

# **Communiqué from the Synod Of Bishops**

Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)

September 2023

The Synod of Bishops was held virtually from Bishopscourt, Cape Town, under the presidency of His Grace the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Revd Thabo Cecil Makgoba, from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

The Synod began in silence and was subsequently soaked throughout its proceedings by Scripture and Liturgical Prayer and Silence.

The Bishops gathered individually to log in digitally with Altars prepared to celebrate the Holy Eucharist from their locations in the Dioceses of the Province across the countries of Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Saint Helena and South Africa. The Archbishop presided at the opening celebration of the Holy Eucharist from Bishopscourt, with the Dean of the Province, the Right Revd Stephen Diseko, and Judge Ian Farlam, the Provincial Chancellor, in attendance.

The Bishop of Saldanha Bay, the Right Revd Raphael Hess, preached the sermon based on the texts of the day. He extrapolated from the texts the following dictum: “conversation precedes creation”. It is the voice of God that creates, the voice that is audible, visible and creative. During Eucharist on the second day of Synod, the Bishop of Lesotho, the Right Revd Vicentia Kgabe, drew instructive and inspirational parallels between the preparations made by Moses to hand over leadership to Joshua and the transformative enabling leadership required of Bishops in their Dioceses. On the final day, the Bishop of Mzimvubu, the Right Revd Tsietsi Setiloane, preached his final sermon as a Bishop on the Bench before his retirement. Modelling for us the ministry of Ezra the Priest, he fittingly brought his active ministry in Synod to an end with the encouraging refrain, “Whom God calls God sends.”

Significant agenda items generated serious conversations in which the Bishops created a creative company of voices.

## **Theological Education**

The report of the Advisory Board on Theological Education was presented by the chair of the board, the Right Revd Eddie Daniels. The most significant guideline emerging from debate was the emphatic commitment of the Bishops to Theological Education and Spiritual Formation, especially of the clergy. Attention was drawn to the application of Canon 18 and Act 6 in the administration of full-time residential training and Diocesan programmes for Theological Education and Spiritual Formation training.

Synod re-emphasised the requirement that the minimum academic qualification, obtained from an accredited academic institution, must be strictly adhered to for the ordained ministry. Each Diocese

should account to the Board of Theological Education on the content of their formational training and provide evidence of the academic achievement of each of their Ordinands ordained each year. The Rector of the College of the Transfiguration joined the meeting to give an updated High Level Report on the College and details of its 30th Anniversary celebrations.

### **Technology and Ethics**

The Archbishop's Commission on Technology and Ethics produced three arresting pillars for action. The Right Revd Vinkinduku Mnculwane, Bishop of Zululand and chair of the commission, articulated the importance of:

1. Developing technological infrastructure in each Diocese for communication and to close the digital divide;
2. Educating our people to develop their digital literacy; and
3. Developing, as part of our missional platform, codes of conduct for using the new technology.

The theological implications of the technology and ethics commission were recognised as an important facet of this work. A theological framework is to be developed to deal with digital technology and the deep philosophical, ethical and theological questions it raises. We asked the question: What does it mean to be a human being in the light of the phenomenal development of artificial intelligence (AI)?

### **Lenten Bible Study**

Bishop Luke Pato, the retired Bishop of Namibia and leader of this year's Lenten Bible Study, "The Land called Holy", joined us and emphasised the importance of having our conversations in the Synod and in Provincial Standing Committee undergirded by Holy Scripture. He introduced the Bible Study themes to be addressed at the ensuing Provincial Standing Committee meeting.

### **Human Dignity**

Bishop Raphael Hess presented the report of a Synod sub-group on Human Dignity (which included the Church's thinking on human sexuality). This presentation was probably the most significant achievement of the Bishops in the 20-year conversation seeking to develop "Pastoral guidelines for persons in civil unions". Sixteen draft prayers developed by the sub-group of four Bishops, reflecting varying emphases, were accepted for incorporation into the Dean of the Province's report to the Provincial Standing Committee.

The draft Pastoral Guidelines and Prayers are to be sent to Dioceses to comment on and report back to the Synod of Bishops by mid-January 2024. An enabling motion shall be put before the Provincial Standing Committee to endorse the Bishops' decision to send to Dioceses. Inputs from members of our Church, including comments and questions, should be sent to the [Provincial Executive Officer](#) for further processing. The February 2024 meeting of the Synod of Bishops will

reflect once more on the process of reception of the Prayers in Dioceses and by mid-May 2024 a resolution will be prepared to place before Provincial Synod in September 2024.

### **Anglicans Ablaze**

The Right Revd Tsietsi Seleokane, the Liaison Bishop for Anglicans Ablaze, and the Revd Bruce Woolley, Director of Growing the Church (GtC), updated Synod. They gave thanks to God for the 20th anniversary of GtC and reported on the programme and speakers for the forthcoming Anglicans Ablaze conference. Bishops are encouraged to send people to the conference and there will also be an opportunity to follow virtually within ACSA and anywhere around the globe. The registration fee per participant will be the same, R800 per adult and R400 per child. There will also be an opportunity for young people registering and attending to win bursaries.

### **Safe and Inclusive Church**

Lay Canon Rosalie Manning, who chairs the Safe and Inclusive Church Commission, reminded us that under the Canons, the Commission's work is based on a Resolution of Permanent Force, indicating the seriousness with which the Church regards its work. She reported that the Commission is at present inundated with requests for cases to be investigated. Though they are short-staffed, potential investigators are being trained with the intention of bolstering their numbers and speeding up the pace of handling cases.

She presented Synod with helpful and informative case studies and explained how each case was dealt with and what the recommendations would have been. She invited Bishops to bring to the Commission their questions and concerns. She and her team could visit Dioceses if they were willing to pay for travel and accommodation. A request was also made for local teams to be trained to ease the Provincial team's workload.

### **Liturgical Committee**

Reporting on the work of the Liturgical Committee, its chair, the Right Revd Nkosinathi Ndwandwe, expressed disappointment at the lack of response from Bishops to liturgical drafts that have been produced. The Archbishop noted that the committee could use the retired bishops' network for feedback as well as Dioceses. Liturgical resources can also be posted on the Provincial website for comments from our parishioners. The Archbishop issued a reminder that the mandate is to publish a revised Prayer Book by 2025. Much work has gone into the effort to make this a reality and he urged the Liturgical team – one mandated by Synod – to press on with their work.

### **Youth Unemployment**

The Right Revd Dr Vicentia Kgabe, convener of the Archbishop's Commission on Youth Unemployment, urged the Bishops to encourage our leaders to be the voice of our youth and act to break the cycle of youth unemployment. The church must seek to actively involve young people in its work and ensure their participation in the economy by creating youth development projects and

programmes such as making the vestments used in our parishes. We should also audit and list their skills with a view to making use of them in our Dioceses.

### **Anglican Students' Federation**

Bishop Stephen Diseko, Liaison Bishop for the ASF, urged Dioceses to encourage Anglican students in tertiary education institutions to form and join Anglican Student Societies, not only in the older established universities but in newer institutions such as TVET colleges. Visits to Chancellors of these institutions should be made and chaplains appointed in order to assist.

### **Chaplains to the South African security services**

The Bishops considered the protocols that need to be followed in the licensing of clergy appointed to the South African National Defence Force, including the Navy, and the South African Police Service. Synod approved a Memorandum of Understanding with the State on Military Chaplains, and it is envisaged this model will also be applied to the other services.

### **The Anglican Communion**

The state of the Anglican Communion was the subject of intense discussion when Synod received reports on the April 2023 meeting in Kigali of GAFCON IV (the Global Anglican Future Conference), with the participation of the Global South Fellowship, and on proceedings of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA).

ACSA remains solidly committed to its classical Anglican canonical roots, pursuing its mission and ministry, using our resources to spread the love of Jesus, excluding no one, while seeking to act as a bridge across divides, keeping conversation going and coming alongside those who may differ from us.

### **Administration and Finance**

The Bishops gave attention to the financial management of the Dioceses and in particular our corporate responsibility to be good stewards of the Clergy and Lay Workers' Pension Fund. We acknowledged that serious attention must be given in each Diocese to fulfil our fiduciary responsibilities. The Archbishop emphasised the importance of record-keeping by Bishops in their Dioceses, including the recording of Episcopal Acts.

The Registrar of the Province, Mr Lloyd Fortuin, reported on the re-drafting of the Canons of the Church to keep up with changing circumstances, new demands for accountability and the practical functioning of ministry. He referred in particular to: the structuring of Provincial Standing Committee; to updates to Act XI which are needed to define eligibility to serve on Elective Assemblies; and to the expansion of Canon 45 to incorporate the establishment of Finance Boards in each Diocese to facilitate proper financial management, including the management of Diocesan Trust investments.

## **Western Cape floods**

The Bishops heard from the Bishops of the three Western Cape Dioceses on the unseasonal, destructive weather patterns emerging in the Western Cape. The Vicar-General of the Diocese of False Bay reported that thousands of homes had been flooded, and in informal settlements many homes containing everything families owned had been swept away. (The Vicar-General's [Pastoral Statement to the Diocese](#) is attached.)

## **A sad farewell**

Synod concluded by thanking and paying tribute to the ministry of the retiring Bishop of Mzimvubu, the Right Revd Tsietsi Setiloane.

To God be the glory!

*Contact details for the PEO: <https://anglicanchurchsa.org/contact/>  
Pastoral statement on False Bay Diocese: <https://bit.ly/3ES4Rxc>*