

Thursday, 5 November 2015

'Cathedrals as Institutions of Education'

An address delivered to the Conference of Deans and Senior Priests, held in the Diocese of Swaziland:

Deans and Senior Priests of the Province:

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. I have just returned from Washington, attending the inauguration of Bishop Michael Curry of North Carolina as the new Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church in the United States. It was a great joy for me to attend this wonderful occasion and it is also a great pleasure for me to be with you this morning.

As you well know, international flights, especially those to the United States can be very tedious, and so I read a book, say my daily Office and just try to make myself as comfortable as possible. On this last flight, I could not bring myself to relax. Cut off from the world, I was extremely worried about the state of affairs at the University of the Western Cape where I am the chancellor.

The day before I boarded the flight to Washington, I had just landed at 11:00am on a flight from London, where I had attended the annual meeting of the Compass Rose Society, to be rushed straight off from the airport directly to UWC to engage with student leadership and university management concerning the spate of mass action.

I began to listen as a father would to his children, hearing their stories and committing to understanding them. But at the same time I wanted to help them to understand, and to see a bigger picture – which is that education is vital. As I said to them, I too am a parent, paying university fees, and my wish was for all of them to have the opportunity to write exams. Leaving the university at 10 o'clock that night, I felt I had helped the process – but that ideally I needed another day at least to make a greater impact. Yet here I was, the next day, back on an international flight, this time to the United States. I had to convince myself that I could do nothing, besides commend them to God.

The Province of which you are part, has adopted as its Vision that we should be:

***Anchored in the love of Christ,
Committed to God's Mission, and
Transformed by the Holy Spirit.***

Unpacking that commitment to be A-C-T, to ACT, we say in our Mission Statement, across the diverse countries and cultures of our region, that we seek:

- To honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service,
- To embody and proclaim the message of God's redemptive hope and healing for people and creation;
- To grow communities of faith that form, inform and transform those who follow Christ.

Our missional priority, “protection and nurture of the young“, is the key peg that translates our mission and vision statement into a concrete commitment to provide education for all our people and especially our young people. So education is one of the mission priorities of the Anglican Church and it is very close to my heart.

We have reconfigured the Anglican Board for Education in Southern Africa (ABESA) and we are now planting Anglican schools, through two organisations, Vuleka Schools and the Archbishop's Education Initiative. I am supporting these initiatives through a trust called Archbishop Thabo Cecil Makgoba Development Trust (ATCMDT), which provides bursaries and scholarships to disadvantaged children. St Mary's School in Waverley, Johannesburg, has partnered with the trust to support disadvantaged learners in Alexandra Township. Through the trust we have also raised funds for CoTT, supported international students from Sudan and Zimbabwe (five of them so far), donated to two rural schools in Limpopo, donated to Vuleka for the library of the Archbishop Makgoba Boys' School, which opens next year, to Mabooe Archbishop High School in Lesotho, which also opens next year, and to several South African universities, towards the post-graduate theological education of a couple of women clergy. We have supported equal education, the student movement, the E-Reader Project in Cape Town and a music group in Cape Town. These are just a few examples of what can be done if we are determined and have a vision.

In the Old Testament, the Lord says to Habakkuk, "Write down a vision; inscribe it clearly on tablets, so that it may be read at a glance" (Habakkuk 2:2). I have a dream, a vision for Cathedrals at this Dean's Conference which I want to scatter before you. You know that dreams, visions and ideas don't fulfil themselves. They need committed people. They don't teach themselves, they need to be taught and learned by people.

So here is my dream, and hopefully you will help me make it practical.

My dream for you is that you create Institutions of Education at your cathedrals. Cathedrals must not only be seen as institutions of prayer which offer the daily Eucharist and Daily Offices but institutions which are at the forefront of Theological Education. I believe that cathedrals are uniquely positioned to become centres for Anglican Learning and Leadership Training Centres for both lay and ordained.

Educational units could be offered for Clergy Education, Post Ordination Training, Lay Ministers' Training, Sunday School Instructors' Training, Confirmation Class Instructors' Training, Youth Instructors' Training, Life Skills courses for Youth and Stewardship Instructors" training. There are just a few examples – I know you can come up with others.

As I said a moment ago, visions don't realise themselves. They need to be fleshed out and give life by people as committed as you are, in your beautiful Cathedral buildings.

Good education – theological and otherwise – is at the heart of our capacity to grow into our Provincial Vision, 'Anglicans ACT'. Education must therefore include enabling individuals to become competent and skilled in engaging well with life.

It must prepare young people to tackle wisely and well the ethical and moral questions that endlessly arise in every area of human activity; and so to enable them to play a constructive role in wider society. Questions of good judgement face us at every turn: from how we utilise the finite resources of our planet through to the way we live as spouses, parents, neighbours, colleagues, employers, employees – every choice has consequences, for ourselves, for others.

And it is not enough merely to speak broadly of seeking a world of justice and fairness for all, which moves towards overcoming inequalities, and strives to promote conditions in which all may have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. We also need to have sharp mental tools that help us analyse more specifically what this means in practice, so we may discern what is tangibly possible and how we can achieve it.

The task before us is great. As well as dealing with the legacies of the past, we face new challenges, not least increasing economic disparities and the inequalities that flow from these. Further, as we have seen in vivid ways in the last two weeks, we have not yet learnt enough about how to live with one another's different and distinctive cultural norms, in ways that affirm all that is good, and that

express mutual respect and uphold the dignity of everyone. We do not do ourselves any favours if we pretend these challenges are less significant, less serious, than they are; or that there are simple and easy solutions. To name the challenges is the first step in facing them, enabling us to overcome them.

Jesus said 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free'. Above all else, education is in the business of helping us know what the truth is, and responding with honesty, and justice, and all that is good and right and true.

As you know, the word Cathedral gets its name from the bishop's chair (cathedra). This is a chair or throne that is a symbol of the Bishop's teaching authority in his Diocese and also the primary location from where the bishop's ministry commences. Traditionally the Bishop is the Parish Priest of the Cathedral but because he has the responsibility for the whole Diocese, The Cathedral Dean takes responsibility for this. So you, the deans, have an important role to play in the church, living out your bishop's ministry which is called to be apostolic, prophetic, theological, pastoral, prayerful and educational.

When archbishops ponder education, it is not long before their thoughts are drawn, as they were with citizenship, to Jesus! For it is crystal clear that he was a remarkable teacher:

- a teacher who cared for everyone;
- a teacher who educated by walking with humanity in the ups and downs of our lives; and by walking with each individual he encountered, in their own uniqueness;
- a teacher who encouraged and delighted with his vivid, thought-provoking parables; and
- a teacher who modelled by the example of his own life.

And he is a teacher who calls us all to follow in his steps.

**Archbishop
November**

**Thabo
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2015**