



Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

God's Covenant People

†Martin: St Mark the Evangelist
Charge to Ninth Diocesan Synod: 28th March 2009



1 Introduction

1.1 God's Grace in Sarah

As you know, Sarah died on Sunday 8th March. She had suffered from a malignant brain tumour since 2000, and it had recurred for the 3rd time at the beginning of the year. But Sarah never wanted to be known as the woman who was struggling with cancer. She said, "It is not my struggle - the battle belongs to the Lord." Rather, she wanted people to say, "There is the woman in whom we can see God's grace."

She was a wonderful wife and best friend to me; mother; friend; member and leader of the church. God blessed us through our nearly 30 years of marriage. Even through the 8 ½ years of her illness God blessed us. Thank you for your faithful prayers and support during that time. Sarah experienced God's healing in a miraculous way. At first she was expected to live for only a few months, yet she had a good quality life for all these years. During this time she grew in grace and ministry in ways that I could not have imagined. Indeed we saw God's grace in and through her.

But it will be hard - for Katy, Tasha, Jeremy and me, and for all of us who grieve for her. It will take time for our family to adapt to this new reality, and no doubt it will affect my ministry too. Please continue to pray for us. One thing I know: although we all miss her terribly, God is with us.

While Sarah was having her MRI brain scan in January - which showed how fast the tumour was growing - I prayed Morning Prayer, and one of the lessons included this verse:

"And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children," says the LORD, "from now on and forever." (Isaiah 59:21)

I took it as a personal promise to me from God. Although he did not say that Sarah would be healed this time, God did seem to say that his hand of blessing and protection would be over me, my children and grandchildren. This was an encouraging promise to Sarah too, who had longed to live to see her grandchildren.

1.2 Thank You

1.2.1 To God

As we enter our ninth Diocesan Synod we all need to say "thank you" to God:

- ✦ For being our Father (and Mother for that matter)
- ✦ For life in Jesus
- ✦ For the gift of the Holy Spirit
- ✦ For blessing this Diocese - and God really has blessed us since our last Synod! We are ahead of the targets we set, and God continues to provide for our needs, sometimes through generous donations.

1.2.2 To God's Church

The Church is all God's people, and I want to say thank you especially to:

- ✦ All those good and faithful leaders who serve at Diocesan level and in our congregations, chapelries and parishes. There are so many of you... in fact, please

turn to those near you and say “thank you” to them! Please forgive me for not mentioning you by name.

- ✦ The people of God who give themselves in ministry and mission. Praise God for the growing number of people, young and old, male and female, who are offering themselves to God in many ways.
- ✦ It is a wonderful thing to belong to the world-wide church. For the church is the local Christian community, and so much more. It is also the parish; and the Diocese; and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa; and the Worldwide Anglican Communion; and the fellowship of all Christian churches. We experienced something of that at the Lambeth Conference last year, and I was very touched at the Bishops who came to Sarah's funeral - they included two from my Lambeth Bible Study Group and our Archbishop Thabo Makgoba.

1.3 Diocesan Vision

Once again, I would like to remind you of our Diocesan vision:

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

- ✦ Resources
- ✦ Ministry and service
- ✦ Outreach and evangelism

Today I would like to think about our vision as God's Covenant People. One way to do this is to look in four directions - as we do when we celebrate the covenant in the Eucharist:

- 1) We look up - to God
- 2) We look back - at where we have come from
- 3) We look forward - to see where God is leading us
- 4) We look around - at the world and church where God is calling us to serve.

What can we learn from this for the next part of our journey?

2 Look Up

The Gospel reading we had a moment ago (*Mark 8:27-9:35*) gives us five essential marks of God's Covenant People. To what extent are these marks present in your life, and in your parish? When they are present our Diocesan Vision will come true.

2.1 There is Only One Foundation

Jesus himself is the only sure foundation on which we can build the church (or our lives, or our nation for that matter). God calls us back to our primary *relationship* with Jesus, just as Jesus challenged his disciples to get to know him as Lord and Messiah (*Mk 8:27-30*). “Who do you say I am?” is a question he asks each of us.

But it does not end there. Jesus immediately points his disciples to his cross - he must suffer and die for us, and then rise again. There is no avoiding the cross, it is only through the cross that we can receive forgiveness and healing, and get into the right relationship with God. So Jesus relentlessly keeps calling his disciples to face up to that dreadful yet wonderful reality (*Mk 8:31; 9:31-32*). Resurrection, new life, and blessing as God's children follow (*Mk 9:9-10*), but only when we have repented and put our faith in Jesus who died for us.

2.2 The Kingdom of God

Our Goal can never be limited to the church. Jesus came proclaiming the reign of God, and that is what we must seek in every part of our lives (*Mk 9:1-3*). Now that is not easy - in fact everything in us rebels against it. Peter found it impossible to accept at first, because he wanted to do things his way and not God's. Jesus made it quite clear that his thinking and attitudes would have to be transformed, or he would not be serving God but the devil (*Mk 8:32-38*).

We have to ask God to transform our thinking so that we begin to think and see things as he does. That means that (like Peter) we have to follow Jesus to the cross. We must die to ourselves so that God can live in us.

This has implications for us as we prepare for National elections next month - but more of that later.

2.3 God's Word

As Jesus was transfigured on the mountain we are told that Moses and Elijah appeared (Mk 9:4). They represent the two great strands of the Old Testament: the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). Luke tells us that they were discussing with Jesus (the centre of the New Testament) his "departure" or exodus, his crucifixion by which he would save the world (Luke 9:31). God's voice comes from out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mk 9:7).

We are to be people of the Word, who love, meditate on, pray from and obey the Scriptures. Because in doing so we are listening to Jesus and giving glory to God. That is what it means to be his disciples.

2.4 Ministry

Immediately on his descent from the mountain Jesus was propelled into ministry. He found a boy in need, a father in distress and his disciples confused and powerless. Jesus' response points us to the things that must be at the heart of our ministry too:

- ✦ He helped the father come to a *deeper faith* (Mk 9:23-24). We must do the same - by proclaiming the Good News, through listening and counselling, as we share our lives with those in our care.
- ✦ He *confronted and defeated evil* by driving out the unclean spirit in the boy (Mk 9:25-26a). We too must be ready to expose and overcome evil wherever we see it - in society (corruption, greed and idolatry) or in individual people.
- ✦ When the boy seemed to be dead, he reached out, touched and *healed* him (Mk 9:26b-27). The healing ministry is also central to our life and witness as God's church - through prayer, medicine, pastoral care, and support of those who suffer. This includes our ministry to people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

The disciples were still confused: "We tried to do those things, but could not. Why?" Jesus pointed them to fourth essential aspect of ministry: *prayer* (Mk 9:28-29). Jesus was effective in ministry because he was in constant fellowship with God his Father through a life of prayer. So, prayer must also be a daily discipline and habit in all of our lives.

2.5 Servanthood

The disciples were so human - just like us! Just when Jesus was doing all these amazing things they were arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus put them right by showing them a child, and pointing to his own example. God's people must humble themselves and put God's will first (Mk 9:34-35). Those of us especially who aspire (or are called) to leadership must be ready to lead by example in everything as servants of God and his church.

I love the example of John the Baptist. When his disciples were worried that Jesus was attracting more followers than John, he showed his servant spirit: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). There is no room for big chief, self-important, self-serving leaders in the church, just as there is no room for power struggles between leaders.

3 Look Back

Let us take a moment to look back over the three years since our last Synod in 2006. What has God done among us towards fulfilling our vision? Where have we failed or fallen short?

3.1 My Fifth Bishop's Charge!

Can you believe this is my 5th charge to you as your Bishop?

- 1) 2000: Getting Married (at my Installation)
- 2) 2000: A Transforming Church
- 3) 2003: Transformed Mission & Ministry
- 4) 2006: Make Disciples - Transform the World
- 5) 2009: God's Covenant People

Reading over these charges I realise that they contain a lot of teaching that can remind us where we have been and what God expects of us. So I hope to print them all and make them available in a booklet form. This will be especially useful to new clergy and lay leaders in the Diocese.

3.2 Achievements

Parish multiplication has begun to happen and is developing a momentum of its own. The first part of 2008 was one of the highlights of my ministry as I went around the Diocese inaugurating new parishes:

- ✦ Moletši and Matlala (1) became Seshego, Moletši, and Matlala (3)
- ✦ Mahwelereng (1) became Mokopane, Mapela, Mashashane and Baken-Matji Mission (4)
- ✦ Letaba gave birth to Baobab
- ✦ The Zoutpansberg gave birth to Musina Mission.

The most exciting thing for me in all this was to see new leaders emerging and the people taking ownership of their new parishes.

Of course there are many challenges. Many of these new parishes have hard-stretched Community Priests (or retired Priests) serving as Priest in Charge. They need to grow quickly to the point where they can support their own Stipendiary Rectors as well as having a team of Community Priests and Deacons, and many lay ministers and leaders.

It has also been encouraging to see some new churches being planted. For example:

- ✦ In a joint venture between Christ Church Polokwane and St Matthew's Seshego, we have started a new church in "Extension 44", an extensive RDP and informal settlement between Polokwane and Seshego. This church started as a feeding scheme for the poor - until they asked us to start a church for them.
- ✦ The parish of Letaba (based in Tzaneen) is pioneering a strategy to plant churches on farms in the area. Farmers have invited evangelist Jacob Ngobese to start churches on their farms. Several churches with more than 100 members each have already been started. Members include farm workers and refugees (from Zimbabwe and Mozambique).

The Leadership Team has done good work and we are beginning to reap the fruit of it as parish management becomes more effective. Enough people have been trained for as many as six teams to be sent out to do teaching on any given weekend.

At the beginning of this year we also did some re-structuring at Diocesan level, so that we now have four Diocesan Departments. Each has a departmental head and several ministries which are encouraged to get on with their particular work:

- 1) Bishop's Office (†Martin)
- 2) Administration (Felicity Roberts)
- 3) Growing the Church (Philemon Mudzvovera & Alfred Maletse)
- 4) Development (Pat Lennox).

I believe that this new arrangement will make our organisation more streamlined and effective.

3.3 Falling Short

But there are areas where we still fall short of our vision and of what God expects of his church.

In many of our churches we do not have real spiritual leadership. Leaders are managing services, finances and organisations reasonably effectively, but without really seeking, hearing and acting according to God's plans for the church. Too often our leaders act as individuals, sometimes even working against one another, instead of demonstrating real shared leadership in love under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I do not see much evidence that we are taking Jesus' great commission seriously: to **make disciples**. We have thousands of churchgoers, but how many of our people see themselves as real disciples of Jesus who walk with him, serve him, and seek to obey him every moment of every day?

Too often this failure to make disciples is demonstrated by poor giving. If people are not experiencing God's grace; if they are not growing in the knowledge and love of God; if we are not helping them to order their finances according to Biblical principles... then how can we expect them to give joyfully and generously?

4 Look Forward

I would like to focus on three specific things that I believe God is calling us to do in the coming years. After what I have said so far they will be no surprise.

4.1 Make Disciples

Remember, making disciples is at the heart of our Diocesan vision. So, what can we do to obey this commission of Jesus more effectively? In my travels I have come across a very exciting discipleship programme: "**Rooted in Jesus**". It was developed by Anglicans in East Africa and the UK. It comprises four books (48 modules) of basic Christian teaching. The teaching takes place in small to medium sized groups and we are in the process of translating it into N Sotho and Venda.

Participants don't have to be literate: Each session includes a memory verse and practical things to do to apply what has been learnt. Those who successfully complete the course receive a certificate of achievement. A team from SOMA UK and Africa will be here to train our first group of leaders in September. My goal is for every congregation in the Diocese to have at least one Rooted in Jesus group meeting by the end of 2010.

4.2 Equip Leaders

Every year for some time our Clergy Schools have focused on one or other aspect of spiritual leadership. Last year we had a course on the "Purpose Driven Church". One of our lay leaders was so excited about this that he donated enough money for me to get a copy of the book by Rick Warren for each parish. They have been distributed to Rectors and Priests in Charge today - and I have three in reserve for the next three new parishes! Thank you to our donor.

Last year international Bible Expositor Jorge Atencia introduced us to the Preaching Schools that are sponsored by Langham Partners International. It was an exciting day as we began to learn to pray the Word of God and see the potential for local Preachers' Clubs. We have decided to adopt this as an important strategy for Training Preachers and Community Clergy as part of our Diocesan Growing the Church (GtC) initiative. We are calling it **Kgodišo ya Lentšu - Growing the Word**, and hope to start in 2010 (or 2011 if next year proves impossible).

4.3 Focus on Young People

Also as part of our GtC process, we are establishing a new **Diocesan Youth strategy** - called "Growing the Youth". The emphasis will be on:

- ✦ Identifying, training and mentoring young people who show potential and are committed to Christ as Lord and Saviour
- ✦ Using these young leaders to run camps and youth events for youth members of our parishes
- ✦ Helping young people to discover how God is calling them to serve him in and beyond the church.

One of the members of our Diocese has already donated funds to make this possible, and there is a promise of more to come.

5 Look Around

Our Diocesan vision is all about being a Christian community. God's Covenant People need to look around at one another, and at the world in which we live, and ask: "What is God saying about our life together? What is God saying about our witness in South Africa?" We need to be a strong church not for our own sakes, but so that we can reach out to God's world with his love.

5.1 Our Role in South Africa

5.1.1 South African Election

Of course I will not try to tell you who you should vote for! But do vote, and do so with wisdom. Remember that both the church and the government will have to answer to God in the end. Our goal is more than a prosperous South Africa; it is the God's reign of justice and peace.

It will also be important to hold politicians and their supporters accountable for what they say and how they behave. Earlier this year I was part of a delegation from the SACC (Limpopo) that met with leaders of the ANC and COPE. We reminded them of their responsibility to act democratically and assured them of our prayers.

5.1.2 Zimbabwe

Although there are some signs of hope in Zimbabwe, refugees continue to stream across the border into South Africa. I am grateful that the Anglican Communion has promised to get involved. When a group of us visited Louis Trichardt and Musina on Ash Wednesday we met hundreds of refugees - most of them young people and children.

Thank you to Richard Mulaudzi, our priest in Musina, who has exercised a wonderful ministry of compassion and care among the refugees. At the end of last year the Municipality recognised his contribution by making him "Community Developer of the Year". He has been supported by the Zimbabwe Crisis Committee. At one stage about 1000 people were crowded into the little church in Nancefield. The government is still failing to provide adequate care for these refugees. But the church is becoming increasingly willing to support our work - one parish in Johannesburg has just pledged R5,000 per month.

5.1.3 HIV and AIDS

HIV and AIDS continue to be a huge challenge to us. Infection rates are still far too high and too many lives are affected. As part of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa we have benefited from great support from international donors. This has been a mixed blessing. Although we have been able to do a lot of work and a great deal of training, there is also a problem - our HIV & AIDS ministry has sometimes looked more like the work of an NGO than the church. What we do has often been determined by the priorities of donors rather than the needs of the community as determined by us.

Instead of volunteers offering their ministries as part of the body of Christ we have found that many people seemed to expect to be paid or reimbursed for everything they did. Now some of the major donors are pulling out. It is time to re-think our HIV & AIDS ministry so that it is properly owned by the church and its members. We need to see this as an opportunity rather

than a problem. You don't need huge funds to get alongside suffering people to love and support them. You don't need money to teach your children about a Christian lifestyle, or to influence your friends and colleagues to change their behaviour.

5.1.4 Development

We have begun to invest a lot of energy in our land at Jane Furse. In the next few years we need to find the best way to develop new plans for the old hospital and farm. Philip Moseki moved there at the beginning of this year to act as Project Manager.

Tlangelani, in the northern part of the Diocese also shows great potential and could become a pattern for similar projects in other parts of the Diocese. You will see that there is a motion to ratify the newly elected Executive. I am also grateful for the link that we have between Tlangelani, the Protestant University of Freiburg in Germany (which Sarah and I were able to visit last year), and the University of Venda.

5.2 The Christian Community

5.2.1 Reflecting on Sarah's Life and Death

As you know, Sarah suffered from a seriously malignant brain tumour for 8 ½ years until her death a few weeks ago. Reflecting on these last years of her life has taught me a lot about ministry. Rather than feeling sorry for herself, Sarah got involved in all sorts of ways:

- ✦ She gave Alpha talks at Christ Church and St Matthew's
- ✦ She served God at Christ Church by leading the Healing Team, coordinating Small Groups, training people in Christian Listening, leading worship, and doing a lot of counselling
- ✦ She was a constant support and listening ear to me in my challenging role as your Bishop.

On several occasions Sarah said to me that the only time she felt really well was when she was giving herself to God and others in ministry.

That is how the Christian life works! When we put ourselves first we lose out on the fullness of life. When we die to self and put God first then God blesses us beyond anything we could have expected.

5.2.2 The Real Thing

During the first part of this year, when Sarah's health was deteriorating alarmingly, I had to give more and more time to caring for her and being with her. On one occasion I was praying and said to God, "This illness is distracting me from my ministry as Bishop." God seemed to reply at once, "***This*** is the ministry I have called you to. ***This*** is the real thing".

God was reminding me, and I want to remind you, that the real work of the church is to reach out to those in need - to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, heal and care for the sick and suffering, and confront evil wherever it is present in our society. That is why we are trying to build strong, vibrant congregations. That is why we are multiplying parishes and planting new churches - not for ourselves, but because he has a mission for us in the world.

6 We Are God's Covenant People

We are God's Covenant people. The promise he made to me at the beginning of the year is also for us as a Diocese. If we give ourselves fully to him then his promise will hold true for us all:

"And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children," says the LORD, "from now on and forever." (Isaiah 59:21) †