discussion of the report of the Pityana Commission on Theological Education. We celebrated the report as a seminal work, giving insight and guidelines for the priority of Residential Theological Education and Training of clergy, as offered by the College of the Transfiguration (CoTT), and its viability.

On CoTT, our general feeling was that the college should continue. It must be supported by the Bishops and fundraising must continue to augment its cash flow. We acknowledged the sacrificial efforts of the College's academic staff.

A template for the discernment of candidates for ordination was agreed to by the Bishops. It is to be developed and will be recommended in the dioceses of ACSA.

#### **DIOCESAN NAME CHANGE**

Synod approved the name change of the Diocese of Swaziland to the Diocese of Eswatini.

## **CHURCH and COMMUNITY MOBILISATION PROCESS (CCMP)**

Synod received an excellent presentation on theology in action in our communities through a programme called Church and Community Mobilisation Process. The Bishops were inspired to think of planning workable and renewable community projects, using the tools of CCMP. We noted that the classical Anglican Communion Five Marks of Mission, enshrined in Canon 15 (1), provide a framework for projects to implement the call of the Gospel for holistic community transformation.

## **CANON LAW AND CHURCH ORDER**

Mr Henry Bennett gave input on the updated Canons in relation to Church Order, including disciplinary processes for ordinary lay Anglicans, laity in leadership and clergy. He referred to the Canons dealing with the administrative role of Archdeacons, highlighted the importance of Resolution of Permanent Force 5, paired with Act XV, and covered Canons which deal with malfunctioning of a Diocese, Bishop or Clergy person. Interpretation of the Canons around intervention are best guided by Diocesan Chancellors and Registrars.

## **ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING (APM)**

The Provincial Secretary/Treasurer and the Provincial Deputy Registrar reported on the impact of Covid on the Church, noting how the pandemic has slowed down the economy. They proposed a denominational census to gather data to enable medium and long-term planning. The Archbishop implored dioceses to cooperate with the APM Committee in making data available for analysis, in preparation for the Provincial Standing Committee meeting from 27-29<sup>th</sup> September.

## **“CARE FOR CREATION”**

The Dean of the Province, Bishop Stephen Diseko, challenged dioceses to take up the Lambeth Call to plant trees to grow an “Anglican Communion Forest”. To this end, the Revd Dr Rachel Mash has negotiated with the Department of Forestry to supply churches with trees at no cost. Inspired by the call, the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Ghana (ACC-18) has appealed to the Communion to sign the “fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty”. We are also challenged to not use Styrofoam products at church events. A beautiful new “Five Marks of Mission” poster, which has space for parishes to add their own photos, will be distributed to every parish. Dioceses are encouraged to send their environmental coordinators to a two-day conference organised by Green Anglicans in Gauteng.

## **REPORT on “The Case of Ukraine”**

Dr Greg Mills of the Brenthurst Foundation, who accompanied our Metropolitan on his visit to Ukraine in December 2022, highlighted the imperative to pray for peace between Ukraine and Russia. The Bishops are equally mindful of the many areas in the world where wars are waged. They earnestly pray for pro-active peace-making and call the Church to prayer, holding peace-brokers in our hearts.

## **HUMAN DIGNITY AND CIVIL UNIONS**

The outcome of our discussions is reflected in the Addendum which is attached.

## **STATE OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Mr Mcebisi Jonas, South Africa's former deputy Minister of Finance reminded the Synod that as church leaders we must not underestimate our influence. He also challenged church leaders and clergy everywhere, including at local level, to help change the moral fabric of our society.

## **ELECTION OF THE BISHOP OF GEORGE**

Synod elected the Ven Edwin Pockpass to be the new Bishop of George, in succession to Bishop Brian Marajh, who has been translated to Kimberley & Kuruman. We express our deep appreciation for the work of the Vicar-General of the Diocese, Canon Jerome Prins.

*“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”. (Phil. 4:8)*