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## Anglican Church of Southern Africa

*The Right Reverend Allan John Kannemeyer, Bishop*

24<sup>th</sup> May 2023

To: the holy faithful people of God

Diocese of Pretoria

### PASTORAL LETTER HAMMANSKRAAL CHOLERA OUTBREAK

My dear people of God

#### **Giver of life**

#### **in the midst of poisoned water**

#### **We groan with creation. Lord have mercy**

The words above are part of the prayers for Penitence in the Liturgy for World Environment Day on Trinity Sunday (June 4).

If ever there was an appropriate time to pray this prayer, it is now. The Hammanskraal area has been suffering from irregular water supply for the last twenty years. Now fifteen people have lost their lives. Fifteen precious lives are lost because of the poisonous state of the water in the Hammanskraal area. Even the water from taps which is presumed processed and safe to drink, is said to stink. Health practitioners have advised people to boil water (including tap water) before it is consumed. This represents a new low in service delivery failures by local municipalities.

Our politicians seem to be caught up in battles for their own survival, and the dawn of coalition politics has caught all of them unprepared. We plead with our leaders to fix their gaze on the challenges we are faced with, to apply themselves and to serve the people of our land as best they can. At present it seems as if they are serving only themselves and the parties they represent.

The tragedy in Hammanskraal and reports from Parys and elsewhere bring home what Pope Francis says: *'We must hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth'* when he spoke of Social Justice and Environmental Justice.

The loss of life in Hammanskraal is a human rights issue. A dysfunctional wastewater treatment plant has led to a deadly outbreak of cholera that has left at least fifteen people dead.

"New wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved".  
(Matthew 9:17)



The Water Services Act of 1997 states the human right to water and sanitation. • *Everyone has a right of access to basic water supply and sanitation services;* • *Every water services institution must take steps to realise these rights;* • *Every municipality must plan in its water services development plan to realise these rights*".

It is these human rights that are being trampled upon in Hammanskraal and elsewhere where people have started to resign themselves to the inevitable: our leaders are failing us, and we seem to be on our own.

The prophet Ezekiel asks: "*When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?*" (Ezekiel 34:18-19).

As climate change impacts us more, water will become scarcer. When you combine water shortage with poor municipal services, it becomes a devastating and fatal combination.

We need to also hear the cry of the Earth. If we do not protect our rivers and our water sources then how can Mother Earth look after us?

We need to realise again that water is sacred, and that it is a gift from God. Water is our primal element. Christians become members of the family of God through the sacred waters of baptism. Our Muslim brothers and sisters wash their hands before prayer each time. Water flows through the pages of our sacred scripture. At the start of Creation the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. In the last book of the Bible the Shepherd is said to guide God's people to springs of the water of life (Rev 7:17). Water rushes, gushes, and pours through the pages of the Bible 722 times!

Let's do what we can to preserve this sacred and life-giving commodity. May the tragic deaths of the fifteen people who have died from poisonous water galvanise those whose duty it is deliver clean water that is safe to drink for all, especially those who cannot afford bottled water, or lack the means to boil water first before consuming it.

Our deepest sympathies are extended to the families of the fifteen people who lost their lives. Your pain is our pain. Your loss is our loss. May God grant you strength to live through this sad ordeal.

We must be worried. If this can happen in the municipality that is the capital of our nation, it can happen anywhere. We deserve better. We can do better. We have to become protectors and defenders of water. This is a responsibility that belongs to all of us. We cannot escape this responsibility.

We appeal to our leaders to raise their output and put the people of God in our land first. Our goodwill towards our leaders is running out. Our confidence in them is at an all-time low. It is my prayer that this tragedy may lead to the emergence of real servant leaders.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ (Phil.4:7).

In the service of Christ

*+ Allan Pretoria*

The RT Revd AJ Kannemeyer

Bishop of Pretoria

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(Matthew 9:17)

