



ANGLICAN BISHOP

DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG



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PASTORAL LETTER - POST SYNOD

Dear Saints

It is with joy and thanksgiving that I write to you following the successful conclusion of the 65th Synod of the Diocese of Johannesburg. We began our sitting in the beautiful surroundings of St Margaret of Scotland Parish Church of Bedfordview, where I delivered my Charge, the full text of which can be found on our website. We had to move the venue from our traditional one of the Cathedral of St Mary the Virgin, owing to prolonged power outages in downtown Johannesburg. Thereafter we moved to the equally beautiful environment of the Bishop Bavin School in Bedfordview, where we were superbly hosted by this Diocesan school which carries the name of one of my predecessors.

Much of the business of the first two days, Friday 8th and Saturday 9th September, was spent with delegates poring over motions that were largely aimed at cleaning up administrative and similar issues in our Diocesan rules and regulations. These were many and varied and I shall mention only some here - in due course, all the motions passed by Synod will appear on our website.

One of the most significant measures that will affect all Parishes was the announcement that the Diocese has concluded new arrangements with the Standard Bank that will benefit us all. This requires those Parishes and other organisations and institutions that do not at present have their accounts with the Standard Bank to move them there. Some of these benefits include the opportunity to invest directly with Standard Bank in due course (as opposed to the Diocesan deposit account), a highly competitive interest rate on deposits, reduced banking charges, and a massive decrease by two thirds in the costs of depositing cash directly into accounts. More details of this are available from the Diocesan office. Training by the Diocese for Parishes remains a high priority and is being standardised.

Amendments to the medical aid provisions were passed after a full debate. This is an important motion, and I would urge you to consult the Diocesan website to read it in all its detail, rather than cherry-pick just some of its important aspects here.

As always, motions with financial implications elicited mixed emotions from the floor. There was discord; there was pain. This is to be expected in a Diocese whose Parishes comprise a membership from the poorest of the poor to very wealthy. We could rejoice at the end of these debates, however, in the fact that there was an acceptance and understanding of these differences and a commitment to find equitable solutions to these massive challenges that confront us as a Diocese. Financial matters affecting the Church require transparency at all times. With this in mind, Synod passed a motion instructing Parish Councils to publish their monthly Parish accounts for the information of the entire Parish, in addition to considering them at Parish Council meetings. Your constant prayers for us to find workable solutions to these challenges are important, and I urge us to continue to engage with one another in finding solutions, especially to one of the biggest issues facing this Diocese which is how to work with Parishes that are in financial distress.

No debate at Synod illustrated this more than that regarding the report of the commission that looked into the future of St John the Divine in Belgravia. Two options regarding the future of this historic parish were presented: to keep it open in the face of the financial and logistical challenges facing it, or to close it. The area served by St John the Divine has undergone, and is still undergoing, major changes in the make-up of the folk living there. There are also other Anglican Parishes nearby. That said, the point was made that the challenge presented by the Parish could be God calling us to new forms of ministry for our Anglican Church in the area. Several delegates committed themselves to working in a team to resuscitate the Parish in the event of Synod agreeing to keeping it open. This Synod did with 151 voting in favour, 84 against, and 31 abstentions - a clear majority. Our prayers and pastoral support for the members of St John the Divine and those who will join them now in seeking to resurrect this Parish which had been closed for nearly two years are now more urgent than ever. I pray that God's Spirit will wing over the earth which Belgravia covers, in the words of John Bell's hymn,

".....resting where she wishes,
lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;
(nesting) in the womb,
welcoming each wonder,
nourishing potential hidden to our eyes."

(John L. Bell, Hymn 259, Ancient and Modern, Hymns and Songs for Refreshing Worship)

The creation of the Diocesan Council, which meets between Synods was seen as an important move by Synod, as was its composition. It stimulated keen debate and an amendment to the initial suggested membership to ensure a wider representation of Parish Councils and organisations. I urge all Parishes to play their full part in this important body of our Diocese.

Sunday 10th September saw Synod turn to consideration of motions which have relevance to the world in which we live, minister and witness. These include a motion charging me to immediately establish a Diocesan Gender Ministry which would operate in line with the strategic goals of the provincial gender desk which include combating gender based violence, offering counseling and support, using inclusive language, raising awareness about human sexuality, forming Church policy and sourcing funding. Given the contents of my own Charge to Synod, I was pleased to see this motion and trust that it will be fully embraced by all our Parishes, organisations and schools. A related motion was one which highlighted the abuse of women and children and its spirit and detail will be considered by the Diocesan Gender Ministry which I will soon call into being.

Youth development was another motion which spoke to the contents of my Charge, and Synod agreed to the re-establishment of a Diocesan Young People's Ministry which would look at in-house training, organise potential opportunities for young people, and identify skills development programmes to provide stabilisation for our youth as they seek to use their skills for the betterment of society.

It was also pleasing to see that Synod once again recognised the importance of staying abreast of environmental issues and the need to protect our heritage in this respect. African indigenous spirituality and its impact on our work as an Anglican Church, received attention, and Synod agreed that a commission be established to examine its impact and unintended consequences on our Anglican churchpersonship.

A subject that will remain on the agenda of the Anglican Church worldwide for the foreseeable future, that of the LGBTIQ community, was one of the last to be debated at Synod and stimulated deep and moving contributions. Synod heard the need to give pastoral care, which it had failed previously to do, in ministering to Anglicans who are members of this community. It noted that there was nothing to stop the Diocese having pastoral guidelines in this respect, with the motion pointing out that as early as the 1990s the Diocese had passed a motion calling for pastoral support to be given to homosexual persons that needed to focus on healing and wholeness, counseling and guidance, support and comfort, reconciliation and spiritual growth. Synod noted further that while dialogue had occurred in many parts of the Diocese, no formal guidelines existed to assist LGBTIQ parishioners and clergy in dealing with homophobia in the classroom and workplace, relationships, the adoption of children, the death of a partner, and understanding a person's sexual orientation. In the light of this, I have been instructed as your Bishop to establish a task team that includes clergy and laity from this community to provide such guidelines that may be implemented both in our own Diocese and forwarded to the Synod of Bishops and the Archbishop of Cape Town for broader consideration. The motion was passed by an overwhelming majority after an amendment had been passed calling for the development and provision of these guidelines so that discrimination against Parishioners who are LGBTIQ can be eliminated and that such guidelines be made available to those members who are "in or intend on entering same sex civil unions or civil marriage". Synod emphasised, and I wish to underline this, that this was not a

motion supporting such unions, but one that dealt wholly with providing pastoral support to this community - something Jesus would most certainly had done as he illustrated to us countless times in his ministry on earth.

In keeping with our wonderful tradition of recognising the many gifts and skills which our clergy and laity share with us so willingly, we were able to give thanks for those faithful saints who are no longer with us, and others who continue to contribute to our work. In particular, we recorded in a motion proposed by one of our retiring priests, Father Godfrey Henwood, our recognition of Canon Eric Richardson, who died recently at the age of 104 years and 11 months after 83 years of faithful service as a priest to his Lord and Saviour.

In concluding, let me say that I had a warm response to my Charge in which I specifically charged all Parishes, organisations and schools in the Diocese of Johannesburg to implement at least three of the issues I pointed out that need addressing. One of these had to be the issue of racism and others from which a choice can be made by Parishes, schools and organisations include the abuse of women, human trafficking, the LGBTIQ issue and marginalised groups, poverty, and state capture.

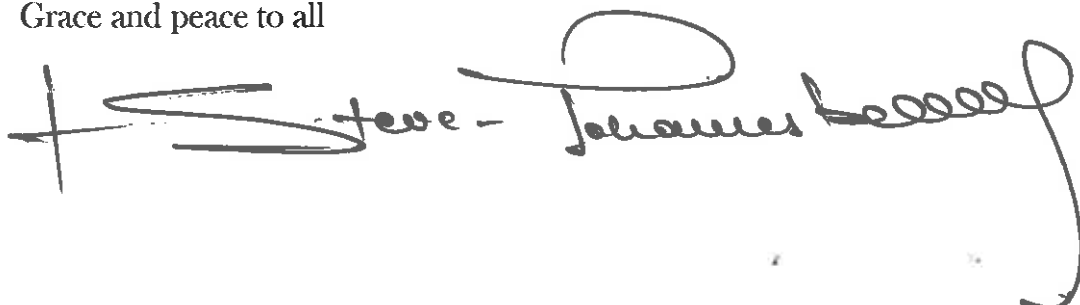
I have charged that I receive an annual report on what work has been done in these matters, at the time of Vestry, and then also to the next Diocesan Synod.

My dear fellow Anglicans, there is much to do in the vineyard of our Lord. We are in the midst of the Season of Creation, and there is no better opportunity to use the inspiration that should come to us at such a time to find new ways of responding to the call of Jesus and to bring about fresh ministries to once again enliven our Church and its work and our people.

The Collect for the Sunday on which we met in Synod could not have been more apt with which to end:

Eternal God
You crown the year with goodness
And you give us the fruits of the earth in their season:
grant that we may use them to your glory
for the relief of those in need
and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever,
Amen.

Grace and peace to all

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve - Johannes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end.

The Rt Revd Dr. Steve Moreo