



FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ANGLICAN BISHOP DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG



Our Vision is: To Achieve the Practice of the Ministry of All Believers

4 September 2019

Pastoral letter Vol 4 APPEAL FOR END TO VIOLENCE

It is with distress that my first letter to you after my recent refreshing sabbatical must be one in which I share a great sadness of what has become a ghastly reality in South Africa. I refer of course to the despicable and hateful scenes of violence in the streets of Johannesburg and Pretoria and elsewhere, even as I write this to you. All Africans, and indeed the world, rejoiced greatly when change came about in our country in 1994 and, to all intents and purposes, the ever-present scenes of violence of the apartheid years disappeared. But they didn't. As was the case a few years back, we are vividly reminded now of the hatefulness that can so easily intoxicate our very souls as human beings. It is terrible; it is sinful; it is not of the love of God.

I write to you as fellow Anglicans and Christians to commend the open letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa by our Archbishop, the Most Revd Thabo Makgoba, urging the President to call for calm in a speech to the nation. I support this fully. As the Bishop of the Diocese of Johannesburg, which is so badly affected by these scenes of wanton destruction, I am encouraged to hear the Premier of Gauteng, David Makhura, make an impassioned plea for an end to the violence brought on, by among other things, the mindless actions of those South Africans intent on xenophobia and others who act with criminal and evil intent to harm their fellow human beings and the land that gave them birth. I was also encouraged to hear the Mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, speaking in similar terms, for a call for an end to the chaos.

The use of social media in whatever form - whether to Tweet or message in other ways - to encourage the violence, sow further discord amongst all of those caught up in it, or simply, as some of them claim, to "spread the news" fans the flames of terror that engulf the streets in which we live. The sight of children ransacking shops, including liquor outlets, is too sickening for words, and one shudders to think what seeds we are planting in their psyches. Vivid images on TV are enough to make our hearts sore. But what they don't show is how the hearts, souls and minds of the people, ordinary South Africans and our foreign guests, are being torn apart by these ungodly acts. Amongst our Church leaders are folk who have walked the streets of our land, Jules Street in Johannesburg being an example. Their walk to see what they could do took them past cars smouldering from fires, the remnants of clothing looted from shops with well-known brand names, lie abandoned and burnt. These violent people who are bringing shame to us don't even know how to use what they steal without destroying it first. That is the sign of a sick society. Doctors' surgeries destroyed of all their

resources to provide healing; amazingly a local municipal clinic was spared this mindless attack. And still the violence seems to spread.

It's time for people with adult minds to stop. Foreigners live in South Africa and will always do so, just as they do everywhere else. To adopt hateful actions towards them serves no purpose.

Christians have a seminal role to play now in bringing about peace, calm and stability. Anglicans in particular need to be at the forefront of doing this. I pay tribute to priests and lay people who are already walking the streets of these cities to bring peace and reconciliation. I call on all Anglicans in the Diocese to join them in searching for workable solutions to bring together the residents of South Africa who are now being alienated from one another. Galatians 3:28 says: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In South Africa, there is no Nigerian, Zimbabwean, or South African. We are all people made in the image of God, and when we attack one another, we attack that very image. As Anglicans, we need to remind ourselves of this on Sunday when we meet in our various parishes. No doubt there already are many who offer prayers for a just resolution, but prayer without actions has its limitations. On Sunday when you as Anglicans gather in your parishes, embrace everyone as the people made in the image of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Allow the Holy Spirit to work. Practice that intentional discipleship to which you committed yourselves after my call in my charge at the last synod.

South Africans have always been good at demonstrations. In that spirit, create your banners to hang in your churches, outside your parishes, from everywhere they can be seen, so that all the people of this country can see that Anglicans will not stand for this hurtful and naive denial of human rights.

We acted when our country was being raped by the heresy of apartheid. The heresy of violence is no less sinful. Women and men died so that we may live in peace in South Africa, and embrace a Pan Africanism that accepts everyone. We abandon this tenet of our faith and humanity at the risk of surrendering the Christendom of many of our great leaders in South Africa, not least in the Church. Even worse, we will deny the life and witness of our Lord Jesus Christ and the great example he set of love of neighbour.

It is time for the people who live in South Africa, whether they are citizens or our guests, to do what is good and right. In the words of St Paul of Tarsus, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.... And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone."

Grace and peace to all.

The Rt Revd Dr Steve Moreo
Bishop of Johannesburg