

# The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(Anglican Church of Southern Africa in Limpopo)

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To: All Clergy  
All Churchwardens  
All Leaders of Diocesan Organisations

Dear Friends in Christ,



First, God bless you and those you love this big year in the life of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist!

This, my last “Ad Clerum” as your Bishop, comes with much love – and a mixture of sorrow at leaving you and excitement for the future. Know this: you will always be close to my heart and very much in the prayers of “Mma Bishop” Colleen and me.

So I would like to take the opportunity (based on my final report to Diocesan Standing Committee (DSC) last November) to look back at Diocesan Synod last August, and forward to what the next year holds.

## Looking Back – Looking Forward

As always, I want to start by reminding you of our Diocesan vision:

**To make disciples** in vibrant, self-sufficient congregations established and linked to each other by sharing in

- ✦ Resources
- ✦ Ministry & service
- ✦ Outreach & evangelism

This vision has served us well and has given direction and purpose to everything we do. It has only been changed slightly from the very first vision of the Diocese when it was established more than 30 year ago. Under the leadership of a new Bishop, you will need to seek God’s vision for the Diocese going forward... whether this one or something new.

### 1 Looking Back at Synod 2018

Reading though the Acts and Resolutions (see the Diocesan Web Site for that: [www.stmark.org.za](http://www.stmark.org.za)) I have asked the questions:

- 1) What were the main themes?
- 2) What was God saying to us?

This is what I found.

## 1.1 A Time of Making Disciples and Leaders

There were a number of debates and resolutions on this theme. We asked the leaders of the Diocese for more disciple-making material, training and support. We agreed to evaluate the training that we have done in recent years – how effective has it been? We asked for retired clergy to be empowered and released as trainers and mentors of those who are younger in ministry. We decided to clarify the licenses of Priests in Charge to indicate the time period for which they are appointed. We challenged parishes to draw up action plans for evangelism and church growth, based on all the training that we have done.

## 1.2 A Time to Focus on Youth and Children

After many years during which the Diocesan Leadership Team trained Churchwardens and Church Councils, the emphasis has shifted to young people. We hope that Churchwardens and Church Council members who received training in the past will pass that on to their successors. But we now have a Diocesan Youth and Children's Development Coordinator, a Volunteer and Interns' Programme (VIP), and training taking place for Licensed Youth Leaders and Sunday School teachers.

At Synod we agreed that parishes may admit baptized children to communion, once the necessary teaching and training has been done. We change the rule that required Lay Ministers to be "mature", so that it now says that they must be "God-fearing". We asked the Diocesan Youth team to help parishes have "generational gap conversations", so that the different generations understand one another better, and support one another in their mission and ministry. We also challenged parishes to make better provision for youth and children by including budget items for those ministries; and to make room for youth leadership in all their parish structures.

## 1.3 A Time to Care for our People

At Synod we looked at the requirements for membership in our Diocesan rules, and recognised that it may be impossible for some to give financially (if they have no income!). We said that we will give opportunities for such people to give in kind – through time, skills, practical service, produce or whatever they have to offer. We recognised that the abuse (often sexual) of women and young people is rife in our society and, sadly, even takes place in the church. We therefore affirmed the Archbishop's call for each Diocese to establish a "Safe Church Network", and tasked me (and my successor) to set up such a network in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist immediately. This is taking place as I write.

In the spirit of God's love and Christian outreach we agreed that, subject to certain conditions and guidelines, our churches should offer ministry and funerals to non-Anglicans and even non-believers who come to us in need. We also agreed to ask the Bishop to confer the Order of St Mark the Evangelist on Betty Monyemorathoe (Letaba Parish) and Muriel Wagenhauser (St Michael's United Church, Modimolle). This has been done, as a celebration of faithful service over many years.

## 1.4 A Time for Administration and Finance

As always, Synod dealt with these items. We approved our audited accounts, giving thanks that, once again, we achieved "clean" audits of Finance Board and Diocesan Trustees. Congratulations and thanks to Freda Chigumadzi and the financial team! We made decisions to relieve a few parishes that were in arrears to the Diocese, and received the presentation of the proposed Diocesan budget for 2019 (which was finally approved at DSC in November. Once again, it is a budget for growth in the midst of challenging times. We also asked Diocesan Finance Board to review the travel reimbursement rates for travel on behalf of the church.

We agreed that we should develop a policy to encourage mutual financial support between parishes based on the principle in Galatians 5:2, "Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ".

## 1.5 Adapting to Changing Times

Change is not always welcome – but we faced up to the reality that these are changing times, and we must adapt accordingly.

Synod therefore agreed to some important developments at Jane Furse:

- ✦ The sale of a small portion of the farm to the District Municipality;
- ✦ New Memoranda of Understanding for Jane Furse Memorial Village and St Mark's College as Non Profit Companies.

We encouraged parishes to investigate forming United Churches under the Church Unity Commission where this will strengthen our witness and mission – particularly in small villages where the denominations are small and weak.

Adapting to the challenges of the times is also important. This was the first Diocesan Synod where everything was available electronically and on the Diocesan Web Site – and Synod accepted the challenge to aim at becoming a “Paperless Diocese” by 2021. We also asked that the Diocesan Communications Team be strengthened to develop and implement a communications strategy for an electronic age.



So, looking back at Synod, I would summarise its message as: ***Consolidate what we have done in the past and prepare to move forward.***

This means that there is plenty to do this year during the interregnum between my retirement and the consecration and installation of your new Diocesan Bishop!

## 2 Looking Forward to Electing a New Bishop

This year will be dominated by the process of electing, consecrating and installing the new Bishop. Once again, let me try to answer two questions:

- 1) What happens next?
- 2) What is God saying to us?

### 2.1 Exit Process for Me (28<sup>th</sup> February)

First, I have to leave! Although I finish my term as your Bishop on 28<sup>th</sup> February there will be a farewell service on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2019, at 11:00 at Christ Church Cathedral. Dr Shashi Ledwaba and a team are working on it. In the meantime, at the request of Chapter, I have prepared a Diocesan Diary for 2019 – although of course it does not include Confirmations and Bishop's visits to parishes.

Archbishop Thabo will appoint a Vicar General to oversee the life of the Diocese from my retirement date until the installation of the new Bishop. I am working with Chapter and other Diocesan bodies to make sure that there are clear lines of responsibility for all the functions and ministries in the Diocese during the interregnum. I have one special request for you: ***please do your very best to make sure that all parish pledges are up to date when the new Bishop comes into office!*** This will be a wonderful gift to him/her.

During March, Colleen and I will pack up the house and prepare to move to Cape Town. We are already hard at work getting rid of things we won't need so that the move is not more expensive than necessary. We hope to move during the second week of April.

### 2.2 The Process of Electing a New Bishop

Here is a summary of the process that is already underway:

- 1) Diocesan Synod elected the **Diocesan Electoral Advisory Committee**, under that chairmanship of Peter Lekalakala. They will be joined by representatives from the wider Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) closer to the election.

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- 2) The Archbishop will set a date and venue for the **Elective Assembly**: all indications are that it will be from 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July at St Peter's, Tzaneen.
- 3) The Electoral Advisory Committee, with help from other Diocesan bodies like Chapter and Finance Board, will prepare a **Diocesan profile** and expectations of the new Bishop.
- 4) Parishes will elect their **lay representatives** for the Elective Assembly – two for each Parish and one for each Mission Parish. Together with **licensed clergy**, they will be summoned to Elective Assembly.
- 5) Once the mandate for an election has been issued, **nominations will open**. Anyone in the Diocese may nominate candidates, together with required supporting documents. Candidates may be from within or beyond the Diocese.
- 6) The Electoral Advisory Committee will **receive nominations**, check that they are qualified to stand, and prepare for the Assembly.
- 7) The names of those nominated will be **made public** for prayer and discussion in the Diocese. Note that this is not a time for “political” campaigning, but for seeking the Lord's will and guidance.
- 8) The **Elective Assembly** will be constituted and chaired by the Archbishop – probably starting in the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> July. It continues to meet for up to three days until an election has taken place, unless the Assembly votes to delegate the election to the Synod of Bishops.
- 9) In order to be elected a candidate must have **two thirds of the votes** in the houses of laity and clergy.
- 10) Once an election has taken place and been confirmed by the Synod of Bishops, a date is set for the new Bishop to be **consecrated** (if not already a Bishop) **and installed** – probably in September or October. I hope to be present to hand over the Bishop's staff and assure my successor of my love, support and prayers.

### 2.3 Remember What You Are Doing...

This is an election year in South Africa, so it is tempting to see the election of a Bishop as some kind of political process with campaigning, mud-slinging, character assassination, winners and losers! But it is not a political election. It is a carefully designed **process of spiritual discernment**, designed to help the Diocese identify who God is calling to be a Bishop of the Church and leader of the Anglican Church in Limpopo.

### 2.4 Let It Be Characterised By:

Therefore, let the process be characterised by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and not the excesses of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). This will be the difference between a happy, prosperous Spirit-filled Diocese going forward and an unhappy, divided, angry church going forward! I have complete confidence that you will demonstrate that you are true disciples of Jesus Christ by the way you go about this election.

As I have said before, Colleen and I will hold you in our love and prayers throughout this process. We pray that God will continue to be glorified in you – indeed that God will do even greater things among you and through you than has been seen in the past.

Yours in the love, joy and peace of Christ,

†Martin: St Mark  
the Evangelist

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