



THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA (*Anglican Communion*)

THE MOST REV. PETER J. AKINOLA, CON.
Archbishop, Metropolitan and Primate of All Nigeria

29th March, 2008

PASTORAL LETTER

My Dear People of God,

Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia. May the power that raised Christ from the grave continue to empower and inspire our witness for Him as we daily identify with His death and resurrection in our lives.

The Bishops and their wives, Clergy and Laity, representing all our dioceses, with the Mothers Union and Women Guild delegates came together for the Standing Committee meeting of our Church which was hosted by the Diocese of Nnewi. The Bishop, Rt. Rev Godwin Okpala and his dear wife, led the clergy and people of the diocese to give a warm welcome to us all. We are grateful for their generosity demonstrated in so many ways, and pray for God continual blessing upon the diocese

Our theme for the meeting was: **BEING IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD**, taken from our Lord high priestly prayer in John 17 (focusing on verses 14-19). The sermons and Bible Studies were drawn from the passage with penetrating insights and heart-searching applications. We came under the conviction that our identity has been compromised in that our witness for Christ has suffered so much embarrassment and indictment from the watching world. We acknowledged that if our Lord should be physically present in the in the world to see the Church today, He would be shocked and utterly disappointed by the extent to which His Church has lost its identity. Hardly anyone in the Church is free from this serious spiritual sickness.

Leadership in the Church has often reflected the leadership style of the gentile rulers who lord it over their subjects rather than the standard of servant leadership commended and modelled by our Lord Himself. We have become so obsessed with an endless multiplicity of titles and positions without a corresponding passion for Kingdom values to advance the course of Christ. We reminded ourselves afresh that we are called to exemplify godliness in every sphere of life and teach others in society to do what is right before God. We must extol the dignity of honest work and legal enterprise as the means to acquire wealth in a way that honours God. We must beware of celebrating those who have acquired wealth through unwholesome means or those who have stolen positions through illegal processes. If we fail to condemn these serious issues we will lose credibility before those who should take our leadership seriously.

THE DIACONATE MINISTRY

At our General Synod in Ibadan in September 2002, we opened the door to those who sense a call to the diaconate ministry in order to fulfil that important caring ministry in our parish life. We are still waiting for the trailblazers in this venture. Much time has been devoted to further discussion with a view to clarifying the dimensions and potentials of this ministry. It is a biblical ministry that addresses a key point in our vision statement: ...a Church that epitomizes the genuine love of Christ We agreed that this is a vital ministry that must be implemented as soon as possible.

GAFCON

The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) was introduced in our earlier pastoral letter written from the Bishops retreat in January. The planning of this conference, coming up in Jerusalem in the month of June, has reached an advanced stage. The choice of Jerusalem as the venue is to take us back in a pilgrimage to the biblical and historical roots of our faith to draw inspiration in the face of major attempts to undermine the sufficiency of Scripture by some of our brother and sisters in the West. Knowing that this is not merely a cultural or theological struggle alone, but more importantly a spiritual battle, we urge earnest and concerted prayers that the Spirit of the Lord will show us the way ahead for our beloved Anglican Communion.

When the proposal was first discussed in January, we were staggered by the enormity of the cost, but we trusted that if God hand was in it, He would provide. Indeed the Lord has gone beyond our expectations by raising up from among us those who have felt sufficiently committed to the need to preserve the sanctity of our historic faith that they have committed huge resources to cover all the cost of the conference. May our gracious God reward these people abundantly and may they never be confounded as they continue to trust in Him and give themselves to His glad service.

The Bishops also resolved that Dioceses that had paid the required amount but have an outstanding balance in their Endowment Fund commitment should have their accounts credited with the money meant for the travel costs. This should enable us to make further progress in our desire to resource our Seminaries and other major projects in our vision. This will be a tremendous blessing to the seminaries where our clergy are trained. We have made resources available to meet their most critical needs so that our candidates for ordination and the future shepherds of our church will be well prepared for their ministry without being subjected to the usual handicaps in their training. We hope our postulants and the staff of the seminaries will reward this gesture.

POLYGAMY IN OUR CHURCH

As those who are in the forefront of the prophetic call for a return to biblical truth, we cannot close our eyes to the increasingly blatant disregard of the teaching of the Bible on family life. These aberrations will destroy our witness if not firmly addressed. We cannot claim to be a bible believing church and yet be selective in our obedience. We must all come under the authority of the whole Bible, whoever is involved. Indeed, any attempt to trivialize the clear teaching of the Bible will make a mockery of whatever else we stand for. The integrity of our faith is far more important than the reputation of those who turn their back on the word of God. Sadly sometimes, even our leadership has looked the other way on this matter.

Our time together in Nnewi has been a great blessing. We have seen God hand at work and to keep pace with what God is doing among us we have created eighteen new missionary dioceses and prayerfully elected bishops to serve them. It is a privilege to be members of the Church Nigeria at this time. All that we have heard and seen has encouraged us, we know that the Spirit of God is being poured out on us all.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Every Blessing,

Signed

The Most Rev Peter J. Akinola
Archbishop, Metropolitan and Primate of All Nigeria.