



Diocese of Johannesburg

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 8 22 October 2021

Dear Saints

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

We would all have been disturbed, indeed angered, by the noxious and false statement posted on Twitter, incorrectly in my name, with the false information of the "death" of our former beloved Bishop of this Diocese, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. As soon as we became aware of this malicious, willful act of circulating such fake news, we issued a statement pointing out the lie that it was. Personally, I am deeply offended that my name or position should be used in such a diabolical manner. This sick act of misinformation simply underlines that none of us must accept at face value any information on social media until its veracity has been established. Please make sure you do not accept any information on social media until you have verified that it is true! I personally, and we as a diocese, apologise for any hurt caused to our beloved Father in Christ, Archbishop Desmond.

Approaching feast days

This letter comes to you a week before we celebrate two of the great festivals of the Christian Church, All Saints Day on 1 November, and All Souls Day on 2 November. Each of these has a special place in our lives as they connect us to the great host of Christian witnesses throughout the ages. These two days in our calendar allow us to honour the memory of those - the saints - whose lives have been recognised as showing us how to live as faithful followers of Christ on the one hand, and, on the other, those equally beloved people - the souls - whose largely unsung lives have quietly guided and inspired us to do likewise. In his book, *Anam Cara*, John O'Donohue writes about how, when the soul leaves the body, it is no longer under the burden and control of space. "This suggests that the dead are here with us, in the air that we are moving through all the time. The only difference between us and the dead is that they are now in an invisible form. You cannot see them with the human eye. *But you can sense the presence of those you love who have died.*" As we are reminded of the saints and the souls on these two

wonderful days of celebration and memory, may we feel their presence close to us, inspiring and leading us in the circle of life of which we are part.

Upcoming local government elections

The first day of November is also a significant one for South Africans this year as we go to the polls to elect our representatives for local government, the level of government that, together with provincial and national structures, make up our system of governance in South Africa established in terms of and protected by our Constitution. Many of us make the mistake of thinking that municipal elections are not particularly important; on the contrary, local government is the sphere of government that is closest to the citizens of our country. It is responsible for the most basic of our human rights, including the provision of safe potable water, electricity to warm our homes, and sanitation and the removal of waste to keep us safe from disease and make the places where we live habitable and enjoyable. These services are not just "nice to have" - they are human rights guaranteed by our Constitution. Local government, or municipalities, is responsible for providing these human rights to every citizen. Sadly, local government in South Africa has largely failed our people. Government itself has red flagged 87 out of the country's 257 municipalities, while News24's Out of Order index has flagged another 43 as being on the verge of collapse. That means that just over 50% of local governments are in danger of becoming completely dysfunctional. According to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), only 64% of households have *reliable* access to water. Equally shocking is that 56% of wastewater treatment plants are in poor or critical condition.

That is a catastrophic scenario! It means that every South African who has the right to vote on 1 November must exercise his or her responsibility to do so. When we cast our ballots, we act not only for ourselves, our families and our communities, but also for those faithful departed whose very presence in our lives, unencumbered by space and time, we will celebrate on 1 and 2 November. When we make our crosses, we need to ask ourselves whether our municipalities have acted as faithful stewards of God's vineyard. We must ask whether we are satisfied that we are making our crosses in favour of representatives who have been faithful to their calling to serve their constituents, and whether our crosses for parties represent people who have been free of corruption and worked diligently to improve the lives of our people.

The call to be vaccinated

Together with what I am speaking about goes the issue of vaccination and our responsibility to be vaccinated. Our forebears took us as children to be vaccinated against chicken pox, smallpox and polio - diseases which we seldom hear of today. In a similar way, we must ensure that we are vaccinated against the ravages of the Covid-19 virus which has caused so

much destruction in our global village over the past 20 months or so. In making this appeal, I want to plead with our current day saints to *not* believe the wild and frequently ridiculous claims that are many times made on social media about vaccination. I am appalled at how many people believe something that closer examination would reveal is absurd, simply because they have read this on social media! Social media is a useful tool of communication in our modern world - but it is not the beginning and end of all truth - as was amply illustrated by the appalling misinformation perpetuated about Archbishop Desmond to which I referred at the beginning of my letter to you!

Church governance

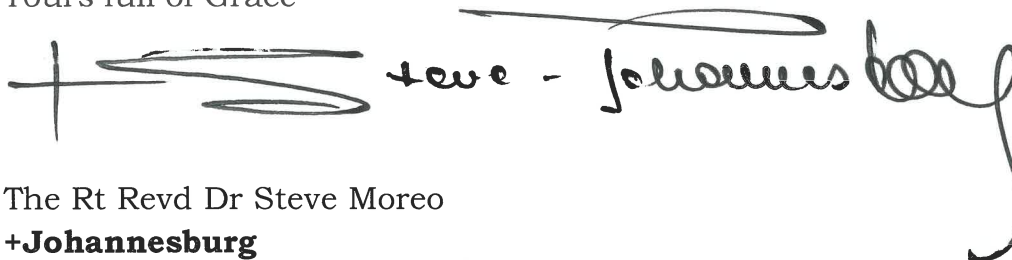
I now turn to issues of church governance and ask for your prayers for the various task teams hard at work on the issues that have resulted in the postponement of our diocesan synod to a date yet to be announced. You will have received my letter of 20 October making this announcement and citing the reasons for the postponement. I shall be in touch as soon as there is more information following the work of the various experts who are addressing the challenges we face so that these can be discussed at synod.

I wish to extend a deep word of gratitude to those who have responded to our recent financial appeal. The results so far have been very encouraging, and our prayer is that others will be led to add to the amount raised. One of the spin-offs of this appeal is that lay people have been coming forward to offer their skills and talents to enable our Diocese to sustain its strength of witness and, in fact, to grow, and this fills me with great pleasure and hope for the future.

In Isaiah 42: 6-7, we read: "I the Lord called you with righteous purpose and taken you by the hand; I have formed you, and destined you to be a light for peoples, a lamp for nations, to open eyes that are blind, to bring captives out of prison, out of the dungeon where they lie in darkness." Join me in prayer that this should be so - and that we will all be inspired by the Spirit of our Lord to make our mark in the life of Gauteng, the heartbeat of our land.

Liziwe joins me in best wishes to you, that you stay safe and well in these times of the pandemic.

Yours full of Grace



The signature is handwritten in black ink. It begins with a large, stylized cross symbol. To the right of the cross, the name "Steve - Johannesberg" is written in a cursive, flowing script. The "y" at the end of "Johannesberg" is particularly large and loops down.

The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo
+Johannesburg