



FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ANGLICAN BISHOP DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG



Our Vision is: To Achieve the Practice of the Ministry of All Believers

Pastoral letter Vol 6 Pentecost 2020

My fellow saints

The Holy Spirit is moving amongst us! I share this conviction as we prepare to celebrate Pentecost on this coming Sunday. As I have worked with my fellow clergy, lay leadership and ordinary Anglican members, and especially the youth, I have come to a renewed understanding that the Holy Spirit is in our midst as each of us, as Anglicans in our diocese, responds to the challenges posed by the pandemic sweeping the world.

Pentecost is a repeatable experience. As Christians we know that we do not wait for the 50th day after Easter (which gives Pentecost its name) to experience again the movement of the Holy Spirit in our innermost beings. However, when we mark the day this coming Sunday, it will be a new opportunity to reaffirm our faith in our Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The faith of people is never more tested than it is at difficult times like these. None of us is untouched by the uncertainties that the lockdown in South Africa continues to bring. Some of our civil and personal freedoms, which we took for granted, have been stripped away. In some cases, security forces have displayed terrifying behaviour which has no place in our democracy. Actions like these leave us confounded. In some cases, the freedoms temporarily removed from us are necessary in the interests of combating the onslaught of Covid-19. But harsh and on occasion illegal violent treatment by security forces *never* has a place. As Christians, it is our duty to say so when they occur. Our witness as Christians to those in authority has not been as critically important, as it now is, for many years. Our prayers for our land and its leaders, together with the actions that must always be part of our prayerful life, are an integral part of this witness.

The celebration of Pentecost can therefore not mask the hardships that confront us. For many of our neighbours, food shortages - even starvation - is a reality. Many others have lost their jobs. Thousands of our fellow citizens have tested positive for the Coronavirus. The death toll is in the hundreds. The rate of infection and death is expected to rise even further now that we are entering a new phase of the lockdown

the day on which we mark Pentecost. Our prayers are with all who suffer, as it is with the first responders, the medics and others caring for all who are stricken with this virus.

Faith is hard to find for many. But let me share with you the encouragement I felt following a digital meeting with our young people on 1 May. It was a reality check because a lot of anxiety was shared. Many were worried about how life will look post-lockdown and distressed at the lack of person-to-person contact, and missed their own parish life. Some were coping well; some not. But there was a realisation that they would have to learn to cope with "the new normal". Many of the young people were involved in practical support initiatives in their parishes, such as delivering food parcels and checking on one another and others in their communities. Those with access to social media had new insights of their responsibility of reaching out to those who do not have that privilege because they are from disadvantaged communities. Much more came out of this meeting, but it was truly a learning experience for me to be together with these young people. They are the church of tomorrow. Most encouraging was an understanding that it is only with them that the church will move forward when this pandemic retreats. I will continue to have meetings with them. The Archdeacons will do so in their regions, and so too, I hope, will priests in their parishes.

The church has now entered a new era. As a diocese, we are working hard to ensure that the transformation that is occurring enriches the spiritual and practical lives of our people. There are teams in our diocese who are working to do this. Our church operations, practices and norms, taking cognisance of our theology, will undoubtedly have to be urgently transformed and adapted to the new normal. Some of these changes will be unpleasant and uncomfortable. Through our reaffirmation that the Holy Spirit moves among the faithful, we shall nevertheless overcome such unpleasanties and learn anew how to worship God and thus to care for the wider community.

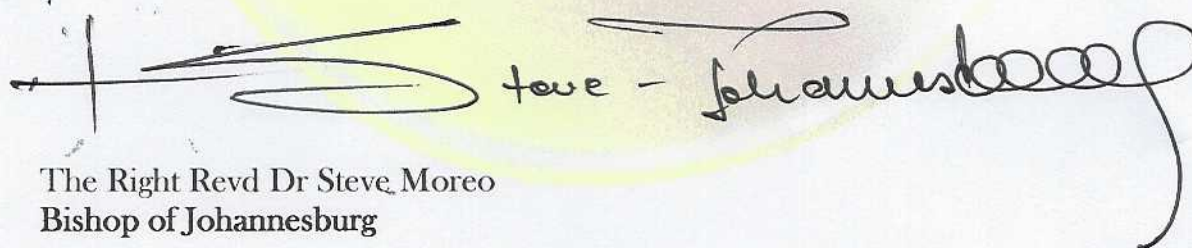
As I said in my last letter to you, pastoral care is essential in providing Christian support for the vulnerable and weak. We need to think of new ways of worship and service. Some already use social media for worship. Recognising the need for person-to-person interaction, perhaps we should think of "drive-in" services where facilities make this possible, and turning our properties into food gardens and the use of our buildings for entrepreneurship enrichment and other work opportunities. An openness to the Holy Spirit breathing fresh life into our lives is key to this renewal now thrust upon us. Thinking with Christian creativity must be integral to our new and developing church life. The church of the future is not necessarily the parish buildings or activities of the past.

Let me end by briefly paraphrasing points from a recent address given by Revd Margaret Place to Anglican counsellors on helping ourselves and others to cope with some of the impacts of the lockdown and the disease itself. Thank you for sharing these, Margaret and Anglican counsellors.

- Get used to things and be realistic. This is where we are; there's no vaccine as yet, so let's make the best of what we have for now.
- Mourn the past for it is gone. Life will be different. We all need to do whatever we can to help the poor and give support to our social outreach portfolios.
- Initiate contact. People won't come to you, so be pro-active in contacting people who are lonely or in need.
- Keep an eye out for depression in yourselves and others, and look after yourselves by exercising, eating responsibly and keeping your spiritual practices alive.
- Meet in small groups on platforms such as Zoom to keep you in touch and give perspective.
- Recognise that interacting with others will now be different. You may have to be more probing with your questions in counselling them.
- Smile in your attitudes and learn to wave or give "thumbs up" or shout and make contact in that way. Be sensitive to workers, such as those who serve you in the shops, with whom you interact.
- See God at work through this and look for signs of resurrection hope even in the midst of our depression and confusion.

In conclusion, let us be reminded of the days following that first Pentecost and how the earliest Christians lived together: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of the people." (Acts 2: 44-47)

Grace and peace with a glad and generous heart to you all!



The Right Revd Dr Steve Moreo
Bishop of Johannesburg