



Anglican Church of Southern Africa
Diocese of Grahamstown

The Bishop of Grahamstown
The Rt Reverend Ebenezer St Mark Ntlali

P O Box 181 • Grahamstown • South Africa • 6140 • email: bishop@grahamstowndiocese.org.za
Tel. Home (+27) (0)46-622 2500 Office (+27) (0)46-636 1996 • Fax (+27) (0)46-622 5231

1 December 2022

ADVENT PASTORAL LETTER
BY THE RT REVD EBENEZER ST MARK NTLALI
BISHOP OF GRAHAMSTOWN

Dear People of God

Advent greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are well, wishing you the same.

We are grateful to God for carrying us through COVID-19 and bringing us to a New Year in the Church where we are this year able to meet in person again. We have just started a brand-new liturgical year with Advent Sunday 2022. Advent is “the season which marks the four Sundays before Christmas.

It was Pope Gregory I (590-604) who settled the Season of Advent of four Sundays with a very clear emphasis on the Christian hope of the “Coming of Christ” (Lectionary 2022:6).

The season of Advent encourages us to remember that Christ has come and will come again. We are now living after the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Christ and we find ourselves in the uncomfortable period ‘in-between’.

We are living after the birth of Jesus which the prophets prophesied about in the Old Testament, eg. Isaiah 9: 7 and before the second coming which Jesus himself referred to in the Gospels. We are therefore in a continuous period of waiting.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian explains this season of waiting as: “Celebrating Advent means being able to wait”. Waiting is an art that our impatient age has forgotten. It wants to break open the ripe fruit when it has hardly finished planting the shoot.... For the greatest, most profound, most tender things in the world, we must wait. It happens not here in a storm but according to the divine laws of sprouting, growing, and becoming.”

Waiting is important as Bonhoeffer explains. We all need to learn to wait – to be patient. This need to wait encourages us to become silent and less busy but rather more aware of God’s presence. It reminds us of the words of the Psalmist, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). We are invited to stop all that we are busy with – have silence outside by stopping all activities but also have silence within and be aware of Christ within our hearts. That awareness brings calm and peace – it brings certainty that “all shall be well” as Julian of Norwich, anchoress and English Mystic of the Church who lived in the 14th century, said. She was able to say this although her life had so many challenges. She had lived through many

rounds of the bubonic plague and she had also witnessed the death of family members and of friends. Yet she was able to say these words with such confidence that it has become one of her famous phrases that she is remembered for. One is only able to “be still and know God” – to know that “all shall be well’ through the grace of God. This connection with God comes through patience and waiting.

In the words of Macrina Wiederkehr OSB from her poem, “The Song of the Seed”:
*“Life unfolds
a petal at a time slowly.*

*The beauty of the process is crippled
when I try to hurry growth.
Life has its inner rhythm which must be respected.
It cannot be rushed or hurried”*

This Advent, my dear people of God, we are all called to slow down and wait in silence. We are called to do this with kindness and gentleness. We are called to “be still and know...”. God is calling us to actively wait and listen with our hearts – focusing on the Benedictine spirituality (a life of prayer; reading and studying Holy Scriptures, obedience to the Word of God).

God bless you as we are partners in God’s mission.

Grace and peace

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bishop of Grahamstown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BISHOP OF GRAHAMSTOWN

**Christ has no body on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours.
Ours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out;
ours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and ours are the hands with which
He is to bless us now. (St Teresa de Avila)**