



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 3 20 March 2020

Dear Faithful Saints

I have felt I must write to you to express my sincere thanks for the overwhelming support I have received from clergy and laity alike, and people in commerce and industry, for my announcement earlier this week that all services in Anglican Churches in the Diocese of Johannesburg will be suspended for public worship until after Easter. This support was reaffirmed at a meeting I held with clergy yesterday. During that meeting, I was further encouraged by the fact that clergy had already internalised the need to do ministry differently in this crisis of which we are all part. They came to the meeting with written and oral suggestions as to how pastoral ministry should be carried out, and I chaired that meeting knowing that we have women and men of great faith in their God and love for their people.

They challenged one another, saying that it cannot be business as usual. They committed themselves to each go out and take positive messages to the people of God, even beyond their own parishes, diocesan organisations, our church schools and old age homes. Chapter members who were present reaffirmed their decision taken on Monday earlier this week. Time and again it was noted that Gauteng, which forms the kernel of our diocese, had very special needs, given its economic importance in our country. That aside, we also reaffirmed that what we were doing was a Gospel imperative.

The input at our meeting, far from being full of doom and gloom, was one of excitement and hope in the Gospel as we creatively put our minds together to find genuinely innovative and fresh ideas for how to minister to our people.

I have no doubt that we are being faithful to Jesus, in whose footsteps we walk. Jesus took his ministry to people who could not get to, or who were not allowed in the temples of the day. That is now the situation with which we are faced, and we must bolster our pastoral ministry by going out into the world. It is consistent with our ministry of all believers. Everyone is a pastor. Our Church buildings are indeed important, and are the epicentre of where we express our faith through worship and Eucharist.

The Church, however, is bigger than any building - again, as Christ showed us. He was not restricted to buildings. He went out on the roads where he found his disciples; he found a woman at a well and ministered to her; Lazarus was found in his home; the parable of the Good Samaritan is set on a remote, wild road. The stories abound. Jesus did not need a building to exercise ministry - and neither do we. Even more now in this modern age in

which we have access to the most advanced means of technology in communicating with people. Already our task team, our Archdeacons, and many members of the clergy and lay leaders are devising ways of bringing the Church service to you. Others are devising ways of reaching out as Jesus did, in an age-old missionary context, adapted to meet the needs of today.

But still, we shall miss the physical presence of Church. Our Churches will nevertheless remain open, seven days a week. They are there for you to go there to pray and meditate at any time of the day. In my earlier letter, I emphasised the need for prayer, which comes both unspoken and spoken. I urge you, especially on a Sunday through this Lent period, be silent and listen for the evocative sound of Church bells, wherever they may come from, understanding that this is the music that calls the faithful to worship wherever they are. Perchance you might hear an organ playing, small groups of people singing hymns and psalms. Gather your family and a few friends to sing favourite hymns and go through the beautiful prayers of our prayer books. Of course, there are many resources on the internet from which you can draw. Some of our own churches are setting up YouTube and Facebook live streaming. Your parish will be in touch with you regarding this. These are moments to treasure. If your parish has a bell, ring it loudly and long on these Sundays! If you don't have a bell, perhaps you might look at how you can find one to use.

These are but a few suggestions of how we can get through this trying time together. They are suggestions that in fact can consolidate our membership and grow it! Remember it was in that time of seeming irreversible catastrophe, of great sadness and misery, after Christ's Crucifixion, that the Church grew, and grew, and grew..... The disciples of Jesus met responded with vigorous action and a positive attitude at those times. Our modern day calling is to do no less.

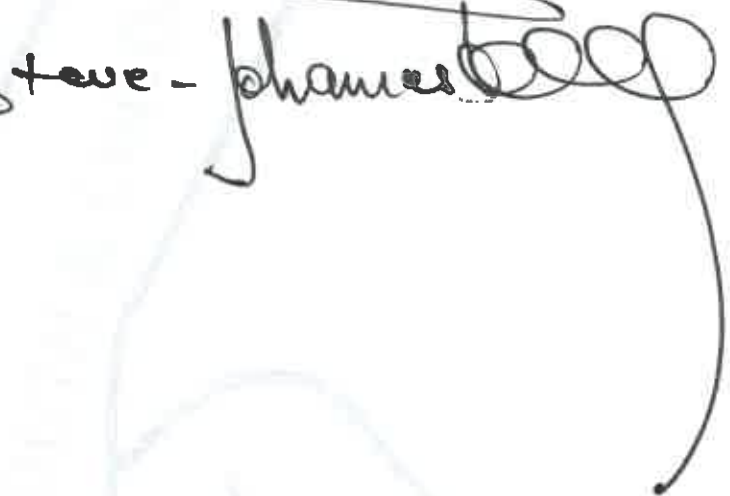
A final word on young people. There are disturbing reports that many young people, the world over, but most frighteningly in our own diocese, are holding what they call "corona virus parties". They gather together, party, drink without taking protective measures, and arrogantly declare they are young, and if they get Covid-19, they will recover. One of our focuses as a diocese is intentional ministry to youth and children. This deviant pathological behaviour which is among us provides an additional, urgent call for us to be active in ministry to young people.

None of us have pastored people through a pandemic before. We don't know all the answers. But we are paying attention to science and best practices worldwide. The diocese has an informed and skilled task team. Together, we must take courage, have faith, be patient, and know that it is our responsibility to take every care to ensure that we have the least chance of infecting others.

Finally, let us recall Christ's words in Matthew 25: 45, as he answers the question: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?". Christ answers: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

I will be in touch with you through various means in these coming days. Your Archdeacons, clergy and lay leaders will likewise be informing you of our ministry in these times. Please feel free to be in touch with your clergy and Archdeacons to share with them any suggestions that you might have that would be helpful.

I continue to pray for you all. Please pray for me. Pray for yourselves, pray for one another. Pray without ceasing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Moreo', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Moreo', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

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