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A PASTORAL LETTER

TO BE READ IN CHURCHES IN THE DIOCESE OF NATAL

ON SUNDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 1988

Dear people of God,

A CALL TO PRAYER AND FASTING

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing this Pastoral Letter out of a deep concern for the continuing situation of conflict and violence in the Pietermaritzburg area. The killings continue at an alarming rate. In December there were 90 deaths; in January there were 108. Our capital city and its surrounding area have become the focus of the worst violence in the country at present, and the situation has all the marks of tragedy because, despite a series of peacemaking efforts, the conflict does not go away.

Different explanations of this violence are given by different people. It is not the purpose of this letter to engage in that process, other than to say that we are experiencing the fruit of a deeply divided society where some have privileges and others do not.

The purpose of my letter is to call you to prayer, with fasting, about the Pietermaritzburg situation during the coming season of Lent. With imagination and caring will you take the situation into your hearts and be given to prayer? That is the call I wish to make.

Jesus was once asked by his disciples why they could not cast out a certain sickness in a young boy. He replied that this kind of sickness could only be driven out with prayer and fasting. (Mark 9: 14-29). This is the story to have in our minds as we pray and fast. There are young boys, even of ten or eleven years old, caught up in the crisis around Pietermaritzburg. Who has brought them to this? How can healing come? Let us take our Lord's words seriously and use the spiritual weapon of prayer and fasting as a way to bring peace back into the hearts and homes of our people.

Wednesday this week is Ash Wednesday, a day always observed in our Church as a special day of prayer and fasting, in penitence and hope, as we begin the holy season of Lent. I intend to keep the day as such in our Cathedral in Maritzburg, by being there from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. I shall take no food during that time, and shall make this small offering to God as a plea for an end to the present conflict. Others are welcome to join in, in whatever way seems appropriate to them. I hope that in every church throughout the Diocese a vigil will be kept on Ash Wednesday, from six to six, so that we can be united in heart before God on this matter, which surely grieves his heart of love.

Then, let/.....

Then, let the remainder of Lent be a continuing time of prayer, with self-denial according to each one's decision, asking that true peace may come in Maritzburg and throughout the land: peace built on justice and mercy and faith in God who is our peace. So we pray:

Lord God,  
renew your Church  
and begin with me;  
heal our land,  
tend our wounds,  
make us one, \*  
and use us in your service;  
for Jesus Christ's sake.

That is our prayer. Let it be made with a sincere faith and a profound desire.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

+MICHAEL

February 1988.