

# The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(The Anglican Church in Limpopo Province)

Bishop: Luke Pretorius

[bishop@stmark.org.za](mailto:bishop@stmark.org.za)

Tel: (015) 297-3297

Diocesan e-mail: [reception@stmark.org.za](mailto:reception@stmark.org.za)

29 Devenish Street, Polokwane



P.O Box 643

Polokwane, 0700

South Africa

July 2020

## Ad Clerum – Winter

Dear Friends

I write this on a very chilly winter's day, with another cold front battering the Cape and the prospect of extreme cold arriving amongst us within the day.

Please stay warm and healthy. More especially as we move into the peak infection rate of COVID-19. What President Ramaphosa is describing as the Pandemic Storm.

Much has happened since the beginning of the year, and much of our communication these past few months has revolved around the impact of COVID-19. I suspect the disruption of COVID-19 will be with us for the best part of this year.

### COVID-19

The impact facing us from this Corona Virus is not only that of the disease and the risk of death but is also economic and societal.

I have written at length about the risk factors associated with COVID-19, as have many others. I will not repeat these here – but please do keep yourself abreast of developments and the efforts by Government to curb the spread of this disease. What is important is that we take responsibility in limiting our exposure to either become infected or to infect others.

### Economic Impact

The lockdown, as necessary and important as it is, has negatively affected many businesses resulting in people earning less or being retrenched. I suspect this situation will continue to deteriorate. Please be wise in your financial decision making and be generous in your assistance to those in need.

The negative financial impact on the Diocese and on our Parishes has also been felt. All Stipendiary Clergy and Diocesan Staff are currently earning 80% of their stipend/salary. Freda has worked hard to compensate this through the UIF TERS Fund, but this cannot continue indefinitely, and some are still earning less than before.

Most of our Parishes have endeavoured to pay their full pledge for March through May, and after consultation with the Diocesan Finance Board we have reduced the pledge from each Parish by 20% from June. I wish to thank our Parishes for making this extraordinary effort to pay, and to our people for themselves remaining committed to continuing their offerings to the best of their abilities. I salute you for your faith.

Only one Parish have declared they are unable to pay anything to the Diocese, and since April have paid nothing.

I wish here to thank the Diocesan Green Anglican Network for their generosity in committing to significantly reduce their budget expenditure to release money to meet the impending shortfall in stipends and salaries. This is a commendable gesture.

## **Social Impact**

An unfortunate side effect of the stress and strain of this pandemic and lockdown has been the high level of violence committed against women and children. This is of course entirely unbiblical and wrong.

To this ad clerum are attached documents – many with hyperlinks to other resource material – concerning:

- ~A Safe World for Children
- ~Pledge by Men of Faith to end violence against women
- ~10 things Men of Faith can do to end violence against women
- ~A Newsletter from Growing the Church about gender-based violence
- ~A set of Bible Studies around gender-based violence

I encourage you to read and share these documents. The scourge of gender-based violence is one of the great challenges facing South Africa at present. It would be good if this Diocese, and especially the men, show leadership in addressing this challenge.

## **Our Worship going forward**

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa has called for the prohibition of meeting for worship in our churches. This is a temporary measure and is motivated by medical advice received cautioning against our meeting, even if it is only 50 people at a time, because this significantly raises the risk level of contracting COVID-19. In my last ad clerum I shared with you the document drawn up by our Chapter endorsing this decision.

Of course, this is not easy for us as we miss deeply our ability to meet and share in worship together. There is also a reduction in income as people have no reasonable way to give their offering if they do not attend church.

I encourage us to think deeply about how we can invent new ways of worshipping without gathering in numbers. Could we use technology more efficiently and help teach those who do not have easy access to technology? Could we meet in open spaces in small groups standing far apart and listen to clergy and lay ministers share the Word of God with us? Could we gather in our cars in the church parking and listen to the preacher? Could an evangelist travel in a vehicle and use a loudspeaker to share the message of salvation?

What ideas can you think of? Whatever we do must abide fully with the gazetted law as well as the ruling of our Church. Talk, pray and discern what God is calling you to do. Share this with your leadership, clergy, and Archdeacons so they can share with the Diocese and thereby encourage others.

I suspect we will maintain the prohibition against gathered worship in church until at least the end of September. Chapter is working on a comprehensive document detailing what will be necessary when permission is again granted to gather for worship in church. This will be distributed soon.

Only God knows how long this prohibition must last. I am reminded of the situation Noah found himself in while isolated in the Ark. Even after the Ark came to settle on the peak of a mountain Noah did not open the doors as he waited for a sign from God. It was a long time before God gave Noah permission to let the animals and his family out. We too must wait for the right time to open our doors again.

Let us maintain our trust that God is in control and that there will come again a time for us to meet in church. In the interim, let us have faith and trust God and continue to do the best we can.

## **Manche Masemola Pilgrimage will be on-line**

Because of the cancellation of church gatherings, the Manche Pilgrimage will be recorded and streamed on Sunday 02<sup>nd</sup> August at 8am. Please look out for the link to Church-on-Line which we will use, as we do every Sunday for our Diocesan Services, to stream this Manche Service.

**In Conclusion**

Please do your best to remain healthy. Remember, there is no stigma to contracting COVID-19. Pray and support those you know who are ill and show them love.

Please help share this ad clerum as widely as you can. Because of the lockdown it is not easily possible to distribute hard copies. Those who require hard copies can arrange for them to be printed and collected from the Diocesan Office.

I pray God's blessings, safety, and health for you all.

Yours in our Lord Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Luke Pretorius".

Bishop Luke Pretorius

Diocese of St. Mark the Evangelist

- Attachments:
- ~A Safe World for Children
  - ~Pledge by Men of Faith to end violence against women
  - ~10 things Men of Faith can do to end violence against women
  - ~A Newsletter from Growing the Church about gender-based violence
  - ~A set of Bible Studies around gender-based violence