

## **A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops to the People of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa**

We, the Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, have been meeting in synod at Modderpoort 16-19 February 2009.

As teachers of the Church, we have spent a full and joyful day discussing Christian education 'from baptism to the grave'. We want to develop a training framework for Christians of all ages in our Church. We were pleased to receive baptism training material from the Publishing Committee, which is meant to be the first of a series of aids to theological education in our Church. We note with gratitude many other such initiatives around the Province.

We also welcomed staff from the College of the Transfiguration in Grahamstown and the Anglican House of Studies in Pietermaritzburg, and received presentations on these and on the TEE College. We were encouraged at the positive reports from each of these as they develop numbers of talented people for ministry and leadership (Ephesians 4:11-14). We gave all of them our support for the future.

The *Growing the Church* initiative has been very much with us in recent months and is already bearing fruit. It is exciting to know that congregations are growing and some dioceses are contemplating giving birth to new ones; the Diocese of Ukhahlamba will be born out of Grahamstown on 3 October this year.

Our Archbishop has recently returned from the Primates' Meeting. We were gratified to hear that all the Primates in Africa were present and engaged with the discussions and planning. Following the positive experience of the Lambeth Conference we remain committed to the ongoing process of reconciliation in our Church; because of our historic experience, we have previously said that we may have some insight to share with others in regard to tolerance and reconciliation. In the spirit of the Lambeth *Indaba* process, we will be glad to offer that – but we know very well that unity begins at home, and we need now to take account of our own life where tensions exist which need to be pro-actively addressed.

We have spent some time discussing the proposed Anglican Covenant, and support it in principle. There is much work still to be done in this regard, including dissemination and discussion in the life of the Church.

As we arrived in the Free State we were disturbed to hear that the provincial Department of Health is discontinuing the provision of anti-retroviral medication to HIV-positive patients for financial reasons; we have issued an urgent statement on this matter.

Naturally for South Africans, the forthcoming elections fill the horizon. We are concerned that voter education should take place, and that voters should be able to turn out in numbers to vote without fear of intimidation. We give our full support to the Independent Electoral Commission and to its Chair, Ms Brigalia Bam. We therefore offer ourselves as mediators in places of conflict and we urge our people to offer themselves as election monitors where this is needed and possible. We hear the cry, 'where has *ubuntu* gone?'

This country needs to choose selfless and credible leaders who will use power for the common good.

We remain concerned about democratic processes not only in South Africa but in neighbouring countries, particularly Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The global economic crisis is damaging both the capacity of southern African countries to take care of their citizens, and the work of the Church especially where international funding or the exchange rate are threatened. We note that the battle against malaria is continuing, notably in Mocambique, but there is still much to do.

In 1999 we were among the first to call for a judicial commission of enquiry into the South African arms deal, and to question the levels of spending in that deal when so many other needs persist in our society. We still believe that unanswered questions around the deal will obstruct the way forward in South Africa's public life, and that a full and comprehensive judicial enquiry is essential to the future health of our society.

Now Lent is coming and we turn our minds to the discipline of prayer, reflection and giving which we associate with the coming season. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba has called us to focus in prayer on Zimbabwe on Ash Wednesday and we will want to join with others who are already fasting for that country and its people on that day. We must pray for the country and its new government; for the right treatment of Zimbabweans in neighbouring countries and for fair treatment at the hands of police and officials, especially in South Africa. We must pray and work for tolerance and patience on the part of citizens, so that among other things, xenophobic violence may never happen again. We further urge governments in the region not to act hastily in seeking to repatriate refugees to Zimbabwe.

These are difficult days for many people but we say with St Paul,  
*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4: 8-10)*

The darkness of suffering yields to the light of resurrection, and the hope of Christ transforms all our days of hardship.

May God bless you all.