

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,

On Easter Sunday, my little 4 year old granddaughter came running to her parents from Sunday School, smiling with joy and shouting, “Mommy! Jesus is alive!” That has to be the most amazing, revolutionary, life-changing, world-transforming news ever.

May you also experience the resurrection joy of Easter – and may God empower you to proclaim and teach that good news in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Praying and Planning

There are some big challenges (which are also opportunities) facing the Diocese in the next year, so I want to help us to start preparing for them. The first is **Diocesan Synod** (our “Parliament”) which takes place once every three years; the second is the **election of a new Bishop** (because I retire at the end of February 2019).

First, as I often do, let me remind you what we are all about as a Diocese. We have embraced the “Great Commission” of Jesus – when he commanded his disciples to **make disciples of all nations**, and to continue to do that until he returns (Matthew 28:18-20). So, **everything we do** must be to take forward the vision of the Diocese:

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

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

This is not something that we have to do on our own or in our own strength. I join Paul in praying that all of us will be able to fulfil our calling in the resurrection power of Jesus – and in fellowship with God: Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. As you read through these verses look for the work of the three Persons of the Trinity, and ask God to give you a fresh anointing of this power for your life, mission and ministry. And pray for the people of your parish or organization, that they also may come to experience all that Paul is writing about.

I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know him. I ask that your minds may be opened to see his light, so that you will know what is the hope to which he has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people, and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. (Ephesians 1:17-20)

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

Let us also tackle the challenges of the coming year in the resurrection love and power of Jesus.

1 Diocesan Synod

16th-19th August at Christ Church Cathedral

Synod gives us an opportunity to review our life as a Diocese and seek God's will for the next season. I will deliver the Bishop's Charge (my 8th and final one since 2000!) in which I try to identify what God has been doing among us, and where I think he is leading us. We will look at changes to our Diocesan Rules to help us to be more effective as the church in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist. We will consider the reports of parishes, archdeaconries, organizations and ministries. We will debate and vote on motions about our life as a church and issues that are facing the world and South Africa (and Limpopo in particular). We will elect people to represent the Diocese in various important ways – one of the most critical being the Electoral Advisory Committee that will oversee the election of the next Diocesan Bishop.

1.1 Preparing for Synod

The Canons of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) lay down a clear time-line for all that has to be done in preparation for Synod. Here are the most important items with their deadlines. In between the deadlines the Agenda Committee will meet to oversee the process.

- 16th April **Summons to Synod**
 The summonses to licensed clergy, parishes, organisations and office bearers were given out at DSC on Saturday 14th April. Unfortunately some of those present did not take theirs... and some did not take those for clergy in the same parish who were not present. We are doing our best to get them to everyone as soon as possible. If you visit the Diocesan Centre, please collect summonses for clergy you will see, and for your parish or organization.
 Later in the year we will send invitations to clergy and others who are not summonsed (eg retired clergy) but may like to attend.
- 14th May **Submission of proposed rule changes**
 Sometimes we become aware of changes that are needed in our rules (the way we govern ourselves as a Diocese). Often this is because the world is always changing; or because we realize that something isn't working as well as it should.
 If you think one of our rules should be changed, please submit your proposal to the Diocesan Office before 14th May, giving a brief motivation for the change. It doesn't have to be perfect – the Agenda Committee will work on it, and the Synod process will refine it.
- 7th June **Publication of the First Agenda Book**
 This book will have a lot of information about Synod – proposed times, themes, details about dress, proposed synod office bearers, as well as any rule changes and motions that have been submitted at this stage.
 We will also include a template for the reports that have to be submitted to Synod.
- 5th July **Amendments to rule changes**
 If you believe that one of the proposed rule changes could be improved, you may submit a proposed amendment to that rule change at this stage – although there will be plenty of opportunities to amend (or reject) proposed rule changes at Synod.
- 16th July **Submission of motions and reports**
 Motions may be submitted on anything affecting the life of the church, or anything that you believe God wants us to say to the nation or wider world community. *Please do your best to submit these reports and motions electronically – by email or on a disk. This saves a lot of extra work.*

26th July **Publication of the Second Agenda Book**
All the remaining items of information will be included in this Agenda book – especially reports and motions.

1.2 During Diocesan Synod: 16th-19th August 2018

I will propose to the Synod Agenda Committee that we follow a similar outline to the one that has served us well in recent Synods:

- Thursday 16th at 18:00 **Opening Eucharist and Bishop's Charge**
All members of Synod should be present at this grand occasion. We will also have a team of intercessors to cover the proceedings of Synod in prayer. Our Interns and some youth leaders will serve as "runners" and helpers throughout Synod. We also invite prominent members of society to join us: the Premier of Limpopo, the Mayors of Polokwane and Capricorn, Leaders of other churches and Ecumenical bodies like the South African Council of Churches in Limpopo.
- Friday 17th **Diocesan Rules (1st Reading) and Reports**
Rule changes undergo the same process as changes to laws in parliament, with three readings. In the *1st reading* we consider the principle of the proposed change. If that is approved it goes to committee for work on the detailed wording, and this is reported back for the *2nd reading*. If those details are approved the rule change is left to rest for a day and then returns for final approval in the *3rd reading*. This process is designed to prevent us from making rash or careless changes. The Diocesan legal team is on hand to help the Bishop preside over this process. Reports give us an opportunity to record progress, challenges and plans in all the different areas of Diocesan life.
- Saturday 18th **Finances, Rules (2nd Reading) and Motions**
We will receive a financial report, elect Diocesan Auditors for the next 3 years, and have a presentation of the proposed Diocesan Budget for 2019. This will be an unusual budget because of my retirement at the end of February and the election, consecration (if necessary) and installation of a new Bishop later in the year. We will also do the 2nd reading of rule changes, and consider motions. In addition to the motions that were submitted ahead of time, there are 3 other kinds of motions that can be added to the agenda if time permits:
- 1) Items arising from the Bishop's charge
 - 2) Items relating to important events that have taken place after the deadline for motions to be submitted
 - 3) "Unopposed" motions of greeting, congratulations or condolences.
- Sunday 19th **Final Business**
We will start the day by joining Christ Church Cathedral in a combined Eucharist. After that we have the Synod elections, 3rd and final reading of rule changes, and any outstanding motions. We hope to finish by lunch time

Now is the time to start preparing for Diocesan Synod! Please pray for Synod, start thinking about any rule changes or motions that God may be leading you to submit, and begin to prepare reports. I find it helpful to think about two questions in particular:

- ✦ What is God saying to the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist?
- ✦ What does God want us to say to the world?

May we have a godly, Spirit-filled, life-giving Synod from 16th to 19th August this year!

2 Electing a New Diocesan Bishop

This is something that doesn't happen often – there have been only two Diocesan Bishops since the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist was established in 1987! It is important to seek God and get it right because a Bishop can be in office for a long time... Please note also that a Diocesan Bishop can be from anywhere in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), or anywhere in the world, of any race group, male or female.

2.1 My Last Year as Diocesan Bishop

It is amazing to think that I am in my 19th year as your Bishop. I have loved my time in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist, but am convinced that it is time for me to step down and for you to get fresh leadership. During this last year I am acutely aware that each visit to a parish is probably my last – it is also exciting to be able to introduce Ma-bishop Colleen to the people.

I have three particular goals for this year. Please work with me to make them a reality!

- 1) To continue what we have started, particularly in these areas:
 - ✦ Multiplying parishes – the next possible multiplications are in Sekhukhuneland
 - ✦ Training leaders at all levels (with a special focus on young people)
 - ✦ Making disciples who make disciples (2 Timothy 2:2).
- 2) To make sure that every ministry at Diocesan level has clear leaders, so that things don't have to grind to a halt while waiting for the new Bishop to take office.
- 3) To try to get all parish pledges up to date. That was a wonderful gift that the Diocese gave me when I started, and I would love to be able to do the same for my successor.

2.2 Election of a New Bishop

This is an important and sensitive process, so let me say at the outset that I hope to **help the Diocese prepare** for a good election. But I am determined **not to interfere** with who gets elected – that would be a very foolish thing to do indeed! Of course, once you have elected a new Bishop I will do my best to help him or her with information and any support they ask for.

As I mentioned in the last *Ad Clerum*, there are four questions that we need to address:

- 1) What is the ministry of a Bishop?
- 2) What are we doing when we elect a Bishop?
- 3) What is the process of electing a Bishop? (It will take place when the Archbishop decides, probably in the first half of 2019)
- 4) How should we behave during that process?

Let's think about the first two questions in this letter.

2.2.1 What is the Ministry of a Bishop?

First of all, there are some things that are **not** part of a Bishop's life or ministry! It is **not**:

- ✦ Not *power and glory* – people often see the Bishop in all his robes at confirmations and other big events, but actually there is very little power! Mostly it is hard work, and trying to influence people to follow God and God's ways.
- ✦ Not *wealth* – basically the Bishop gets the same stipend and allowances as Rectors, and the house belongs to the Diocese. It is definitely not a way to get rich!
- ✦ Not *popularity* – it is nice when people love the Bishop and are kind to him... but one often has to make difficult or unpopular decisions or enforce church discipline. I have been called some terrible things and some people don't like the Bishop at all!
- ✦ Not *better than* lay people, deacons or priests! It is one of many callings in the church. Bishops are called to help and guide the people of God as they grow in discipleship and give themselves to God in mission and ministry.
- ✦ Not a *hot line to God* – Bishops also make mistakes, although they do their best to be in good communication with God through prayer and Bible study, and to make wise decisions.

So, what is the ministry of a Bishop and what does it involve?

Although it can be *lonely* (usually you are the *only* Bishop in the Diocese), it is a *shared ministry* – like all authentic Christian ministry. It is exercised in fellowship with the other Bishops of ACSA, which is partly why I so enjoy going to Synod of Bishops, where we can support, encourage and challenge one other. In the Diocese the Bishop also doesn't act alone, but works closely with the Dean, Archdeacons and other members of Chapter, and the Diocesan office staff.

The life and ministry of a Bishop involves a lot of *travelling*, especially around the Diocese – you are in a different church every Sunday and it is always a big occasion. It is quite hard not to be part of one church where you share your life with a smaller community. On the other hand you are a very public person. Wherever you go, it is likely that someone will recognise you or know you. So, a Bishop needs to make sure that his *lifestyle* is above reproach and an example to all.

The Bishop of a Diocese is called upon to play many different *roles* in the church and wider community. Here are some that have been important to me:

- ✦ The Bishop is part of the *support system for the church*, which is the people of God. As God's people engage in discipleship, mission and ministry the Bishop is called to exercise a *servant role*: giving pastoral care and counsel, praying for the church and its people, enforcing the discipline of the church, conducting confirmations, and many more.
- ✦ People in church and society look to the Bishop for *leadership*: giving vision and direction, ordaining and deploying clergy and appointing other leaders at Diocesan level, serving as "liaison Bishop" for some ministries in ACSA (eg I have been liaison Bishop for ASF, GtC, SOMA, Provincial Finance Board...), working with other churches and faith communities.
- ✦ The Bishop oversees *teaching and training* in the Diocese: making sure that clergy, lay ministers, churchwardens and church councils all have adequate training and are growing in faith and as disciples of Jesus. As a Bishop of the wider church, he is sometimes called to *guard the truth of the gospel* (2 Timothy 1:14) when people try to change the message or water it down.
- ✦ Bishops also do a lot of church *management*: serving on, and often chairing, meetings like Diocesan and Provincial Trustees, Diocesan Finance Board and the Diocesan Office.

So you are looking for someone of godly character, who also has the gifts to fulfil those roles. Of course no one has all the gifts, and the Bishop must be able to delegate and share leadership and tasks with others. And nobody is without sin, but you are looking for someone who is growing in God's love and grace. We need to be able to see the fruit of the Spirit and evidence of a fruitful ministry.

2.2.2 What are we Doing when we Elect a Bishop?

The word "election" immediately brings to mind the kind of political elections we have in a democratic state. And it is true that the election of a Bishop does involve a democratic, voting process. However, it is also very different from a political election – or at least it should be!

In a *political election* we have winners and losers. There is a campaign in support of one candidate and against others. Those who are standing make election promises – I have heard of candidates for Bishop promising that they will appoint someone as Dean, or to a desirable parish if they nominate or support him! I have also heard of people being threatened with punishment if they fail to support a particular candidate. A political election is often about popularity, and who has the most popular policies. Sometimes it is even about the tribe or race of the candidates! At the elective assembly, and sometimes in the run-up to it, "character assassination" takes place, where dreadful things are said or "revealed" about one or another candidate. Please don't indulge in any of those things. They don't glorify God and they won't get you the best Bishop.

The election of a Bishop is a process of *spiritual discernment*. We are trying to hear what **God** is saying and who **God** is calling. So the whole process needs to be preceded by *prayer* and surrounded with prayer. There needs to be a lot of *listening* to God and one another. While there should not be any *campaigning*, there should be plenty of *open discussion* and looking around for suitable candidates. Throughout the process there should be love and *respect* for all, especially those who make themselves available for election. It is a

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very vulnerable and scary place to be! The wonderful thing is that, when an episcopal election takes place in this way, there are no “losers”, because God’s will is done and everyone benefits.

So, what kind of process will you have? In Galatians 5:16-25 Paul compares doing things in “the flesh” with doing them in “the Spirit”. Doing things according to the flesh, our sinful human nature, leads to death. Doing them in the Spirit, surrendered to God, leads to life and peace. But it requires us to surrender our own will to that of God – to “crucify” the flesh.

Here are some of the critical words that contrast these two ways of doing things:

The flesh

People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious... (Galatians 5:19-21)

The Spirit

But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

I pray that the process of electing a new Bishop in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist will be Holy Spirit led and filled, and will produce fruit of life and love for years to come. And in all this, **to God be the glory in the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist.**

3 Trip to Malaysia and Singapore

As I write, Colleen and I are preparing to leave for 11 days in Malaysia and Singapore. I will be participating in a meeting of the “Jesus Shaped Life” group, which is guiding the Season of Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-Making in the Anglican Communion. Apart from the meeting in Kuala Lumpur, we will be ministering in Johor Bahru, a city in the south of Western Malaysia, and visiting friends of the Diocese in Singapore.

After that I will be in Johannesburg for a while, for the SOMA (Sharing of Ministries Abroad) Council and GtC (Growing the Church) Board meetings. We expect to get back to Polokwane on 9th May.

Please continue to pray for the next Anglicans Ablaze Conference (3rd-6th October) and do go ahead and register! On line at www.anglicansablaze.org or phone the Diocesan Office for help.

Have a blessed Eastertide, Ascension and Pentecost. May you and your people draw close to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessings,



†Martin: St Mark the Evangelist