

The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(Anglican Church of Southern Africa in Limpopo)

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Bishop's Charge to the 11th Diocesan Synod

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Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

1 Introduction

1.1 Thank You

Let me start with some expressions of thanks. It would take this whole charge to thank each person individually, so we will have to settle with a more general list. Thank you to:

- ✦ Everyone who is here at Synod, and for the contribution you are making
- ✦ The Diocesan Staff and Interns, who have worked long hours preparing everything
- ✦ The Dean and members of Chapter who constantly support and advise the Bishop on matters of spiritual leadership and personnel
- ✦ The Clergy and Staff at Christ Church Cathedral, who have a lot to do behind the scenes
- ✦ The Agenda Committee, which guides and supports the Bishop in planning and leading the Synod
- ✦ The Diocesan Officers who work hard behind the scenes: Chancellor, Registrar, Administrator and Bursar
- ✦ Those who have served the Diocese so well in the past and have moved on to other places or have died
- ✦ The caterers, intercessors, security people and others who will be working hard throughout Synod.

Fortunately, Dean Luke will propose a vote of thanks at the end of Synod... so he will make up for anyone I have omitted. But to all of you:

Thank you!

1.2 Diocesan Vision

The Diocesan Vision (printed at the bottom of each page of this Charge) has served us well. It keeps us focused on God's call to us and why we are here. Everything we do as the church in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist must serve this vision, which can be summarised in two key words of Jesus, "**make disciples**" (*Matthew 28:18-20*). Everything we discuss and decide as a Synod must be tested against this vision. It applies to us individually, as local churches, as a Diocese, and as citizens of Limpopo and South Africa.

This is only possible through the life that God gives us:

- ✦ The Father created this amazing universe and human beings with a special role to play (*Genesis 1:27-28*)

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

- ✦ Jesus redeemed us through his death and resurrection, and calls us to die daily to self so that we can live to God (*Galatians 2:19-20*)
- ✦ The Holy Spirit floods into our lives and churches with love and power, transforming us into God's image as we allow him to work in us (*2 Corinthians 3:18*).

2 Our Context

2.1 Creative Tension

There are a few “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” bushes in the garden at Bishopsmark (the Bishop's house). The flowers are three different colours from white (yesterday) to mauve (today) to purple (tomorrow). That strikes me as a good picture of the church: we have a long history, good and bad (yesterday); we are involved in all sorts of things now, successful and unsuccessful (today); and we have a great hope and many plans for the future (tomorrow).



Yesterday, today and tomorrow flowers

Ultimately everything and everyone must, and will, submit to God and his reign (*Philippians 2:10-11*). This is true for all people, churches and governments. We all exist to serve God's Kingdom of love, justice and peace. Under God's gracious rule we are all equal (although different). So the most important things we can do are to:

- ✦ Seek **God's will** for our individual and common lives – and grow in relationship with God as we do it
- ✦ Discover the **ministries** for which God has gifted us – and get equipped and use them to build up the church and glorify God
- ✦ Discern **God's mission** where we are – and join in to proclaim God's Kingdom in word and deed.

In these things we live in the creative tension between yesterday, today and tomorrow. At a theological level we know that God has already accomplished everything necessary to save the world. He is now working in society (including the church) to bring about his reign “on earth as it is in heaven.” One the last day (whether the ANC is in power or not!) Jesus will return to bring God's rule to perfection.

So my task in this charge is to highlight some of the key aspects of yesterday, today and tomorrow – and show what I believe we should be doing next in order to get to the tomorrow that God is preparing for us.

2.2 The Church

God's church is very unusual!

It is **not** primarily an **organisation**, although it has many characteristics of an organisation. Unlike a **business** it is not selling something, yet we do proclaim Good News and invite people to respond to it. And it is important to manage the property, finances and personnel properly. That is why we insist on proper meetings, accounting, and the like. Unlike a **political party** it the church not trying to rule the land, and its people are not supposed to compete with one another for positions of power. But we do have elections and democratic processes, and we do expect our leaders to lead with integrity, vision and courage. It is not a **burial society**, where people join and pay their “dues” in order to get service when they need it. But we do serve and care for our members, and those who are not our members, in countless ways. When the church puts all its focus on being an **organisation**, it loses its way and fails.

The church *is* primarily an **organism**, that lives, grows, can be healthy or sick, breathes the life of the Holy Spirit and dies when that breath is gone. It is the **body of Christ**, Jesus' physical presence in the world, and each of us is called to be part of it (*1 Corinthians 12:27*). The body is only healthy and effective when all its members are playing their part. The church is a **community of redeemed sinners**, far from perfect, yet allowing God to work in them and transform them according to his will (*Romans 12:1-2*). When we share our lives in love, acceptance and forgiveness something remarkable happens – we enter into fellowship, not only with one another, but with God himself (*1 John 1:1-4*). There is no greater joy than this! The church is **God's agent in the world** (although not the only one!) to be a sign of his reign and to work with others to make it a reality (*2 Cor 5:17-21*).

2.3 The World and South Africa

Scripture tells us that God **loves** the world (*John 3:16*). But, sadly, the world has not loved God in return or obeyed his commandments of love and holiness. As a result God's creation is seriously out of balance – and we can see the evidence of it in climate change including drought and natural disasters; poverty, corruption and injustice; suffering, illness and death; terrorism, massacres and war; conflict between unions, management and shareholders; abuse of women and children...

Yet in the midst of its failure, the mood of the world seems to be increasingly arrogant and hostile both to God and God's church! Most of the world's leaders have no idea which way to turn. The problems and challenges are simply too great. The world economy, based on debt and greed, is in serious trouble.

South Africa is a mixed bag. I think it *is* true to say that it is "a better place than it was in 1994", but it is far from the "rainbow nation" that we dreamed of! There are too many scandals, power struggles, experiences of load shedding, cuts in the water supply for anyone to boast of progress. Education is poor for most people, the health system only works well for the rich, and unemployment, especially among the youth, is too high. Partly as a result of that, crime is rampant.

In all this the church has Good News: God loves the world! We do not have all the answers, but we know the One who does. And we have an important role to play in partnership with the government, opposition parties, civil society, businesses, trade unions and other religions. Let us all humble ourselves, pray, seek God's will for the good of all and turn from what is wrong (*2 Chronicles 7:14*). In return God has promised to hear, forgive and heal.

3 Yesterday: Achievements

The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist is not yet 30 years old, yet with God we have achieved a lot! Sometimes, when I share with people who were once in the Diocese what God is doing and all the plans and vision we have, they are astounded. This is encouraging because from within it is often difficult to see the progress. **God is at work among us!** Thank you for the way you are working with God. Thank you, God, for working in the midst of our weakness!

3.1 Give Thanks To The Lord

Here are some of the areas where I can see God's hand at work:

- 1) **We have a tremendous sense of vision and mission.** I think we all understand that the church can never be static, we always have to be reaching forward for what God has waiting for us (*Philippians 3:10-14*).
- 2) Of course we fall short in many ways, but many people have commented to me that they can see that **we love one another**. That should not be strange in the church, because Jesus said it should be the mark of our life together, that all people may come to believe (*John 13:34-35*). God has blessed us with good relationships.

- 3) In the last eight years we have **multiplied** from 12 to 24 parishes, plus 3 United Churches and 1 Fresh Expression of Church in partnership with us (about 190 congregations in all). We also have St Mark's College and the University of Limpopo Chaplaincy. We have learnt a lot about how to multiply parishes – first forming clusters of chapelries within a parish, and then helping them to run increasingly independently until they are ready to become “independent” parishes.
- 4) I have dedicated a number of **Church Buildings** since Synod 2012, three new **Rectories** are almost complete in the Western Archdeaconry, and we have purchased a new **Deanery**.
- 5) We have seen **financial growth** in our budget and, thanks to the work of the Leadership Team, our vestry meetings are generally running more smoothly, with elections being conducted effectively.
- 6) **Ministry is growing** – we have more candidates offering themselves for the ordained ministry than we can manage to send to College and many young people are coming forward. This year we renewed the licenses of Lay Ministers, and the training of Worship Leaders, Preachers and Pastoral Carers is going well. The Guild of St Mark is well attended and well run.
- 7) Two **training programmes**, Rooted in Jesus and Langham Preaching, have become established and are starting to bear wonderful fruit in many of our parishes. With the help of Growing the Church (GtC) many other Dioceses and churches are also using these resources to make disciples and equip them for ministry.
- 8) **Christ Church Cathedral** is growing into its calling to be a centre of mission to the city of Polokwane and has shown a steady increase in numbers and finances.
- 9) There has been progress in **Community Development** initiatives – particularly at the Jane Furse Memorial Village (former Hospital and Farm), with Orphans and Vulnerable Children, and at Tlangelani. A few of our churches have started or expanded their drop-in and homework centres. The AWF has done great work in transforming part of the old Jane Furse Hospital into a Conference Centre – and we all need to get more involved with that process.
- 10) Our Chancellor, Matsaro Semanya, is setting up a **legal team** to serve the Diocese, and many of them are with us during this Synod. Welcome and thank you!

Give thanks to the Lord for he is gracious – and his mercy endures forever! Give thanks for God's people who offer themselves in mission, ministry and service.

3.2 Failures

It has been said that the cross of Jesus gives us the freedom to fail and make mistakes. God is in the business of resurrection, and failures are an opportunity to learn and try again. Here are some of our areas of failure:

- 1) Multiplication of parishes has not been without its casualties. Some of our new parishes are struggling, and we have one Chapelry in Matthew Nemakhavhani Parish (formerly the central cluster of Sibasa) where some of the leaders are in rebellion and refusing to submit to the Diocese. It is clear that having the right leaders is absolutely critical to the health and growth of the church.
- 2) We have not succeeded at making St Mark's College into a high quality “Public School on Private Land”, largely because of lack of cooperation from the Department of Education at District and Circuit level. Nor have we been able to make the transition to an Independent School for a number of reasons, especially an inability to raise the necessary funds. However, there is a new spirit of cooperation among the various interested parties, and we hope to be able to make St Mark's a good quality “**Anglican Church School**” in partnership with the Department of Education.

- 3) We do not have enough well trained, experienced clergy to meet the needs of our parishes in the next five years, particularly for Rectors. It takes in the region of R500,000 to train a Rector, and we do not have enough money to send all the available candidates to Theological College. And some of our parishes are not giving enough to support a Rector when the right person is found.

Let us turn to the Lord with renewed prayer and commitment, for he has promised to be with us always as we give ourselves to the great task of making disciples. Let us open ourselves anew to the resurrection power of Jesus, and the life and love of the Holy Spirit.

4 Tomorrow: Goals for Every Parish

Over the years, and arising from our vision, six specific goals have emerged for each parish to work towards. As I remind you of them, please think about your own church and ask yourself: **What is God calling me to do to make these things happen?** Most of the motions in our Agenda Books are aimed at helping us move towards meeting these goals.

4.1 A Stipendiary Rector to Give Leadership

In Anglican theology of the church, Rectors (or Priests in Charge) share the Bishop's ministry of oversight. Their task is to give vision, to help the church grow in theological understanding, to train, equip and release people for ministry. They also share in the wider ministry of the church in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist and Anglican Church of Southern Africa. In order to reach their full potential all parishes need to have "full-time", well trained leaders.

One of the biggest challenges facing us today is to find ways to train and appoint more Rectors for the very near future.

4.2 A Team of Self-Supporting ("Community") Clergy

Self-supporting clergy are not "cheap alternatives" to Stipendiary Rectors. But a team of such clergy is an enormous asset to a parish, particularly when it has a number of congregations, chapelries, organisations and ministries. When this system is working well, each Priest or Deacon serves according to the gifts God has given him or her, and the whole church benefits. The clergy also grow when they are part of a loving, supportive team.

Most of our parishes have such teams, and we can all thank God for those (self-supporting and retired clergy) who volunteer their services to God and the church. Where there are not teams of clergy we need to ask God to help us identify those he is calling so that we can train and set them apart for the ordained ministry.

4.3 Many Lay Leaders

I like to think of lay leaders in the church as falling into these three categories:

- ✦ **Licensed Lay Ministers:** those who are trained and authorised to lead as Pastoral Carers, Preachers and Worship Leaders. For a long time we have said that we also want to train and license Youth Pastors and Evangelists. We are starting to make progress with Youth Pastors, but still need to develop training for Evangelists.
- ✦ **Elected Leaders:** Churchwardens, council members, office bearers of organisations all play an important part in the life of the church. Through the Leadership Team we have made good progress in training all these leaders to work according to the Rules of the Diocese and Canons of ACSA.

- ✦ **Appointed Leaders:** people like treasurers, parish administrators and secretaries, adults who oversee the youth, sacristans, caterers and intercessors also play a vital part in the life of the church.

The more we give opportunities for people to lead in this way, and the more these leaders see themselves as **servants** of God and the church, the more effective we will be in making disciples.

4.4 A Church Supported Youth Pastor

We have had this goal on our list for a long time, but I see very little progress. Yet we have a large number of young people who are willing to volunteer in different ways. This year, however, we have two young Interns in Polokwane – serving at Christ Church Cathedral and the Diocesan Centre. I believe it would not be difficult for every parish to provide accommodation, pocket money and oversight for volunteers and interns to serve the church, while we organise training at Diocesan level.

This can easily be combined with the next goal:

4.5 Community Development Projects Wherever We have Property

If you think about it, we have a vast amount of church property and many buildings. Many of these are hardly used beyond Sundays (and Saturdays for funerals). Yet the needs of the community are enormous: drop-in centres for children, clinics, homework clubs, small businesses (making bricks, candles, wafers for communion, bread...), vegetable gardens, skills training. A few of our churches have this kind of initiative, usually inspired by one or two people who are ready to take initiative. Programmes like this can transform a community!

What if we combine this goal with the people from inside and outside the Diocese who are offering to serve as volunteers and interns? There is an **important motion coming to Synod about this**, arising from our Youth Synod. I believe it could be the start of a really exciting new direction for the church in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist.

4.6 All Members Discovering and Using Their Gifts

Scripture teaches that there are many different gifts, from overtly “spiritual” ones (like prophecy, healing, evangelism and pastoral care) to very “down to earth” ones (like catering, administration and serving the poor) (*Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, Ephesians 4:11-12*). Growing as disciples of Jesus means never being satisfied while there are people who just **“go to church”** instead of being **living members of the body of Christ!** That is where a programme like Rooted in Jesus is so valuable: when it is done properly in small groups of disciples God can use it to transform people and churches radically. So I challenge every parish to make sure that Rooted in Jesus (or the equivalent like Alpha Courses, or The God Who Is There) is taking place among all the people in an ongoing way – not only as Confirmation courses or Lay Minister training.

5 Today: Challenges and Opportunities

So, having reviewed where we have come from and some of our goals for the future, **what is God calling us to do now?** At our Diocesan Finance Board Lekgotla earlier this year we identified three priorities, and two things we must always bear in mind while implementing them. I hope that, after this Synod, we will work in practical ways to make these things real in our life.

5.1 Three Priorities

5.1.1 Practical Discipleship

Our people (not only in the church but everywhere) are crying out for practical teaching, guidance and help in how to live. The world teaches that happiness is in wealth, power and pleasure. But Jesus teaches that lasting joy is to be found when we lay down our lives and put God first! We need to show people how to do that in the everyday, practical challenges *of life* – questions like:

- ✦ How do I manage my money without getting into impossible debt?
- ✦ How do I handle difficult relationships at home, at school and at work?
- ✦ How can I organise my time better?
- ✦ How do I pray in a way that helps me to really connect with God?
- ✦ If I am a young person, how do I choose my husband or wife?
- ✦ How do I know what God is calling me to do with my life?
- ✦ How can I be a good citizen and help South Africa become a better place?

I challenge all preachers and teachers of God's word to do research, develop preaching series and resources, and share them with one another so that we can meet this need more effectively.

5.1.2 Multiplication with Transformation

Limpopo needs more churches of the kind that proclaim and live the kingdom of God (not places that serve the prosperity of the minister or self-appointed "prophet" or "apostle"). So we need to continue on the path of forming clusters of congregations multiplying parishes. Sekhukhuneland has already started with the inauguration of Moganyaka Mission, and the remaining parish has been organised into three clusters. Lebowakgomo and Tlhatlaganya (both covering enormous areas) need to start looking in that direction.

But we also need *new kinds of congregations* and churches that appeal to those (including many young people) who would never go to existing churches. Let me give a few examples:

- ✦ How about starting a 2nd Sunday service, at a different time, that is designed for those who are not attracted to your existing Sunday service?
- ✦ How about us planting a "township-style" church in Polokwane for those who are not looking for a Cathedral but for something more like home?
- ✦ Several of our leaders are receiving training this year in Mission Shaped Ministry and Fresh Expressions of church – how to start ministries that reach out with God's love to non-church people.

In a changing world we need to be ready to transform – without abandoning what is good and valuable in our heritage as Anglican Christians.

5.1.3 Community Development Using Church Facilities

I have already written about this in 4.5 above. But *now is the time to act!* South Africans tend to wait for the government, NGOs or overseas donors to do something. Let us leave that thinking behind and take responsibility as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. Get together with a few church members, do some basic research about needs, and get on with it! It is amazing how much can be done without a lot of money.

5.2 Two Things To Bear In Mind

5.2.1 Leadership Training – Especially Rectors

Everything worthwhile needs leadership, and our biggest need is to identify those whom God is calling as future Rectors of parishes in the Diocese. God is calling people, and many of them are offering themselves to the church for selection and training. But we need to raise a lot of money to

give them the best education and training possible. So, I would like to remind you of the decisions made by Diocesan Standing Committee in November last year:

- 1) To encourage people to give generously through special collections (e.g. during Lent, but also at other times) using the **Give for Growth** envelopes
- 2) To have a **Diocesan Family Day** (early in May next year) with special fund-raising
- 3) To ask all churches and organisations to **give a tithe** (10%) of their patronal festival or harvest collections to the Diocese for clergy training.

5.2.2 Involve the Youth in Everything!

The church in this Diocese is for **all its people** – including young people and children! So, the challenge is to think of them in everything we do. How do we get young people on to our Church Councils? How do we train and license them as Lay Ministers? How can we give opportunities to young interns and volunteers?

God clearly is wanting to do something here. In the last few months we have not only been approached by potential volunteers from within the Diocese. We also have people, many of them already qualified and experienced in one way or another, who are ready and willing to come (often at their own expense) from Cape Town, Germany, Australia, The USA, and England. I believe God is placing this challenge and opportunity before us, and a small team has already started work on this.

6 Two Final Images

Do you feel a bit overwhelmed and out of breath at all of this? I do! But I also know that God is not limited, and neither are we if we follow where God is leading in the power and love of the Holy Spirit. *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13).

So let me finish with two of my favourite images from the Bible. Both of them remind us that following Jesus is not about instant results, but a process.

First, the early Christians called themselves **people of the Way**. They saw themselves as on a life-long journey with one another and in the company of Jesus. A good example is to be found in the walk to Emmaus in *Luke 24:13-35*. As they travelled together with Jesus, discussing the Scriptures and breaking bread (communion), their eyes were opened and they discovered God's resurrection life. We are on a journey of discovery together. Sometimes it will be hard and slow, but God will lead us into amazing things if we walk with him.

Second is the image of a river: **the river of life** in *Ezekiel 47:1-12* and *Revelation 22:1-2 & 15*. If we allow ourselves to be deeply rooted in God's love, drinking deeply the living water of the Holy Spirit, then God can do anything through us. God will produce fruit that feeds the deepest needs of the world. God will use us to bring life and healing to the nations, especially our own country and communities. The trees don't have to **try** to produce fruit and healing leaves – they grow because the water of life flows through them. It will be the same with us.

So, beloved in Christ, **let us travel together as God's yesterday, today and tomorrow people**. Let us give thanks for all that God has done, and repent of all that has been wrong (is there anyone here who has not made any mistakes?). Let us strain forward together towards the goals that God has set before us (*Philippians 3:10-14*). And let us walk with him now in trust and obedience.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (*Ephesians 3:20-21*)

†Martin Breytenbach