



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 2 17 March 2020

COVID -19

Dear beloved Saints

When I wrote to you at the start of Lent we all understood that we were faced with a serious challenge as the Coronavirus, and the disease, Covid-19, associated with it, spread. Few predicted the speed at which it would move. Thus it is that I now write to you as South Africa has taken unprecedented steps to contain the spread of the virus, with the President of our country announcing far-reaching measures in this respect. It was against this backdrop that the Chapter of the Diocese of Johannesburg has met to give prayerful consideration to what our response as a Church should be. We noted that panic had set in amongst many of our people. Social media is rife with innuendo and false reports, sometimes creating more panic. Our prayer is that as a fellow Christian you retreat into reflection as our Lord would have done, and find that quiet inner voice within you, a spiritual song that assures you that all will be well through the love of Christ our Saviour. Let us turn panic into prayer!

Our response was rooted in a spirituality of care and compassion for all the people of the Diocese of Johannesburg, a diocese that represents not only Anglicans but the millions of people of all faiths and persuasions in the economic hub of South Africa. It is done because we love you, as Christ loved all people no matter who they were. In coming to these decisions I have also considered the thoughtful guidelines of the Archbishop of Cape Town and am appreciative of them. Given that the Diocese of Johannesburg works in the commercial and industrial heartland of South Africa, and that people from many corners of the globe make Johannesburg their first stop (even having regard to new travel restrictions), we believe that the following decisions are in the best interests.

I have two major decisions to share, but at the outset I wish to say that we stand in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ as they, like us, face challenges at this time of Lent, the lead up to the great Easter celebration. It is also appropriate to recognise the leadership that has been given to the country as a whole by President Ramaphosa. And then there are the everyday institutions of our church, schools, organisations, and old age homes with which we are associated, that have also

played an important role so far. Doctors, nurses, care workers, hospitals - these are ministries in their own right, and we praise God for their commitment as they stand at the rock face confronting the dangers of this virus.

The first major decision that has been taken by the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg is to suspend, with immediate effect, all public church services until after Easter Sunday 2020. This applies to all church services, irrespective of the number of people attending. We had to wrestle with many issues before this decision was prayerfully reached by Chapter. I have been guided by the fact that it is incumbent on us as a Church to be part of the movement to limit the spread of the virus. *Pastoral work now becomes more important than ever, as we go out to meet and have fellowship with all our people, and not wait for them to "come to church".*

The second decision has been to create a multi-skilled task team that will meet regularly and provide guidance to our priests, lay leaders and other office bearers in our parishes. This task team will inform themselves with respect to new developments regarding Covid-19 and its spread, and the manner in which it can be further successfully contained. They will share their work with me, and also with the Archdeacons and others in our diocese. Their work will encompass ideas of how our ministry goes forward at this critical moment in our history. Archdeacons, in turn, will meet with parish leaders and plan together, and logistical arrangements for the ongoing functioning of our Church will obviously follow.

A word regarding services such as funerals and marriages: These decisions do not affect our responsibility as a Church to conduct funerals, or solemnise marriages, but the proviso of course is that there should be no more than 100 people present at such events.

It is worth remembering at a seminal moment like this that the journey of Jesus to his Resurrection, moments we recall during Lent, was a tough and rough road. Not unlike the road that we face now. It is also a time to reaffirm our faith in the words of St Paul to the Romans: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, *nor anything else in all creation*, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Romans 8: 38-39)

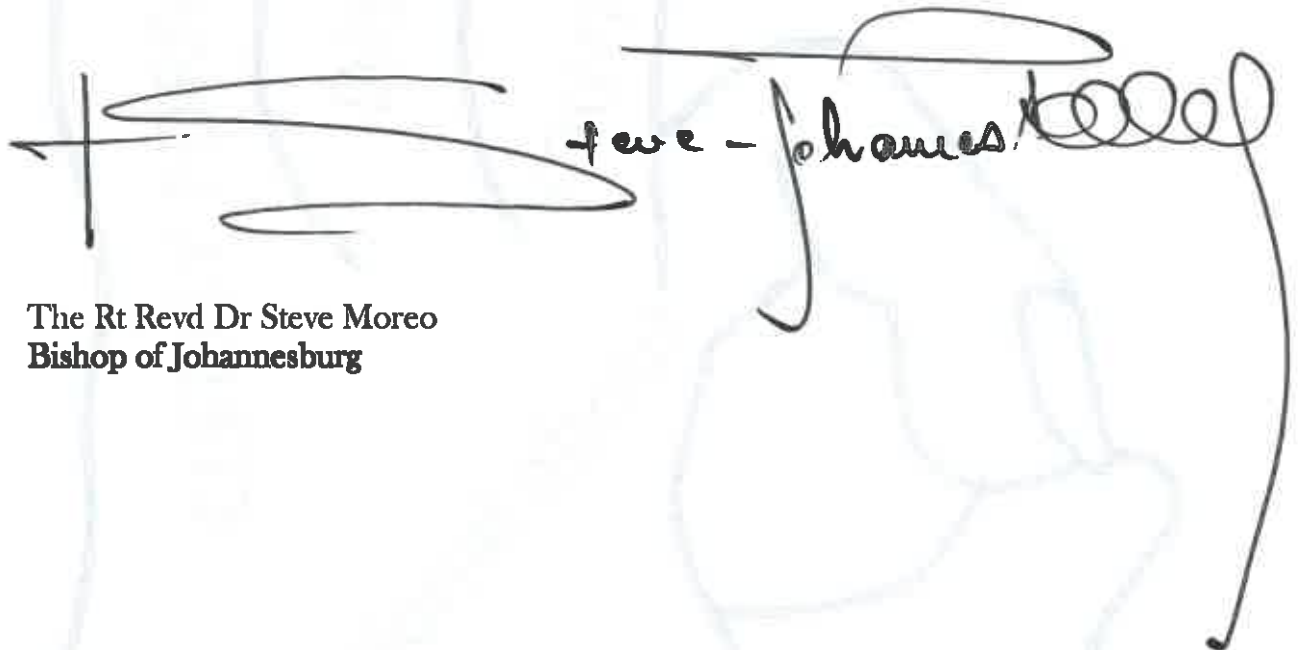
There is no doubt that we face a moment of truth as a Church (a *Kairos* moment), indeed, as a nation. I believe this is a moment in which our Lord is calling us, during this Lent and the coming Holy Week, to learn again what our supreme calling is as Christians, as the Body of Christ: to go to the people - all people. It is a wonderful opportunity for our priests and leaders to go out and pastor to all our people, including those whom they have perhaps not seen for a while, and those that are waiting to see how this Church of the God of Love cares for everyone. Now is the time for the Church to be Christ in the world.

Easter is not a once a year event, although we have turned it into that by celebrating it only once a year. Easter is a recurring theme, Sunday by Sunday, day by day, which speaks of the Risen Jesus Christ that is alive and at work amidst disease and need. But my challenge now to each one of you is to be Christ in this world of panic caused by uncertainty, and of the inevitable pain and suffering that is amongst us.

My prayers are with each one of you. As you reflect on my assurance of prayer for you, please know the truth that if we are faithful, then prayer is forever in our souls, minds and actions, and never simply confined to one place or time. James Montgomery put it so well in these words:

**"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed..."**

May Peace be yours

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and includes the name 'Steve - Johannes'. The signature is positioned to the right of the printed name 'The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo Bishop of Johannesburg'.

**The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo
Bishop of Johannesburg**