



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 4 25 March 2021**

Dear Saints

Peter's First Letter begins simply: "I am an apostle of Jesus Christ". As I have prayed and meditated during Lent, these powerful words have encouraged me and reinforced my faith. We are all apostles of Jesus Christ. This fact gives us strength because, as Peter says further on in his letter, "Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord" (1 Peter 3: 13-15).

I quote these words to you at the beginning of my Holy Week and Easter pastoral letter because I have been disturbed to find how much **anxiety and fear** there is among some of our people. Not just Anglicans, but all the people in the communities to whom we must minister.

We have all lived with this terrible pandemic for just over one year, and those two emotions are real in relation to Covid-19. But they are also real in other matters that impact so forcefully on our lives. The underlying driving force for these issues seems to be violence, anger and hatred.

Beyond our borders, we hear with horror of mass killings. In our own country, we see violence play out on our streets as angry young people fight among themselves in terrible scenes on the campus of the Durban University of Technology, seeming to blindly dismiss a course of debate and peaceful resolution. On our doorstep, it is no different. We were forcefully reminded once more of the tragic manner in which the forces of power treat ordinary people. I have in mind the police reaction to the demonstrations by Wits University students and, more particularly, the way in which an innocent child of God, Mthokozise Ntumba, was gunned down by police as he emerged from a doctor's consulting room in Braamfontein.

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He was a husband and father, peacefully going about his business. Gender based violence continues to rear its ugly head regularly throughout the world and, most awfully, in our own communities.

No wonder people are angry and fearful.

All this saddens me deeply. I have concluded that we are facing not just a pandemic caused by a disease, but a massive **cultural pandemic** which threatens the fabric of our society. I say this because, if unchecked, it will long outlive the life of Covid-19 and its variants.

The one certainty, whether we speak of the viral or cultural pandemics in our midst, is that almost anything can happen in these uncertain times. In Peter's letter he writes, "Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when He is revealed" (I Peter 1: 13).

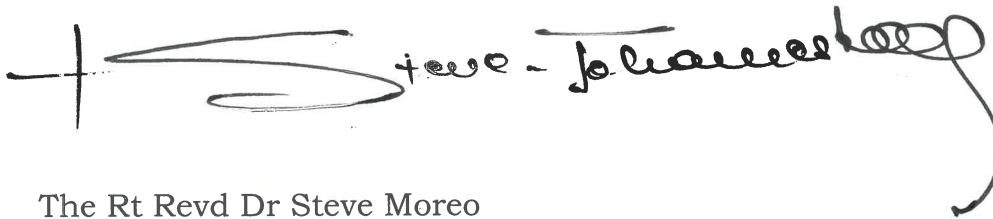
Therein lies the actions and messages we as Christians need to take into the heart of society. For we have to be hopeful, and we have to live out our lives so that we can account for the hope that as Christians we must embrace. That means we need in our actions to be practical Christians in serving our people and our communities. We must work for reconciliation, and show mutual love. In respect of our practical service, let me remind you that at this time, people may relax their guard and congregate in crowded environments. This is unacceptable behaviour that puts people at severe risk. As a Church we must set an example that shows our care for people and the healing ministry to which we are called as we all fight this disease. I refer you in particular to the guidelines that have been carefully developed for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, [which can be downloaded here](#).

As we journey through the events of Holy Week, the fear and anxiety that was in Jerusalem after Palm Sunday will again be apparent. But standing out, in the midst of all the chaos, was Jesus' calm certainty that the God of Grace would overcome the terrible ordeals he was about to undergo. For the promise of the Cross is not death and doom; it is resurrection and life. It is about the mysterious certainty of the Christ who was discovered by the Holy Women in the garden, overcoming their own anxiety and fear, and immediately taking their new-found hope to others.

As I move around our Diocese, I see our parishes, some of which are struggling during this time, doing their best to demonstrate that anxiety and fear can be overcome through the loving service of Christ's modern day followers. Some are in fact going ahead in strength, and all are keeping the faith as the early Church did. Questions around the Covid-19 pandemic, such as that of vaccination, abound. The Archbishop, together with a wide range of Church leaders represented in the SA Council of Churches, has been unequivocal in urging people to get vaccinated.

Let me leave you with these powerful words that Peter writes to the early Church: "Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the Cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and the guardian of your souls" (I Peter 2: 24-25).

Liziwe and I wish you a prayerful Holy Week, a reflective Good Friday, and a joyful day of Resurrection. Happy Easter!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Johannesberg". The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping initial "S" and a long, trailing flourish at the end.

The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo  
**+Johannesburg**