



BISHOP'S ADVENT APPEAL 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the weekend of the 27th and 28th December, we celebrate the First Sunday of the Advent Season.

It is with great pleasure that I get to express my thanks to you all for your most generous contribution to the 2020 Advent Appeal in the amount of R 154 455.31 towards the support of Parishes in poverty-stricken areas. Despite the economic hardships, job losses, retrenchments and short working hours due to the COVID pandemic there has been a great spirit of generosity shown in responding to the needs of others.

Bishops Advent Message of 2021/22

Towards the end of this month of November on the 28th to be precise, the Church makes a clarion call to all the faithful throughout the world to mark the first Sunday of Advent, the spiritual season of hope par excellence. Advent is a favourable time to cultivate and deepen the spirit of prayer, reflection, discernment, awareness, vigilance and radical renewal in the garden of our hearts, in our homes, small Christians communities, workplace, ministry and life.

We recall with gratitude to God the Year of St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, Husband of our Holy Mother Mary and Earthly Father of Jesus. The Holy Family of Nazareth represents and embodies the messianic expectations, hopes, dreams and aspirations of the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah which are all fulfilled through the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ who ushered the sacred history of salvation of the whole of humanity. In God's plan we are all included, nobody is left out, forgotten or discarded.

This Year's Advent invites us to live in the present with renewed commitment to our faith in God who is the Divine Family of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is in this faith that we dare acknowledge, name and come to terms with the devastation of covid-19 pandemic that we have suffered as individuals, poverty stricken, employed and unemployed, families, Church communities, business and all sectors of society here in South Africa and throughout the world. In one way or another, we are all victims. We were infected or affected and have lost a loved one, immediate family members, relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, brothers and sisters in the Lord. We remain traumatized, wounded, broken, hurt and in mourning. Full, active and conscious participation in Advent preparation, prayer, devotion, spirituality and its sublime liturgy augur well for our holistic healing of body, mind and soul.

This Holy Season of Advent and Christmastide invites us to raise our heads high and look into the future with hope. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Mary, the Fruit of God's stupendous love and the Holy Spirit, is with us as our Lord, Redeemer and Emmanuel – in his full divinity and full humanity he is "God-with-us". He walks along with us in the journey of our faith and life.

As a Christmas present of a lifetime, I kindly ask you to take to heart the Pastoral Letter of our Holy Father Pope Francis ***Fratelli Tutti*** on Fraternity and Social Friendship. Please read it carefully, prayerfully and like our Mother Mary treasure all these things and ponder them in your heart of hearts. However, don't keep it secret, please share it with your family, friends, colleagues, people of other faiths and with all men and women of goodwill.

Fratelli Tutti resonates with the Christmas message that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16) In Jesus, we are all brothers and sisters.

Have a Blessed, Joyful, Fulfilling, Meaningful and Fruitful celebration of the Holy Season of Advent and Christmas!

Bishops Advent Appeal.

Due to the COVID pandemic the Catholic Diocese is under tremendous pressure to fulfil our financial commitments and obligations.

Our financial support from levy collections dwindled drastically as the majority of our Parish Communities from middle-and lower-income groups depend on physical gatherings for collections, pledge-giving and fundraising. Our retreat centres ran at a loss as well, the arrears in rental of our school premises remain unpaid – despite all of this we have incurred no bad debt and have been able to fulfil all our obligations. We continue to look after the needs of our retired Clergy, assist parishes in the poorer communities, support our seminarians and administrative staff. Once again, a thousand thanks for your solidarity and support.

For the Advent Season of 2021 we have chosen the following beneficiary: **Seminarian Fund – Formation of candidates to the Catholic Priesthood.**

A seminarian is a young man who is discerning the Lord's call to the priesthood. By virtue of his baptism, he is a member of the priesthood of all believers like all the faithful, but a seminarian hears the Lord speaking to him and calling him to the sacrament of Holy Orders and responds by becoming a priest of Jesus Christ. The priesthood is primarily a vocation: a calling from the Lord and he should be open to hearing the Lord's call in his life and be eager to respond to it.

He spends most of his time in the Seminary: at St Francis Xavier in Cape Town for orientation which lasts about one year; seven years at St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria, plus six months for pastoral internship, normally in his home diocese. Seminarians live in community: praying together, working together, studying together and participating in sports together. They come from all walks of life, family backgrounds, educational institutions, and bring with them different understanding, experiences and talents. These seeds of brotherhood that are sown in the seminary are further deepened in their future life and ministry as priests in their different dioceses.

The seminary is a healthy environment designed to nurture, prepare and form Christian men who are set apart by a particular calling to holiness of life, human virtue and generous service after the example of Christ who "came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for all" (Mk 10:45). It is composed of the Formation Community, under the guidance of the Rector whose mission is to ensure that holistic formation that is human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral is given to all seminarians. There is also ongoing accompaniment, assessment and evaluation to measure progress in one's vocational journey. As a Catholic Tertiary Institution, the seminary is registered with the Department of Higher Education and it is affiliated with SAQA. However, it is accountable to SACBC and to the Holy See where it submits its annual report. It offers two degrees to successful students: BA in Philosophy which takes three years and BA in Theology which takes four years.

The Catholic Diocese of Port Elizabeth currently has 8 young men at different stages of their priestly formation. This year, the total cost per seminarian is R 92 000,00. Multiply that by eight, then it adds up to R 736 000. In the last nearly two years of covid-19 pandemic, we have not received any subsidy from Rome.

In this season of giving, I appeal to you once again to open your hearts to those who desire and prepare to offer their entire lives to the Lord and to all of you as God's Beloved Family and People.

You can donate in a box/envelope provided at your Parish or EFT your Parish with the Reference: Bishops Advent Appeal.

Alternatively, you can EFT the Diocese directly: **NAME:** Catholic Diocese of Port Elizabeth, **BANK:** STANDARD BANK **Branch Code:** 050017, **ACCOUNT NO:** 08 000 638 8, **REFERENCE:** Bishops Advent Appeal and name of parish.

May you and your loved ones be greatly blessed this coming Christmastime.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



RT. REV. VINCENT M. ZUNGU
BISHOP OF PORT ELIZABETH.