

## **Statement from the Synod of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa**

*'God has given us the ministry of reconciliation' 2 Cor 5:18*

We, the Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, meeting at the Gonubie Hotel near East London in the Diocese of Grahamstown between 13 and 18 February 2016, wish to share our experience and reflections with the people of the Church.

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba asked the Bishops on this occasion to arrive early for their synod in order to express their pastoral presence in the Diocese of Grahamstown and the dioceses of the Eastern Cape more widely.

On Sunday 14 February the bishops were invited for refreshments at the guest house of the Premier of the Province of the Eastern Cape, Mr Phumulo Masualle, in King William's Town before embarking on a moving peace walk from the Good News Centre up the hill on the route taken by the marchers to Bisho stadium in 1992, when they were met by the then security forces and 28 were killed. Premier Masualle who was on the march of 1992 and came close to being killed, joined the bishops in the march, together with the mayor and other dignitaries and many Anglican Church groups in uniform. The Archbishop spoke briefly, apologising where the Anglican Church may have failed to act adequately in the past, and he and the Premier laid a wreath at the memorial. The bishops then proceeded into the stadium for a moral regeneration rally led by the MEC for Art, Culture, Sports and Recreation, Ms Penny Majodina, who is also a Methodist lay preacher (and it showed); here the Premier spoke powerfully about the need for moral renewal in the leadership of the nation.

At 14h00 the Eucharist began with some 1000 present including choirs from all 6 Eastern Cape dioceses. It was moving to be welcomed by the wife of the late Steve Biko, Mrs Ntsiki Biko and her family. The Archbishop preached and celebrated and the bishops were hosted by the Premier to a meal at the Steve Biko Centre. As one bishop commented, 'It is important to remember the price paid by others during apartheid so that we can all be free'; the peace walk enabled us to look back with healing eyes to the tragedy of 1992, while the rally and Eucharist addressed needs for reconciliation in the present and the future.

Premier Masualle and his wife had also joined the bishops the previous evening for a fundraising dinner to support the College of the Transfiguration, at which the Auditor-General of South Africa, Mr Thembekile Makwetu, gave a powerful and revealing address. Mr Makwetu gave his support to the Public Protector and to all the processes by which public money is raised and spent responsibly. He pointed his hearers to the public process by which budget decisions are made known. The dinner was sign of commitment to COTT and was echoed during Synod in a call for dioceses to support the College especially on Theological Education Sunday in August.

Throughout the week, the bishops have received outstanding care and generosity from the host Diocese of Grahamstown.

The February meeting of the Synod of Bishops has a developmental character, with opportunity for learning, discussion and growth in leadership in addition to an administrative agenda. On this occasion the bishops heard from Theo Coggin of Quo Vadis Communications about the missional use of social media, and from Henry Bennett about the recent conference of the Canon Law Council and its proposals for changes to legislation at Provincial Synod in September. Mr Bennett underlined the way in which schools and other church institutions are keen to bear the 'Anglican brand' but therefore need to be held to standards in their use of it.

Regrettably a further workshop on the proposed new prayer book fell through, but the bishops continue to hold this project close to their hearts.

The Diocese of Namibia having delegated the election of their next bishop to the bishops, Canon Luke Pato was elected to serve that diocese and will be consecrated on 7 May in Walvis Bay. The Diocese of Niassa having done likewise, the bishops are continuing to strategize about the needs of Northern Mozambique as a whole in the process of identifying leaders who will serve there.

As usual the bishops were updated on work in progress in the Advisory Board for Theological Education, Anglicans Ablaze and Fresh Expressions, the new Stewardship Programme, and the Board of Education. New Anglican schools have been opened this year in Lesotho and in Johannesburg; the bishops affirmed the work of Roger Cameron and the Anglican Board of Education. PSC's decision to initiate a province-wide local-level ministry of mediation was taken forward with the adoption of a project proposal and the appointment of a working group. The former decision to upgrade pastoral care especially of the clergy, was taken forward with a searching presentation on clergy stress from the Bishop of Port Elizabeth.

In receiving a report from the Provincial Youth Council, the bishops affirmed support for the training of young people for leadership. An important report was received from Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya on the COP21 conference and the international call to disinvest from fossil fuels. The bishops expressed thanks to Trinity Church, Wall Street, for the recent sustainability workshop which aims to help both churches and communities to become self-sufficient. Looking forward, greetings were sent to the April 2016 meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council.

The bishops again discussed and worked over their draft *Pastoral Guidelines in response to Civil Unions within the wider contexts of Marriage and Human Sexuality* in readiness for decision at Provincial Synod. These reaffirm our assurance that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ. However, they do not change our current policy, which is that the Province 'cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions' (Resolution 1:10 of the Lambeth Conference of 1998).

The Prayer Book affirms 'that marriage by divine institution is a lifelong and exclusive union partnership between one man and one woman'; therefore the draft guidelines affirm for now that 'partnership between two persons of the same sex cannot be regarded as a marriage... accordingly our clergy are not permitted to bless such unions... nor are they permitted to enter into such unions while they remain in licensed ministry'.

It was with sadness that Synod said farewell to our most senior member, Bishop Peter Lee of the Diocese of Christ the King, who is due to retire on 30 June 2016. Bishop Peter's ministry as a bishop began more than 25 years ago, when one of the first challenges he was faced with was the violence in the Vaal Triangle of the early 1990s. However, we are pleased that he will continue to help us with our education initiatives.

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In all these areas the Church is called to work for healing between people and God, within and between communities and between people as individuals. In this Lenten season we seek God's grace in that endeavour, for ourselves and for the Church.