

The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(Anglican Church of Southern Africa in Limpopo)
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To All: Clergy
 Churchwardens
 Leaders of Organisations
 Diocesan Youth Council

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings in Christ the King of kings and Lord of lords – he was enthroned on the cross, but is now enthroned in heaven. He will return to establish God’s reign on justice and peace forever: “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

May you know the presence of Jesus in every part of your life during this Advent and Christmas season. May he be present when you travel, in your family gatherings, when you meet to worship... even when you brave the Christmas commercialism to go shopping! Remember, no matter how difficult things become, Jesus *will* return in glory and God’s Kingdom *will* come.

Personal News

I need to share with you why I am feeling particularly happy right now: I have a new lady in my life and we realised last week that our growing friendship has moved way beyond friendship into a full-blown romance. We have been sharing the news with our close family before “shouting it from the rooftops”! And we are both experiencing the madness of being “in love”.

Colleen Thomas lives in Cape Town. She was married to James – the South African who was killed in the Al Shabaab attack on a shopping mall in Kenya three years ago. Sarah and I knew them both although not very well.



Colleen Thomas



Colleen helping to lead worship at Anglicans Ablaze 2016

Colleen and I have met on and off at Anglicans Ablaze and Growing the Church events since about 2009. We have both found it helpful to share our experiences of loss and grief. From time to time we have led worship together and found that we “connected” on a spiritual and musical level. In October we both played in the band at “Anglicans Ablaze” (she is a very good musician among other things) and after the Conference we spent a day doing things together. Since then our relationship has been growing in a wonderful way.

Although it is still early days, Colleen and I both think we have found “the one” to share the rest of our lives – although obviously we have to relate largely at long distance for now! I have met her two daughters (Sarah and Julie – Sarah is married) and they have given me their “stamp of approval”. My children are happy for me but still need to meet Colleen and get used to

the idea (although they have been praying that I will find someone). We are waiting on God for what comes next...

Obviously it is very different to have someone in my life who is not Sarah, and for Colleen to have someone who is not James. But I know Sarah would love her. One of the last things she said to me on the night that she died was, "You must marry again." I remember thinking, "Ja right... how will I ever find someone as good as you?" Well, I think it has happened!

It is wonderful, new and exciting, so please pray for us and our children as we adjust to this new reality!

Standing with Women and Children

There has been a lot of talk lately about a "culture" of rape and abuse of women in our society. There have been horrific reports of rapes on university campuses. I suppose we should not be surprised, because some of our national leaders seem to think that women exist to bring them sexual pleasure whenever they feel like it. One hears about Sugar Daddies and "Blessers" (which really is a form of prostitution, paying for sex). How different this is from the Scriptures, which see sexual intimacy as something beautiful and holy within the covenant of marriage!

But two things have brought home to me the seriousness of the situation recently – and I must confess that I feel quite embarrassed and ashamed to be a man when so-called men do things like this.

The first was when a leader in our Diocese told me about a six year old girl who was raped by a much older cousin some fourteen years ago. This little girl was so traumatised by the event that she could not even talk about it until very recently, and she is still struggling with the after effects. Why is it that some men think they can do what they like to girls and women? Partly because they so often get away with it. Partly, I guess, because there is something deeply wrong with the values of our society.

In contrast, here are the sort of values that should mark our interactions with people of the opposite sex: *"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"* (Philippians 4:8).

1 Nosipho

The second happened to our own Intern Nosipho Nzama – I write all this with her permission. As you know, Nosipho came to us from Natal in August to serve as an intern for the rest of this year. Then the plan was for her to start as our first Diocesan Child and Youth Development Coordinator in January. She came from St Agnes Church, Kloof, where Peter Houston is Rector. She has a degree in Child and Youth Development, knows and loves Jesus as her Saviour and Lord, and is passionate about making disciples among young people.

But before coming to Limpopo, Nosipho had a horrible experience. She was trapped by a married man in a situation where she was defenceless. He forced himself upon her and insisted on having sex. She tried to say no but realised that she would not be able to stop him. To put it bluntly, he raped her. And I know that this is the sort of thing that happens to many girls (even boys) and women, because some men think that they exist for their pleasure.

After being here for a few months, Nosipho discovered she was pregnant. So a man commits a dreadful sin and the woman has to bear the consequences! Being a person of upright character, she has decided to keep the baby and to love it. I have assured her of the support, love and acceptance of the Diocese. I have offered to help her demand compensation and support from the man involved. She has decided to go home to Natal and have her child there, and then return to us in the second half of next year when she will start her work as Child and Youth Development Coordinator.

One of the things that has distressed me, though, is that some people here have told her that she should not receive communion until she has attended penitence classes and repented. Repented for what?! For being raped? She did not sin – she is the one who was sinned against. The *man* involved should be facing prosecution. Nosipho, and other women in her position, should be receiving unconditional support from the church, not self-righteous, unthinking rejection! ***Nosipho, and others in her position, are welcome to receive communion!***

2 Support

Please understand that sex outside of the covenant of marriage is against God's will – even when two people agree on it (Galatians 5:19-21; Exodus 20:14). But when a woman is abused or raped she is a victim, not a sinner. She needs the love and acceptance of the church. Even when a woman was caught in the act of adultery (John 8:3) Jesus refused to condemn her, although he told her not to sin again (John 8:11). Why did he not condemn her even though she was sinning? Because it takes two to commit adultery and, typically, her accusers failed to bring the man involved to Jesus. Jesus helped them to see their hypocrisy (John 8:7-9). How much more will Jesus refuse to condemn a young woman who was sinned against?

In discussing this, Nosipho and I have realised that her very difficult and painful experience will help her to identify with many young women and children who are abused in similar ways. It is giving us an opportunity as the church to re-think our attitudes to these things. Because of her experience she will be able to help women to deal with such difficult situations (2 Corinthians 1:2-4). She will be able to teach men and boys about how to treat women and girls with Christian love and respect. She will be able to help women and girls to say no. She will be able to help the church re-think its attitudes to these things. Christian love does not say, "What can I get from you for my own pleasure?" but "How can I give you the honour that you deserve as a child of God?"

So I am asking you please to support Nosipho in her time of need. Please pray for her and, when she returns later next year, welcome her back as one of us. She is a high quality person who has an enormous amount to offer the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist and wider church.

3 Sixteen Days of Activism

It is quite apt that I get to write this just at the start of the sixteen days of activism against the abuse of women and children. This year the Government is taking a new initiative – working with HOPE Africa within the Anglian Church. Here is what Maropeng Moholoa has written about it.

The Department of Women in the Presidency, led by Minister Susan Shabangu, will launch National Dialogues In Lebowakgomo Civic Centre on the 25th November 2016. Through these dialogues, the Department of Women hopes to: e

- ✦ Give communities space to honestly and genuinely talk about violence against women and children,
- ✦ Explore ways in which citizens can play a role in curbing violence in general
- ✦ Focus on cold or old cases where nothing happened,
- ✦ Look at the gaps in the justice system and how to redress some of the shortcomings

This launch is part of the department's 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children with the theme ***count me in – together moving a non-violent South Africa forward.***

HOPE Africa partners with the Department of Women on these National Dialogues that will take place throughout the country.

We have sent HOPE Africa our list of clergy, so don't be surprised if you are contacted to join in with the discussions. They are requesting the diocese, parishes and archdeaconries to support and attend the dialogues at regional levels from 28 November 2016.

4 Jesus

Let me conclude by calling us back to Jesus. He came to share in our pain and suffering – indeed he took it upon himself on the cross: *“Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4-6)*

Here are the words of a song I sang at Anglicans Ablaze 2016:

<p><i>Refrain:</i></p> <p>I hear a cry, my brothers and my sisters I hear a cry, the world in pain And as I hear, and as I listen I hear the voice of Jesus and he’s calling out to me</p> <p><i>Verses</i></p> <p>1) I am poor, I am lonely I have AIDS, I am dying Come to me, come to me I’ve been raped, I’ve been beaten I’ve been mocked and rejected But I love you still And I always will Come to me, come to me</p>	<p>2) It’s too much, you can’t bear it You’re afraid, it’s confusing Come to me, come to me You’re in grief, you’re in turmoil But I’m there in your darkness For I love you still And I always will Come to me, come to me</p> <p>3) You and I will go together We will call to a lost world Come to me, come to me I was dead, but I’m risen Now I give you my Spirit Yes I love you still And I always will Come to me, come to me</p>
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If you have suffered any kind of abuse, turn to him! And find a priest or counsellor who can help you work it through and find God’s healing and restoration.

If you have been abusing others (I am speaking specially to men), then it is not too late to stop. Confess your sin and ask God to fill you with the Spirit of love, gentleness and respect. You also will probably need help, so go to a priest or counsellor who can guide you in living out your new commitment. You may also need to do something practical to compensate those who have suffered at your hands.

People of God, let us lead by example and help save South Africa and the world from the abuse of others, especially women and children.

Have a blessed Advent and Christmas season – and preach the Gospel of God’s holiness, love, forgiveness and new life in Jesus!

Yours in Christ,

†Martin

†Martin: St Mark the Evangelist