

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Communiqué from the Synod Of Bishops

September 2025

The Mercy, Grace and Joy of Christ

The Synod of Bishops met virtually for its second session of 2025 to hear reports of the social challenges facing our people across Southern Africa and St Helena and to deal with urgent pastoral and canonical issues needing resolution.

Bishop Luke Pretorius of St Mark the Evangelist, attending his last Synod before retiring, preached on Matthew 9: 9-13, focussing on Jesus' statement: "For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." He both reassured and challenged us with a series of questions, among them, "Perhaps we need ourselves to think how money and possessions dominate us?", "Do we as senior leaders in the Church come as penitent followers of The Way, or do we come believing we are God's gift to the church?" and "Do we take the opportunities presented to us to reach out to those needing Jesus, and to challenge those who think they already have Jesus?"

As is customary when Dioceses have delegated the election of Bishops to the Synod, we convened as an Electoral College on the first day of our proceedings. We elected Bishop Vicentia Kgabe of Lesotho as Bishop of Pretoria, and the Ven Mcebisi Pinyana, at present Archdeacon to the Ordinary in Cape Town, as Bishop of Grahamstown. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba extended our warm congratulations to both of them.

Synod expressed its immense gratitude to the Vicars-General of the Dioceses of Grahamstown and Pretoria, the Ven Bubele Mfenyana and the Very Revd Moses Thabethe respectively, for their leadership during the interregnum.

Social issues facing our Dioceses

The Archbishop reminded us of the address to our February session by Dr Mamphela Ramphele, championing the ministry of healing in response to the multi-generational traumas generated by the violent history of our region. He reported on the gang violence in the Western Cape which holds communities hostage and on the inter-faith response.

Bishops and Vicars-General from across the Province reported on social crises facing their communities, just a few of which include the children of migrant workers being left alone in Lesotho; kidnappings in the Diocese of Port Elizabeth; corruption over oil exploration in Namibia; illegal mining in Matlosane; youth crime in Mzimvubu; young people harming themselves, even committing suicide, in Eswatini, Pretoria and the Diocese of Grahamstown; xenophobia in the Diocese of Christ the King; the prevalence of taxi violence in False Bay and of drugs and absent fathers in the Highveld. St Helena has issues around low wages, affordable land and houses, and emigration to the UK. The prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) was reported by many Dioceses. The Eastern Cape Dioceses of Mbashe and Mthatha, as well as the Diocese of Natal, reported on the recent devastating floods.

In the face of these sombre reports, we were heartened by action being taken by Dioceses. St Mark's is developing new young rectors who can relate to the crises faced by the youth, and many Bishops reported on the work of their GBV desks, with Kimberley & Kuruman addressing trauma with "circles of grace" and Zululand appointing GBV officers, one of whose tasks is to deal with attempts to cover up and conceal abuse. Christ the King intervenes with authorities on lack of access to doctors. Port Elizabeth and Dioceses in the Western Cape undertake prayer walks against gangsterism. Eswatini has a farming project for the unemployed and Dioceses including the Highveld, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth and Kimberley & Kuruman have feeding projects.

Archbishop Thabo asked that HOPE Africa collate these reports so that Dioceses can share their experiences of ways in which to address these challenges successfully. He also reported on South Africa's National Dialogue, which he and Dr Brigalia Bam OSC serve as members of an Eminent Persons Group. He said the Group is working to avoid the dialogue becoming just another elitist talk shop.

Pastoral Matters and Outreach

Theological Education

Bishop Jemuel Ngombane of Mthatha reported on the support the Province continues to receive from USPG, and on a USPG summit in Botswana on The Future of Theological Education in Africa. The Rector of the College of the Transfiguration, the Revd Dr Percy Chinganga, and the Dean of the Province, Bishop Stephen Diseko, reported on CoTT matters. Highlights of the discussion included:

- The College has adopted the Benedictine practice of balancing work, prayer, study and rest;
- The College has launched a theological journal and is promoting itself as a Provincial resource centre;
- The College needs 60 students to be financially viable but at present has only 47 students;
- Synod is concerned at the state of the College's infrastructure (the Archbishop suggested that Dioceses could each sponsor the upgrading of a room).

Same-sex Unions

Synod noted that it had been tasked a decade ago with drawing up guidelines for ministry to members living in same-sex unions but that it had failed to secure the support of Provincial Synod. Since many members of the Synod of Bishops are new, the Provincial Executive Officer will be tasked to provide a complete set of documentation for Bishops. The matter will be placed on the February 2026 agenda with a view to reporting to Provincial Synod 2026.

Liturgical Committee and Prayer Book revision

Bishop Nkosingithi Ndwandwe of Natal urged Bishops to give renewed and urgent attention to the revision of the Prayer Book, which has been on the agenda since 2012. The Liturgical Committee will collate material for our February 2026 session.

Safe and Inclusive Church

Following the formal establishment of the Commission at our last meeting, Bishops reported on their progress in setting up the necessary structures and appointing Safe Church Officers in parishes. Challenges identified included the need to expand opportunities for training and difficulties in securing police clearance certificates.

Anglicans Ablaze

Bishop Dalcy Dlamini of Eswatini reported that 50 percent more attendees have signed up for AA2025 next month than in 2023, including 20 Bishops. This year's event will include a wide mixture of worship music teams, including some well-known Gospel artists.

Diocese of the Highveld

Synod received the report of the Task Team which inquired into the difficulties in the Diocese of the Highveld.

After interrogating the facts and the Task Team's recommendations, and giving the Bishop of the Highveld the right to be heard, Synod accepted the Task Team's recommendations but will amend the timelines for action which it suggested. Synod welcomes and notes the fact that Task Team found no evidence to support the serious allegations of misconduct made against Bishop Charles. Synod expresses our deep concern and sympathy with Bishop Charles and his family at the ordeal they have been exposed to. Synod is also aware of the pain and wounds of all clergy and laity involved, as well as the pain experienced by the whole Diocese and indeed the Province. Synod accepts the recommendation of the Task Team for professional counselling for those involved. Synod views in a serious light the tendency for disaffected members of our church to spread untested claims and gossip through social and other media, instead of using the channels laid down in the Canons to address their issues.

We agree on the wisdom of Bishop Charles taking a sabbatical of such length as he deems necessary, not because he is guilty of any misconduct, but to give him and his family an opportunity to follow the example of Jesus, and after a strenuous period of ministry, to withdraw "to the mountain" for a time of rest and recuperation. Bishop Charles remains the Diocesan Bishop and is not being asked "to step aside". The Archbishop will appoint an intervention team which, although independent of Diocesan structures, will work alongside Bishop Charles in restoring the Diocese to stability. The Metropolitan and his Executive may take any further action they deem necessary to effect any other decision to foster reconciliation and healing. We thank the Task Team under Bishop Jo Seoka for their work, performed under great pressure and in difficult circumstances.

Diocese of Botswana

Synod noted that a resolution on the inclusion of the Diocese of Botswana in our Province would go before the ensuing session of Provincial Standing Committee, and to Provincial Synod thereafter.

Ecumenical Matters

Synod received reports on the Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches, including its discussion on issues such as climate change, poverty, the world-wide fight against corruption and the situation in the Middle East. Synod adopted a separate statement on Gaza and the West Bank, as well as wider tensions in the Middle East. Synod also discussed the challenges posed by dissenting Anglicans whose behaviour raises the dangers of schism.

Church Governance

Synod discussed guidelines for the issuing of licences to non-stipendiary or retired clergy giving them Permission to Officiate (PTO), emphasising the importance of strictly observing the provisions of the Canons.

Order of Simon of Cyrene and Archbishop's Award for Peace with Justice

Synod approved the admission to the Order of Simon of Cyrene of the following lay members of our Church: Dr Devarakshanam "Betty" Govinden, Ms Lungelwa Makgoba, Canon Rosalie Manning and Mr Sidney Place.

Synod approved the granting of the Archbishop's Award for Peace with Justice to Ms Zenobia Irwin and the Revd Dr Anastasia Huntley.

Farewell to Bishop Luke Pretorius

Synod recognised the retirement of Bishop Luke Pretorius of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist with its customary liturgical thanksgiving for his ministry.

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