

DIOCESE OF ZULULAND

AD ECCLESIAM

February 6th, 2008- No 1

“Built together in one body”

TO BE READ WHEREVER POSSIBLE DURING DIVINE WORSHIP EITHER ON SUNDAY 2nd MARCH OR SUNDAY 9th MARCH 2008

2008

Ash Wednesday, 6th February

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

“Return to the Lord who will have mercy, to our God who will richly pardon”. (Isaiah 55:7)

First and foremost, I would like to wish you all a blessed season of Lent, that, as we journey towards Easter during these forty days of prayer, fasting and acts of charity (almsgiving), we may repent for what is not according to God’s purpose for our lives and joyfully return to him and receive his abundant mercy. As we strive to renew our baptismal promises, may we die with Christ to sin and death so that we may rise with him to a transformed life at Easter.

During our last Clergy School, held at KwaNzimela from Monday 28th January to Friday 1st of February 2008, the Bishop together with the diocesan clergy present shared views on our pastoral approach to the very sensitive area of marriage and family life in our Diocese.

My intention at this stage is not to offer a comprehensive and exhaustive pastoral statement on marriage as a sacrament of the church, but to express a concern on trends which are slowly surfacing among our people and suggest ways of addressing those issues. The Diocesan Department of Christian Education has been requested to begin to address urgently the area of marriage and family life. My hope is that very soon we will be able to formulate a diocesan pastoral policy on marriage and a plan of action to enhance our understanding of Christian Marriage and provide the people in our Diocese with practical instruments to grow into this holy state of life.

1. Qualifications for marriage

Canon 34:2 of Holy Matrimony states that “No clergy person shall join in matrimony two unbaptised persons. A baptised person may be joined in matrimony to one who is under instruction for baptism. **The Bishop may allow the marriage of a baptised person with an unbaptised person (not being under instruction for baptism) under such conditions and with such**

forms of service as he shall direct."

I need to remind you that our church recognises the Baptism performed in other Christian Churches as long as it is done "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Traditionally this applies to the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Congregational Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Lutheran Church.

Other "churches", such as the Jehova's Witnesses, the Nazareth Baptist Church or Shembe, do not share the same theology of Baptism with us. In the case of people who are members of these "churches", it is quite clear that, in terms of Canon 34:2, the Bishop himself needs to be approached and permission to solemnise the marriage **be sought and obtained in good time.**

2. Period of preparation

The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is to be understood as a special opportunity for the engaged couple to rediscover and deepen their Christian faith and their baptismal promises. In this way they will come to recognise and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and serve the Kingdom of God in this holy way of life.

Engaged couples who will be married within the Diocese, or who wish to complete their preparation for marriage in the Diocese, should contact their local priest or deacon **at least nine months before their intended wedding date.** It is recommended that couples be encouraged to start their marriage preparation even before setting a wedding date.

It is my hope that the Office for Marriage and Family Life, under the auspices of the Department of Christian Education, will design good and relevant **marriage preparation programmes** to be offered to all engaged couples in all of the parishes of the Diocese.

3. Venue for solemnisation of weddings

According to the South African Marriage Act No 25 of 1961, Clause 29 (2), "A marriage officer shall solemnise any marriage in a church or other building used for religious service, or in public office or private dwelling-house with open doors and in the presence of the parties themselves and at least to competent witnesses..." Canon 34:13 of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa goes even further and clearly states that **"Except with the Bishop's permission, marriage shall be solemnised only in a church or chapel or other place customarily used for worship"**.

A disturbing trend which is beginning to attract the interest of engaged couples when planning their wedding is that of wanting the marriage officer to solemnise their wedding in community halls, gardens, forests etc.

I wish to reiterate that, traditionally, the Bride's parish church is the venue for the wedding. In any case, a church building, either Anglican or another

Christian denomination, should be used. Weddings may be held at Chapels at the place of reception being within the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Zululand when requested by the couple, provided that :

S the permission of the Bishop is sought before the arrangements are finalised and

S the service in these Chapels will not include the Nuptial Blessing. This will be done at a Parish Eucharist as soon as possible after the wedding.

Under no circumstances will weddings be allowed to be solemnised in places such as community halls, schools, tents, gardens, forests etc.

Conclusion

“Marriage is a gift of God and a means of grace, in which man and woman become one flesh. It is God’s purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love, they shall grow together and be united in that love, as Christ is united with his Church...This is a way of life that all should reverence and none should lightly undertake”. (An Anglican Prayer Book, p. 461-2)

As your Bishop, it was not my intention to sound legalistic or reactionary towards a society that is quickly changing and transforming. It is, instead, my great duty and desire to make sure that we remain faithful to and promote Christian Marriage and that we maintain that good and sound discipline which is ours.

I wish you all a blessed season of Lent.

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Dino Gabriel (The Rt Revd)
Bishop of Zululand