

The Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

(The Anglican Church in Limpopo Province)

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Ad Clerum: Eastertide 2013

To All Clergy
Copies to all Churchwardens
Copies to Diocesan Organisations

Please share this with God's people in your parish!

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our crucified, risen, ascended Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – who sends the Holy Spirit to empower us for life, ministry and mission.

An important part of my calling as your Bishop is to keep reminding you of the vision God has given us, and to keep challenging and encouraging all of us to make it a reality. As I write to you I have been preparing my report for Diocesan Standing Committee on Saturday – so this Ad Clerum and its Notices will cover much the same ground. It is about some of the Big Issues that are facing us as a church at this time.

Big Issues

The New Testament Lesson for Saturday (when we have DSC) and Sunday 21st covers the same text... so perhaps God want to speak to us from it:

³¹Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

³²Now as Peter went here and there among all the believers, he came down also to the saints living in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed. ³⁴Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!" And immediately he got up. ³⁵And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

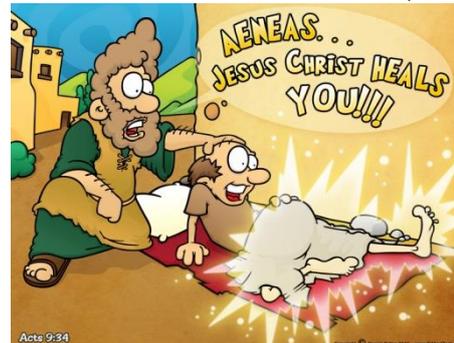
³⁶Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."

³⁹So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing

tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

⁴²This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

(Acts 9:31-43)



1 Missional Church

God was at work powerfully in the early church *because* it was totally missional. By this I mean that it existed to continue the mission that Jesus had begun and on which Jesus had sent them (*John 20:20-23*).

So in this text we see how it knew God's peace, kept growing in spiritual depth and maturity, and increased in numbers (31). Why was this?

- 1) Because they were living in the *fear of the Lord*. There was a sense of wonder and awe as they saw God working among them.
- 2) They were also experiencing the *comfort* (which means the power and strength) of the *Holy Spirit*.

We read about Peter in particular. Clearly he had an amazing gift of healing – as Jesus worked through him to raise up a paralysed man and even a dead woman! But did you notice how he pointed away from himself to Jesus? "Jesus Christ heals you", he said to Aeneas. As a result

many people in the region of Sharon and city of Joppa turned to the Lord and put their faith in God (35, 43).

When we use our gifts, whatever they are, to serve God's mission, God works in amazing ways and we become the missional church that he called us to be. One of the secrets is not to come up with our own plans and ideas, but to learn to recognise what God is doing and then join in (e.g. Barnabas in *Acts 11:23-24*).

Much of this is summed up beautifully in a book I am reading at the moment¹:

"Church happens when a group of people decide to go on mission with God together." (p46)

*God's church is a **missional** church, a community that is sent and given away for God's purposes."* (p48)

What does all this mean for us? ***If we are not a Diocese "in mission" then we are not the church Jesus called into being!*** Our congregations have no choice but to be missional if we want to call ourselves followers of Jesus. So, for example:

- ✦ Our large parishes need to be asking, what is the next stage of multiplying, forming clusters, or planting new congregations for us?
- ✦ All our churches and organisations need to be making concrete plans to make disciples – using, for example, Rooted in Jesus.

2 Parish Leadership

Let's look at the early church in our text again. Peter (the impetuous, rough fisherman) had matured into an amazing servant-leader. Look at some of the things he did:

- 1) He was present among the people, not over and above them – a true pastor (32) who knew his people because he spent time with them.
- 2) He was ready to respond to their urgent request, when Dorcas had died and they didn't know what to do (39). He went down to Joppa at once and took time to listen to them and look at what they showed him before offering any solutions.
- 3) His first instinct was to pray (40a) before leaping into action. I can just imagine what he prayed: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"
- 4) When God gave him direction, he acted in faith. First he said to her, "Get up!" (40b) and then put his words to action by helping her up (41).
- 5) Finally, he stayed there with the people a bit longer (42) to pastor, teach and encourage them.

That is the kind of leader (both lay and ordained) that we need! My experience of most of our people as I travel from church to church is that *they want to grow spiritually*. Like the people of Sharon and Joppa many are going through sickness and suffering (33) and times of personal crisis (38). They need godly leaders to walk alongside them.

But is that the kind of leadership we see in the church, and in our parishes in particular? I'm afraid the best I can say is, "Sometimes". Thank you to those who are godly, Spirit-filled, servant-leaders!

Sadly, too many church leaders forget what it is all about and become committed to other agendas. These can be personal gain, or promoting one group against the rest, or a host of things. In the process they hold back the people who want to serve God, and do immense damage to the church.

All I can say is, ***Choose godly leaders!*** Don't be seduced by those who are rich or influential or speak with smooth tongues. (Of course there is nothing wrong with people who are rich or influential if they have surrendered to Christ!) If you choose bad leaders then it is *you* and *your church* that suffers.

3 Clergy Formation

This flows from the previous section. The Diocese will face a big crisis in a few years time if we don't act now. Our clergy are key leaders and all of us are getting older. Some have reached retirement age, and a number of others will do so in the next few years.

Since 2006 we have multiplied from 12 to 24 parishes, and we plan to reach 35 in the near future. That means we will need 35 Rectors and Priests in Charge. What is more, we have lost some of those we were preparing – to the Government (especially the Police), death, spouses getting work elsewhere, and sin.

Where will we find enough ordained leaders for the future?

- 1) Most of them will have to come from among our ***young people*** of today. And the good news is that there are many youth in our church who believe that God may be calling them in this way.
- 2) Fortunately we have ***young clergy*** in training and growing in experience too! We need to nurture them and help them to grow as spiritual leaders. For this reason Chapter and I are planning a special fellowship day for our young clergy and their spouses.
- 3) We are blessed with a number of excellent ***self-supporting ("Community") priests and deacons*** who are open to moving into "full-time" stipendiary ministry. Chapter and I are planning to meet with them on Wednesday 26th June at Christ Church Cathedral to explore the way forward.
- 4) A few can come from ***outside the Diocese***, but we should not rely on this source! Bitter experience has taught us that it is not easy for those from other countries, and even other Dioceses in South Africa, to integrate into our church and cultures.

So, please ***join me in praying that God will raise up godly, Spirit-filled people for the ordained ministry in the***

¹ Hugh Halter & Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*. Zondervan "Exponential" Series, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010

Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist – especially those who can serve as Rectors of parishes.

4 Young People

This leads me to talk about young people. *I have a dream*, that we can establish a programme to train and mentor young people as Christian disciples and leaders – and then send them out to serve as Youth Pastors in our parishes and congregations.

Have you heard this before? Yes of course, not only from me, but it was a reality in the early years of the Diocese under †Philip. This can be a powerful way of identifying those whom God is calling to long-term leadership in the church. I believe that we **must** find a way, under God's guidance, to make it happen.

It is not as if we are starting from nowhere... Many of the things we are doing with our young people can feed into such a programme, for example:

- ✦ Our **Youth Camp** last year, with the wonderful SOMA team from Sabah in Malaysia, was an enormous success, and many of our young people are asking for more.
- ✦ **Rooted in Jesus** is taking place in a growing number of our churches, especially as an essential part of Confirmation preparation. And we are starting to see the fruit of this. A number of young people received training to lead Rooted in Jesus themselves at our training conference in March.
- ✦ I have tasked Shearsby Mupfudzapake, with Lesiba Meso and Kwena Makgoka, to oversee plans to take **Youth Discipleship** further in the Diocese. They will be meeting with leaders on Saturday 11th May.

As some of you know, I am going to Singapore next month to teach at a Christian Conference for students, organised by St Andrew's Cathedral. At the invitation of †Albert Vun, I will also visit the Diocese of Sabah in Eastern Malaysia – where our SOMA mission team came from last year. I have two special goals:

- 1) To learn more about their "**Ambassadors**" youth training programme (see my dream above!) and see if we can partner with them in some way.
- 2) To learn more about their **Worship and Music Academy**, to see if we can establish something like that here.

Perhaps a team from Sabah would also be open to coming here on mission again!

5 Financial Issues

You will be glad to know that I don't have much to say about this here. But *I do draw your attention to everything in the Ad Clerum Notices* – these are some challenging and exciting developments.

Money must serve God's mission! And we must make sure that we give generously and manage it wisely to the glory of God.

6 Diocesan Communications

I am very grateful to Dean Luke Pretorius who has established a very active and forward thinking Diocesan Communications Team.

As a result, DFB has agreed to move our Diocesan Web Site to be hosted by Growing the Church. We will also be buying into the online database, "MyAnglican" which GtC is developing. This will benefit all of us and cost us less than we are spending on these things at present.

Please see the notices for how your church can benefit from these developments.

7 HIV and AIDS

Finally, let's go back to our text from *Acts 9:31-43*. Did you notice what an important role the mothers and widows played in the life of the early church?

Tabitha, or Dorcas (both names mean Gazelle in different languages) was first of all a devoted Christian disciple (36). This led her into action, and she set an example in her generous acts of charity and good deeds.

Then she died, and the whole church was in shock. I can picture all the people gathered around Peter beside her body, weeping and showing him the clothes she had made for them (39). They really loved her and she had touched them with the love of God. Praise God, he did a great miracle and she was raised up to live again!

Things have not changed. Our women's organisations (Mothers Union and AWF) are still absolutely central to the life and mission of the church. Recently they (particularly the MU) have agreed to take greater responsibility for the Diocesan HIV and AIDS ministry – particularly for working with orphans and vulnerable children. I am particularly grateful for Pat Lennox and Rosina Ledwaba for making this happen.

Good news is that we have found funding for Nyaradzo Matsane to continue her work overseeing this ministry in the Diocese, at least for now. Please pray that this funding can be extended for the next few years.

But the challenge to the whole church is to be part of this ministry, and to support it. Did you notice that, when Dorcas died, it was the *men* who went to call Peter (38)! In the same way we must all, men and women, work together to care for those who are suffering and vulnerable in our communities.

Yours in Christ,

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the Evangelist

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