



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 9 11 September 2020

Dear Saints

Spring has arrived in our diocese! As we look around we see signs of this in nature as the grass slowly turns from its winter drabness and green shoots appear. Trees and shrubs start to blossom, and bulbs that had lain dormant in the ground have poked their heads up through the earth and are flowering. We are truly in the Season of Creation which we celebrate each year at this time. It is a time of joy as we celebrate the newness of life.

As a Church we rejoice in the never ending cycle of life that this epitomises. It is in this spirit of joyfulness that I greet you with warmth and gratitude for your ongoing faithfulness that enables our parishes, schools and all other organisations to continue to take the light of the world, Jesus Christ, to all people. In Matthew 5, Jesus speaks of us, his followers, as the light of the world. As modern-day followers of Christ, our Christ-light must shine brightly for our sick and fearful world, bringing hope where there is none. In the first verse of his hymn for the journey,

“Wake now my senses”, TJS Mikelson reminds us of the Call of Creation:

*Wake, now my senses, and hear the earth call;
feel the deep power of being in all;
Keep, with the web of Creation your vow,
giving, receiving as love shows us how.*

As I begin this letter to you, I am mindful that it is challenging and demanding to be part of the new creation to which Christ continually calls us. It requires energy.

It needs us to be able to see creation even in the harshest of conditions, even as the very first followers of Jesus did after his death. South Africa faces some of the harshest conditions since the end of apartheid. Allow me to deal with them.

I have spoken often of the pervasive presence of violence in our society. I have called to your attention the continuing scourge of gender based violence. The ugliness of such violence, often carried out in the confines of domestic households, is too ghastly to picture. Images of children and other family members, sometimes caught up in the viciousness of such abuse, can hardly bear dwelling on. I have no doubt that such pathological deviant behaviour occurs among those we serve. Every Anglican has an ongoing responsibility to speak out against this and minister in every possible way to those directly affected by gender based violence, whether as victim or perpetrator.

Of course violence of other forms is alive and well. Sadly, this is sometimes committed not just by criminals, but also by those with the responsibility of protecting South Africans. In our own diocese, we witnessed the first of such unfortunate actions as the initial lockdown began when a man was killed, on his property in Alexandra, by members of the security forces. Two weeks ago our neighbouring diocese in which Eldorado Park falls, witnessed the senseless killing of an innocent teenager with Down syndrome. As the South African Council of Churches (SACC) said in a memorandum to the president of the country, "the killing of a young boy with Down syndrome disability is a vivid illustration of the 'skiet en donner' mindset that still prevails".

Our message of peace and reconciliation, tolerance and love must be intensified as we bring the message of the light-bearing Christ to dysfunctional state institutions and communities that are both weary, and wary, of such institutions.

We ourselves are no doubt often in the camp of those who are tired, dispirited and distrustful of both institutional state organisations and elected public representatives. This is no wonder, given the second issue I wish to address – that of graft and corruption in our public bodies. Regrettably it goes hand in hand with the fight against the pandemic of Covid-19. It is outrageous that a sizeable number of public servants and public representatives have blatantly enriched themselves by using funds that were earmarked for the acquisition of goods to help stem the tide of

the pandemic. That people should steal public money to enrich themselves is simply disgusting. They do so not only at the expense of patients lying in hospitals struggling against this most terrible pandemic, but also hamper the work of the countless doctors, nurses, paramedics and other health workers who give, and give again, of their professional expertise. I concur with the SACC's view expressed to the President that such corrupt actions of "international shame" should be treated by the South African justice system as culpable homicide.

Of course, our work amidst this pandemic must continue. I am encouraged, as your bishop, to see new creation at work as our parishes and other diocesan organisations strive to ensure that innovative and workable methods of ministry are implemented. Worship has gone on unabated, but there are many instances of new life we can discover as we provide pastoral care for those who sit at home alone, are depressed, ill as a result of other diseases, and, not least, those who are suffering from the ravages of Covid-19. It appears that having had and recovered from Covid-19 does not necessarily mean that people are able to resume their normal lives again. Some are back home, but are still suffering with the after effects of this frightening disease.

As a Church, it is worth mentioning that an important situation that is demanding our attention arises from the fact that many clergy are older than 60. This means that they are in a high co-morbidity risk situation. This has implications for the movement and placement of clergy and the diocese is working actively to address this matter.

Finally let me address the scourge of racism that still is amongst us. I need hardly spell out the ways in which racism continues to be a blight on our society, both in our own country and in the rest of the world. The emergence of #BlackLivesMatter in the USA and subsequently other countries is a clear indication of the systemic racism that bedevils the lives of millions of people. As a diocese, we are particularly concerned about its impact on our Diocesan schools, and I have therefore asked Canon Thandi Chane to undertake a ministry of care for our school chaplains and journey with them as they work to eradicate racism on all levels in our schools. As I penned this letter, we witnessed a thoughtless racist advertising campaign by Clicks pharmaceutical retailer that underlined the subliminal presence of racism. Such actions are simply alien to our call to take the love of Christ to all, and to be his light. But it also tells us, as a Church, to be ever aware of the sensitivities around this.

As a Christian, take love to every person: that surely is one way to eradicate racism.

We have become accustomed to the lockdown and, as is clear from my remarks, have adjusted well. The exciting news is that as a diocese we pray, and are certainly planning, to resume in-person worship services on the first Sunday of October. Most of our parishes are ready to do so, but we must remain cautious and practice the now well-known protocols to limit the spread of the virus: wash our hands regularly, wear a mask in the company of other people, avoid touching our faces and maintain social distancing. We are now in the most relaxed lockdown phase since March, and thus may be tempted to go a little easier on ourselves. Do not do so; remain vigilant. Look forward to the creative ways in which we may all be able to celebrate with joy in-person worship again on 4 October!

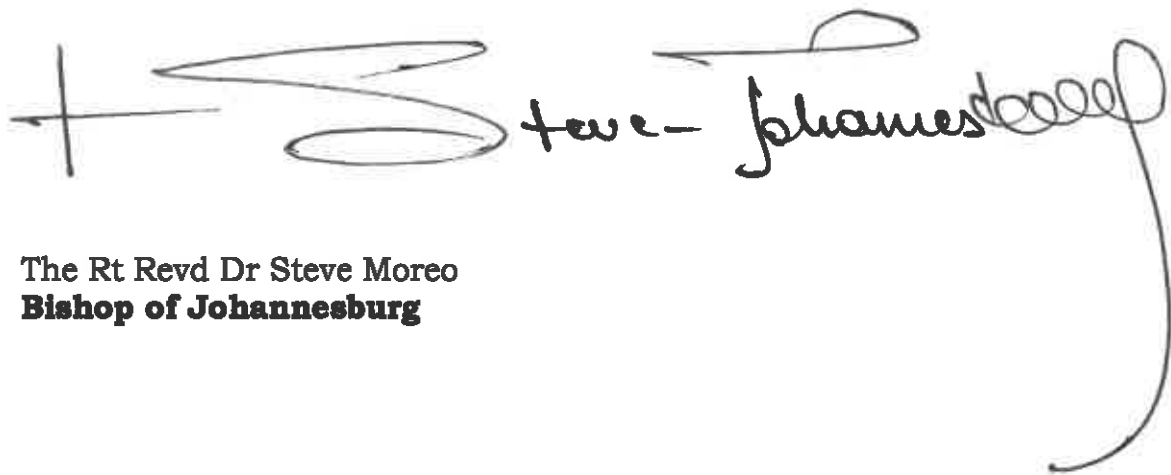
In saying so, I am reminded of some beautiful words about creation and joy by a former Bishop of Johannesburg and Archbishop of Cape Town, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. In the book written by him and the Dalai Lama, "The book of joy", the Dalai Lama requests the Archbishop to offer their readers a blessing. The Archbishop responds in a way that is most apt for the situation in which our ministry now takes place as the people of God:

"Dear Child of God, you are loved with a love that nothing can shake, a love that loved you long before you were created, a love that will be there long after everything has disappeared. You are precious, with a preciousness that is totally immeasurable. God wants you to be like God. Filled with life and goodness and laughter - and joy.

"God wants you to be able to find what is so beautiful in God's creation: the compassion of so many, the caring, the sharing. And God says, please, my child, help me. Help me to spread love and laughter and joy and compassion. And you know what, my child ... as you do this you discover joy. Joy, which you had not sought, comes as a gift, as almost the reward for this non-self-regarding caring for others."

As we celebrate the Season of Creation, may this joy and ministry of caring be yours and mine. May it ever be so.

Yours in his service

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve-James Moreo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'S' and a cross-like symbol to the left. A long, thin vertical line extends downwards from the end of the signature.

The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo
Bishop of Johannesburg