

# The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(The Anglican Church in Limpopo Province)

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To All Clergy  
Copies to all Churchwardens  
Copies to Diocesan Organisations

**Please share this with God's people in your parish!**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings in our incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended, Holy-Spirit-giving, coming-again Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! There is no one like him – the first and the last, the Word of God made flesh, who carried our sin and the punishment for it, and lives to intercede for us (*Hebrews 7:25*).

## **“Practise Resurrection”**

As disciples of Christ we are people of the resurrection – the life we enter through faith in him is a foretaste of heaven in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have just finished reading another excellent book by Eugene Peterson, called “Practise Resurrection”<sup>1</sup>. It is the 5<sup>th</sup> (and last?) in his Spiritual Theology series, in which he brings together all his reflections and experience from many years as a pastor and teacher.

This book is based on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and is all about growing to Christian maturity – something we don’t see a lot of in the world and church today! It really is about our central calling as Christians: to **make disciples** (see *Matthew 28:18-20* and our *Diocesan Vision at the bottom of the page*).

The thing about God’s plan for us to grow is that it does not come as a neat, step by step package! Of course we can use the Bible to prepare programmes like **Rooted in Jesus**, which help a lot, especially in establishing solid foundations for our faith.

But the process of becoming a mature disciple of Jesus Christ is more messy, more organic than that. Here are some of the insights from Ephesians.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Practise Resurrection*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2010. ISBN: 978 0 340 995181.

*The whole series is well worth reading – solid theology and challenging, but well written and not difficult to read. The other books in the series are: Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places; Eat This Book; The Jesus Way; and The Word Made Flesh.*

*Diocesan Vision: To make disciples in vibrant, self-sufficient congregations established and linked to each other by sharing in resources; ministry & service; outreach & evangelism.*

## **1 General Principles**

### **1.1 Prayer**

Have you ever noticed that most of the letter to the Ephesians is in the form of an extended prayer? This is especially true of the first three chapters.

Paul praises and blesses God for what he has done, is doing and will do. He gives thanks for the Ephesians and prays that God will deepen their relationship with him. He prays that they will understand their part in the amazing, cosmic plan of God to reveal himself to the whole universe. He prays that they will come to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and the infinite love of God in all its dimensions. Paul prays that God will be glorified in and through the church. He tells us to put on the armour of God by praying in the Spirit at all times (*Eph 6:18*) and to pray for him.

Without prayer there can be no spiritual growth to maturity. **People of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, become praying people!** That does not mean that everyone is called to spend hours on their knees every day (although God does call some to that), but it means that we must let prayer, conversation with God, punctuate our day every day. We must have daily, disciplined times of reflection on Scripture and praying from it (Morning and Evening Prayer are excellent for that).

### **1.2 Relationships**

Flowing from that, in Ephesians Paul shows how everything to do with Christian growth and maturity is about relationships.

It is through our ever-deepening relationship with God through the Bible, prayer and worship that we grow. Throughout the letter, but especially in chapters 4 to the end Paul writes about relationships: with God; between Jews and Gentiles (or black & white; Sotho, Venda & Shangaan... in our context today); within the church where we all have different gifts and roles to play; between wives & husbands, children & parents, slaves (employees today) & masters. We even have a relationship (spiritual warfare) with the powers of evil!

As we work out these relationships in Jesus' way, we grow in faith, love and maturity. **People of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, make sure your relationships are growing in the love of God!** Then we will become more mature disciples together.

### 1.3 Participants in the Resurrection

In all of this we are becoming participants in the resurrection of Jesus – we are “in on it” as Peterson likes to say.

Jesus' resurrection is an objective, historical fact. It happened. But that is not the end. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we are destined to live beyond death if we are in him. And, more than that, we can begin to experience that resurrection life now. We can expect to see God's power breaking into our lives in answers to prayer, miracles, healings and gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, God **has** raised us up and seated us in heaven with Christ (Eph 2:6)! It is as though we live with one foot firmly planted in this world of darkness, sin, suffering and evil; and the other one firmly planted in God's kingdom of light, forgiveness, healing and goodness.

**People of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, live as people of resurrection!** Expect to see God at work in your lives, and in the lives of others through you. Then we will grow towards maturity.



God's church in Mara – the children came to see what was going on at Rooted in Jesus.

## 2 The Church

### 2.1 God's Creation

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that the church is much more than a human institution. It is God's creation, and God has amazing plans for it.

We are the body of Christ, the household of God, a holy temple in the Lord, the bride of Christ. It is through the church that God will reveal his wisdom to all powers and authorities. In the church we can expect God to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine.

He expects us to make every effort to maintain the unity that he has given us in Christ. God loves his church despite all its failures, dirty politics and weakness. **People of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one**

**another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you”.** (Eph 4:32-33).

### 2.2 Saints

Now here is a surprise! Paul keeps referring to the people of the church in Ephesus as **saints** – and they were no different or better than the people in any of our congregations!

We are saints not because we have reached some advanced level of holiness, but because God has made us saints. There is “*no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:1). Now the Holy Spirit is at work in us to make us what we are – to transform us, slowly but surely, into the image of Jesus.

**People of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, look around at the people in your church and see them through God's eyes.** God sees them as saints! They are precious to him. They are at many different levels of holiness and maturity, but God is at work in each of them. He has an amazing plan for each of their lives.

### 2.3 God's Strategy

Do you see that this imperfect, sin-ridden church is God's strategy for us to mature? Like precious stones all rubbing up against one another in a polishing machine, God uses our rough edges to smooth each other into the beautiful, mature people he created us to be. If God wants you to grow in patience, he may send you a really irritating person to care for. If God wants you to grow in faith he may put you in a really difficult, stretching situation.

So, as we turn to God together, supporting one another, forgiving one another, hurting one another and reconciling with one another God is at work in our lives. As we embark on ministry and mission together – serving soup to the hungry, visiting the prisoners and those in hospital, challenging what is wrong in our society, succeeding and failing – God is at work!

**People of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, thank God for the church and pray for its leaders!** Like you, we are fallible human beings on the road to maturity as disciples of Jesus.

Well, those are some of my reflections after reading “Practise Resurrection”. Let us live, love and serve as people of the resurrection. And let us rejoice as God works in us to make us more like him.

Yours in Christ,

†Martin: St Mark  
the Evangelist

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## My 2012 So Far in Words & Pictures

So far this year has been a mixture of joys and trials for me. Here are some thoughts and pictures about it.

Some of the joys have been:

- ✦ Meeting with Youth leaders and encouraging them as they prepare for the Diocesan Youth Camp from 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> October.
- ✦ Working with “Growing the Church” and “Anglicans Ablaze” to prepare for the big Conference in Johannesburg from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> October. **Don't miss it!** (See the Notices for more information)



*Anglicans Ablaze Leaders praying for each other*

- ✦ Our first sitting on Synod in March, where I had a chance to “paint a picture” of the Kingdom of God in the Diocese and South Africa.



*Jack doing Rooted in Jesus Training in Mara*

- ✦ Returning to Mara in Tanzania to lead follow-up conferences on “Rooted in Jesus”, with Jack Kudumela, Trevor Pearce and Sheila Bridge.



*Confirming in Bunda, Diocese of Mara*

- ✦ Our level 3 Langham Preaching School, “Growing the Word” / “Godišo la Lentšu” with Emmanuel Oladipo in April, where it was exciting to see how much we are learning.



*Working together on sermon preparation*

- ✦ †Philip brought it to my attention that I have now been bishop of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist for longer than he was! I can hardly believe it has already been more than 12 years.

But it has also been a trying time for me:

- ✦ The third anniversary of Sarah's death really brought home to me that things have changed for good. But I am also looking forward to whatever God has in store for me next...
- ✦ The conflict that has raged in the Parish of Sibasa has caused me (and others) great pain and stress. I do not understand how Christian disciples can fail to reconcile with one another. Hopefully that saga is nearing a conclusion.



*Trevor, Sheila & Jack on the beach of Lake Victoria*

- ✦ I have travelled too much! Somehow there have just been too many meetings and events that I had to attend away from home until now. But the good side of it is that I will now have an extended time in the Diocese until the end of this year.



*International Arrivals & Departures in Mwanza, Tanzania*

In all this I continue to give thanks to God for his unfailing love, and for all those who support me – family, friends, Diocesan leaders and staff and the team at Growing the Church in Cape Town. Thank you!

*†Martin*