

**Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane Address at Farewell Dinner
23rd September 2007**

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, it is a great privilege and joy to share this evening with you.

Though I have to say it has not been without danger to myself.

Adlai Stevenson famously said that flattery is like a cigarette – it is all right as long as you don't inhale.

Well, so many nice things have been said about me this week, and especially tonight, that sometimes I hardly dared to breathe at all!

However, I must admit that alongside the sadness of these goodbyes, I am also giving a sigh of relief at being able to lay down my staff.

11 years in Bishops court is a long time. My first three predecessors were in office for very long periods in the formative days of the Province and then through the war years. After that a maximum of ten years seemed to become the norm.

So I hope I have not overstayed my welcome! But I was determined to see to its conclusion the process of transforming the Diocese of Cape Town – completed with our Diocesan Synod last month.

The pace of life today is very different from that the first Archbishops of Cape Town enjoyed. The advent of aeroplanes and cyber technology means there is rarely a moment when I am not pursued by the issues of Diocese and Province and Communion, to say nothing of Country and Continent.

As the Psalmist almost noted,
'Where shall I go from my cell-phone? Or where shall I flee from my email?
If I spread my wings towards the morning, or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there the clergy will find me, and the right-hand women of my office will get hold of me!'

It is both burden and privilege that with this Office comes so many, and such high expectations from around the world.

Yet these bring amazing opportunities to share with others the riches of God's grace that we have experienced.

Whenever I travel, I am struck afresh by the privilege it is to be a member of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa; what a privilege it is to be a partner in the gospel with you who are here tonight, and with everyone you represent.

When the burdens of office have been heavy, I have been comforted by words of Saint Augustine, words that I quoted at my enthronement in Kimberley in 1991.

He said this:

'Believe me, brothers and sisters, if what I am for you frightens me, what I am with you reassures me. For you I am the bishop; with you I am a Christian. "Bishop" – this is the title of an office one has accepted to discharge; "Christian" – this is the name of the grace one receives!'

Such is the grace and reassurance that we receive, as we respond to the call to collaborative ministry within the body of Christ; in which we are held together in the love of Christ, with all our human weaknesses and failings and where our faith is enriched through the created diversity that is God's gracious gift.

This is the rich prize we have to share with the world. Of course, it has not always been easy to deal with our differences. We have had tense times in our Synods and Committees, and there have been many pains alongside the joys.

Yet the Lord gave us great courage to hold together and to face our conflicts head on. We dared to believe that what we had in common as fellow-members of the body of Christ, was far greater than anything that could attempt to divide us.

This glorious 'unity in diversity' can get the Anglican Church a bad name, even within our Communion! Sometimes the Anglican ability to live with difference is wrongly caricatured as little more than having no real principles by which to stand.

Some of you will remember the Zapiro cartoon which showed me as the 'Ambivalent Archbishop' with two faces looking in different directions in the debate on homosexuality.

Of our current controversies let me only say that this is God's church – he has seen us through all manner of crises in the past, and he will see us through again.

But the reality is this – we are a church that encompasses a great breadth of opinions on this, as on many other subjects, where there are no easy answers.

We respect all who earnestly strive to discern the truth; and we declare there is a place within our walls for all who honestly yearn to follow the way of Christ in faithful obedience and holiness of life.

Bishop Michael Nuttal, in his gracious words at the Cathedral (thank you, Michael), spoke about being 'touched by Jesus'.

Yes, Jesus Christ is the corner-stone, the touch-stone of our faith.

This too is a lesson that the Anglican Communion must relearn, even as we in Southern Africa found that the roots of our identity lie in Jesus Christ. The life of faith is entirely dependent on our relationship with him – not on any particular stance on any particular issue.

As I said in my final Charge to the Diocese of Cape Town last month, 'If you remember nothing else from my years as Archbishop, I hope you will remember my desire that you should abide in the love of God' – the love expressed in Jesus Christ.

The love of God is the source of all we are and all we do and all we are called to become.

Only in him, and in his love, will we find meaning and purpose for our lives; and all that we need to face the challenges of life.

One of the prime ways he shows his love to us is through one another, in the fellowship of Christian brothers and sisters, within the embrace of the Church.

So I thank you for the love with which you have embraced me, and put up with me, warts and all, through my 11 years as Archbishop, and the 23 years of ordained ministry before that!

It is more than fitting that this, the final event before I depart on sabbatical, is held at Bishops.

It was here, over 11 years ago, that we held the Elective Assembly that gave me this daunting responsibility.

In those days it was, of course, a huge Assembly, with over 500 electors – a daunting Assembly, to elect an unsuspecting (or even suspecting!) individual to a daunting task.

At least this week it will be a rather more intimate affair.

But nevertheless, please hold in your prayers the individuals at its focus, whether suspecting and unsuspecting, because the task ahead of whoever is chosen remains a daunting one!

I think that the walk I took 11 years ago, down the aisle to the front of the chapel here, was the longest of my life.

Now I shall take the short and easy journey to Glencairn Heights, as I move from Bishopscourt to new ministries with African Monitor (my initiative to bring African grass roots voices into effective engagement with Africa's development) and with the Historic Schools' Restoration Project within this country.

One may retire from the church, but one never retires from God! His hand – a hand of love but also of challenge – is upon our lives until we take our final breath. So I am looking forward to many more adventures in his service.

Let me end by recalling another cartoon, this time from 11 years ago. This showed me with my predecessor's huge mitre so far down over my eyes that it almost reached my toes. A sympathetic parishioner was reassuring me with the words, 'Don't worry, your Grace, it will come to fit in time.'

Well, I do not know how well it has come to fit – that is for others to discern.

But I do know that the time has come to lay it down, ready for another to pick up, and share in the amazing privilege it has been to follow in the footsteps of Robert Gray and those who came after him.

As tonight marks both an ending and the dawning of a new beginning, let me end with this prayer

'Almighty and Eternal God,
We entrust the past to your mercy
the present to your love
and the future to your wisdom
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Alpha and Omega
who is the same yesterday, today and for ever.

Amen.'