

**CHRISTIMAS MESSAGE FROM THE VICAR GENERAL, VEN. B.T.M.
MFENYANA**

FROM : THE VICAR GENERAL'S DESK
TO : THE PEOPLE OF GOD (ORDAINED AND UNORDAINED)

Dear friends and the people of God in the Diocese

I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, more importantly I extend Advent greetings to you all.

I write to you on behalf of myself (and my own family) and in the stead of the Ordinary of the Diocese of Grahamstown, Thabo Makgoba, the Archbishop of Cape Town and The Metropolitan of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

We have reached that time of the year when we were and still are called to wait, watch and prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In a few days time we shall celebrate Christmas a time that reminds us of God's love for us, who, even though we deserve to be punished for our sins, gave to the world a gift of His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. As I was preparing my message to you, I was reminded of these words as recorded in Luke's gospel:

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people (Luke 2:10)

How desperately our world and our diocese need to hear these words. As we prepare to enjoy Christmas there are other people to whom the words joy and happiness ring hollow. We have countries that are at war, where the ordinary people are being killed, maimed or displaced. Father's and brothers are forced to go and fight a war they did not start. This reminds me of the poem 'An Irishman Forsees his Death by W.B. Yeats when this soldier says:

Those that I fight I do not hate

Those that I guard I do not love.

This highlights the senselessness of war. Please join me as we pray for the end of all wars in the world and in our continent, Africa.

Bishop Schlert of the Diocese of Allentown shines a light of hope in the darkness of pain and sorrow. He writes:

Just as Christmas May occur during times of distress, so too does it offer us each year a message of joy, healing and hope. The hope is rooted not in the human events of the day, but in the eternal message of salvation

The Bishop's words and those of the angel are relevant to our own diocese, parishes and homes. We all need a word of encouragement, we all need to hear the 'good tidings of great joy' so as to revive our hope, faith, love and joy. Advent season helps us focus on the joy of knowing that Christ came, Christ is with us and Christ will come again.

As the Diocesan family let us all wait and watch as God, through Christ, is at work in our Diocese.

We are grateful to God that has been with this diocese up to now. We have a lot to thank God for as the Diocese of Grahamstown. We are grateful for the privilege afforded us by God to lead you at this critical moment. We have been hard at work, taking the opportunity afforded us by the Archbishop to work on a Turnaround strategy for the Diocese. We wish to make it abundantly clear to all of you beloved people of God that we are working to regain the lost ground for our Diocese. We believe in God's promise in Isaiah 40:4 where God through Isaiah declares:

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.

We believe that the great joy promised by the angels will be a reality for our Diocese. May the joy of the 'good tidings' fill our parishes and homes as we celebrate Christmas. I urge you to be generous to those who have no means to celebrate Christmas. Let our outreach programmes touch the most destitute of our brothers and sisters so that God's name be glorified.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some good news. You will remember that the Diocese has significant financial challenges. As one of the initiatives to address these, I sent out an appeal for a once-off love-gift of R150 per person. I am happy to inform you that we have managed to collect R130 800.00. This month we were able to pay R143 942.01 (R47 810 X 3). This has enabled us to bring the ACSA pension fund to August 2023. Without your support we would be in deeper trouble. Thanks to all parishes and guilds that have deposited their contributions. Parishes ranged from R1200 to R28 800; guilds from R2400 to R28 000. There are also individuals that deposited their gifts directly into the Call Account ranging from R150 to R25 000. I have a reason to glorify God for it is through Him that we have reached this point. I still hope that those parishes, guilds and individuals who have not yet deposited their love-gifts will do so as soon as possible. Let us continue collecting and encouraging God's people to give to this effort. The Co-ordinating Committee, chaired by Ven. Rusch will send out a more detailed report on this Appeal.

You might have noticed that the focus of my letter is my gratitude to all those that have journeyed with us during this time. I am particularly grateful to those individuals who have given generously to the work of God in this diocese. Your contributions have carried us through and ensured that our

stipendiary clergy receive their stipends and our staff, their salaries. I continue to pray that we would be able to incentivise them with either an increment or a bonus as they continue to work in their parishes. I am aware that our duty is to ensure that we carry out God's Mission in the world. That does not mean that they should not be looked after as they continue to face similar challenges to those who work in the public and private sectors.

One of their key benefit is Medical Aid. They continue to hold on to this as it ensures them that when sickness strikes they will be well-looked after. Thank you to all parishes that have contributed to this fund. It has gone some way in alleviating our challenge. The Diocesan Council resolved that all beneficiaries should pay in one-third towards the Medical Aid Fund. This has been met with some consternation by the retired clergy, understandably. We shall continue to seek ways of alleviating that on them.

We dare not forget to thank God for entrusting us with this ministry and we are witnesses to God's love and work amongst us.

In this season of Advent and Christmas we commend you and your families to God's loving care and protection. We pray for safe journeys and responsible celebrations. May the Christ-child continue to bring light in our homes this time.

I wish all clergy that will be taking leave after Christmas a peaceful and restful time.

May the Lord meet you in your hour of need so that your joy May be complete.

I would also like to thank the Office staff for all the work they did this year. I wish you a blessed Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

Lastly, my thanks, goes to Archbishop Thabo for holding my hand during this time as his Vicar-General. I believe that with your guidance this Diocese will emerge victorious after this difficult time. Thanks to the Dean, Bishops Commissary, Bishop's Executive Officer, Diocesan Leaders and those of Diocesan Orders. My gratitude goes to all members of Chapter who have been a pillar of support to me during this time. I cannot forget members of the Diocesan Council, Diocesan Council Executive, Finance Co mittee and Trusts board.

Now to Him, who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Yours in Christ
BTM MFENYANA
VICAR-GENERAL
DIOCESE of GRAHAMSTOWN**