

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**To the People of God – To the *Laos***  
**October 2008**

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Dear People of God

So much has happened since I last wrote. But my memories of the Synod of Bishops and the Provincial Standing Committee, and the consecration of the new Bishop of Grahamstown, Ebenezer Ntlali, are overshadowed by the sudden death, barely a week later, of Bishop David Beetge, dear colleague, friend, priest, pastor, and father in God to so many of us. Dean of the Province since 2003, David was an outstanding leader of our church, a man of deep spirituality and prayer, for whose life we are enormously grateful to God, even as we grieve his death. Our love and prayers are with Carol, his widow.

I first met Bishop David in 1987, when he led a retreat for seminarians at St Peter's College, of whom I was one. For the next few years he was my spiritual director and a wise guide through the turbulence of the early 90s. More than anything else, David would advise me to pray – and I could see that this was the best possible option in every area of life, because I could see the effect of prayer in David's own life. He persistently deepened his relationship with the God who is love, daring to open himself to receive in love whatever the Lord had in store for him, no matter how easy.

In this way, Bishop David's response to his illness is a lesson, and an encouragement, to us all. Let me quote some inspiring words that he wrote to a friend a couple of months ago:

'My prayers are only for God's will to be done. If that will is for healing I will embrace it fully, but if it is not, I look forward to the vision of God that I have known and will see more clearly; and to being caught up in the wonder of that Trinitarian love that Jesus makes possible for us. We must not pray as though we fear death.'

David loved to speak of the experience once on retreat, when he felt he had been caught up, in Christ, into the very fullness of the dynamic love that flows between Father, Son and Spirit. That love, reaching out unconditionally to everyone flowed through David, similarly unconstrained.

Such love fuelled his unstinting work within his Diocese; and within the Province in everything from the Pension Fund to HIV and AIDS. Here he was conscious that the church has too often stigmatised and excluded those who are infected or affected, instead of extending God's welcoming arms. He also played a significant role within the Anglican Communion, including in the Lambeth Commission that produced the Windsor report, and in ecumenical work, especially in relations with the Roman Catholic Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury sent a moving personal message, which you can read on our website, [www.anglicanchurchsa.org](http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org).

All this we remembered at his funeral, as we heard St Paul's reassurance that 'nothing – neither life nor death – can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord' (from Romans 8:38-9). It was typical of Bishop David that he had told some of us that, should he die soon, he wanted his funeral to speak not so much of him, but of his Lord, and the gospel promise, the sure and certain promise, of the resurrection to new life.

The ways of life and death remain so much beyond our comprehension – so often illness and death seem unfair, and we come to God in confusion and deep grief. Yet in Jesus we find a place to weep for our dear friend, remembering that Jesus himself wept at the grave of his own dear friend Lazarus even though he knew he would be raised. Therefore we trust in this same hope, for David and for ourselves, so wonderfully expressed in the words of St Peter:

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed...' (1 Pet 1:3-5)

So let us not be afraid to mourn our loss, even as we hold fast to our faith – for, as our Lord assured us, 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

What, then, of our Synod, and the Provincial Standing Committee? The Bishops issued a statement about all we discussed, that is also on our website. One particular decision was to send a delegation to express our solidarity with the Diocese of Swaziland and the people of that country as, 40 years after independence, they work for a more democratic society. We gave thanks for the recent elections in Angola. Within the Province, our decisions included the formation of the new Diocese of Ukhahlamba in the northern part of the Diocese of Grahamstown.

Among the matters PSC addressed (in part through small groups – we wanted to capture some of the strengths of the indaba style of the Lambeth Conference) were the budget, xenophobia, gender, the environment, ecumenism, social development, and youth. We also heard reports on the Lambeth and GAFCON meetings, and in discussion noted the Synod's view that 'We agreed to continue working for the unity of the worldwide Anglican Communion through the current instruments of communion and dialogue, including the proposed Anglican Covenant, the Windsor Continuation Group and a possible Pastoral Forum. We agreed to continue to work with all parties in the current debates particularly on our own continent and to share South Africa's experience of a reconciliation which embraces all.'

We also spent time at PSC talking together about consultations across the Province, to produce a 'vision statement', but I will save further comment on this for my next letter.

Yours in the service of Christ

+Thabo Cape Town