

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Installation of Revd Richard Girdwood
St Michael and All Angels, Observatory
17 August 2008

[They will mark the Feast of the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Collect and Readings are in A Book of Common Prayer, CPUSA, p.347]

1 Sam 2:7-9

Lk 1:46-55 – both presumably to be read from the King James Version as in BCP

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, it is a great joy to be with you this morning.

You may know that Fr Richard and I share some common origins, in Knockando, Wits College of Education, in Johannesburg.

One of the greatest pleasures of being a bishop lies in visiting parishes across one's Diocese, and getting to know God's people, in all the rich diversity of who you are, and the circumstances of your lives.

When I look at my life, I feel that more than anything else, the Lord has called me to be a pastor: to walk with God's people on their journey of life, and on their journey of faith. So I am looking forward to being a pastor in this diocese – alongside Bishop Garth, who of course carries the prime day to day responsibility.

And I believe that it is as pastor that I am also called to care for the Province as a whole. As I hope you have seen, I am trying to write a letter each month to the 'Laos', as the New Testament Greek word calls the people of God.

Father Richard, I hope you are circulating this within the parish!

The next issue, you will not be surprised to know, focuses on the Lambeth Conference.

It was the most wonderful opportunity to explore deeply together the life of faith to which God calls us, and how we are to share that faith through participating in God's mission to his world.

We did this through focussing on Anglican Identity, believing that there is something about Anglicanism that makes it the richest possible soil in which God's people can grow and mature as Christians, across the whole breadth of our great variety.

We structured the Conference around small groups – Bible Studies of eight, and Indaba Groups that brought five Bible Studies together. As we met, morning by morning, we were surprised with joy and delight at the extent to which we found Christ in one another, and found one another in Christ.

We were very different in our backgrounds and views, but we learnt to share our faith journeys, the joys and pains of ministry, and our hopes and fears for the Anglican Communion, with ever deepening trust, openness and vulnerability.

It was intensely moving to build relationships in Christ that were far more profound than the differences with which we find ourselves labelled. We found we could exchange very divided opinions and sharp disagreements – but we learnt we could be honest, holding one another in love and respect.

Some people suspected the Indaba approach was a tactic for avoiding difficult questions. In fact the reverse was true. We created a safe space where everyone could have their say. We could peel the layers off the onions, so to speak, getting beneath the surface, and grappling with what really mattered.

Some members of TEC in my indaba group, for example, discovered how ignorant they were of the situations in other parts of the world, and of how their actions affected the lives of Bishops and ordinary Christians far away. Other Bishops came to realise that the accounts of the American church that are beamed round the world on television and internet are often not accurate, and certainly don't tell the whole story.

So, what of the 'big question' of human sexuality? One thing we did not do was debate and vote on reports and resolutions, as past Conferences have done. The problem with voting is that it means having to take sides, for or against, and there has been far too much taking sides, or trying to force people to take sides, within Anglicanism in recent years.

Instead, through debating honestly, and sometimes painfully, together, we came to a deeper acknowledgement that we have big differences, and we don't easily know how to deal with them.

But, more than this, we concluded that we all belong to Jesus Christ, and therefore we belong to each other, and we want to stay together as Anglicans – and so we *must* keep on talking and discussing, in mutual care and trust. The indaba must go on!

We agreed we should go forward on the basis of the Windsor Report, with a moratorium – perhaps best understood as a ‘season of restraint’ – on the consecration as bishops of persons living in same-gender relationships; on the formal blessing of same-sex unions; and on cross-border trespassing by bishops. But we also agreed that the debate must go on – wrestling with God, the Scriptures, one another, and the questions of pastoral care.

And it will – globally within the Communion, and also within our Province and Diocese. It will not be easy – but we know that we are called to be together in Christ. And we know that there are other matters that we can and must tackle together, whatever our other disagreements, including poverty, HIV and AIDS, TB, the environment, the abuse of women and children, and xenophobia.

Archbishop Rowan put it in these words: ‘We are called into union with the one Christ and stand in his unique place – we stand in the Way, the Truth and the Life. Our unity is not mutual forbearance but being summoned and drawn into the same place before the Father’s throne.’

He is right – our unity is not in mutual forbearance, but God’s calling of us into the body of Christ. And we are all diminished, if any are absent. God creates us in great diversity, so our different experiences of his hand upon our lives can enrich us all.

This is true, even at Diocesan level. Church tradition has always understood the ‘local church’ to comprise the Bishop, clergy and people, across the whole of a Diocese. This is why, in a moment, I shall say to Father Richard, ‘Receive the cure of souls, *which is both mine and yours*’. We are in this together!

So, what might the Lambeth Conference mean here in St Michael’s, here in Cape Town, for Father Richard and for us, as we keep the Feast of the Assumption?

The primary message is this – first and foremost, always and everywhere, we are to be faithful to God in Jesus Christ; and to the life to which he calls all his people to share together, and to share with his world.

Therefore, Father Richard, take to heart the promises, the commitments, you will make as we proceed with the installation. People of St Michael’s, take to heart the promises, the commitments, you too will now make.

Be faithful to Jesus. Be faithful in your commitment to evangelism – sharing his good news. Be faithful in prayer – and please pray often for Bishop Garth and for me! Be faithful to the Word of God, and to the holy Eucharist.

And be faithful to Christ and one another – in this Parish, but also within the Diocese, the whole worldwide Anglican Communion, and as members of the

Body of Christ: rejoicing together within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of all God's people in every time and place.

And may the Lord bless you richly – 'filling you with good things', as today's gospel reading put it – and may he make you a blessing to others.

Amen