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Churchwardens & Councillors.
Christ Church Kei Rd
Church of the Province of South Africa
Grahamstown Diocese

3rd January 1990

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

We are aware, having heard second hand, that the community has been abuzz about our "activities". As no one has contacted us yet to ask us about these rumours that are doing the rounds we take this opportunity to give you the facts from our side and ask you as fellow councillors to help us solve a difficult problem. We hope that we have not erred in our Christian duty but if we have please point it out to us.

It seems to us that rumours do abound these days and a typical comment is 'We have it on good authority'. You will remember that those who confronted Martin and Priscilla Glover with regard to the rumours about Lulama Ntshingwa were then "not available" when Lulama and Nomhle's visited the parish for the specific purpose of answering them. Personally we believe that truth is more important than hearsay (however entertaining the latter may be).

We ask you to consider the following scripture:

How is it that when you have something against another Christian, you "go to law" and ask a heathen court to decide the matter instead of taking it to other Christians to decide which of you is right? Don't you know that some day we Christians are going to judge and govern the world? So why can't you decide even these little things among yourselves? Don't you know that we Christians will judge and reward the very angels in heaven?

(Corinthians 6:verses (1-6))

It is not our intention to detail all the rumours we have heard concerning what we have done or not done here but simply to address the main issue as we see it, viz; that we are accused of being meddlers in business of which we know nothing of or have no right to be involved in. This seems to concern our role in the evictions at Wolseley Estate and an accusation that we are organising an "underhand" wage survey on the farms in the district.

Let us give you a brief account of events leading up to this unfortunate eviction which took place on the 1st February 1990.

On 27th December 1989 we were approached by two of our employees, Fashion Somtsorha and Michael Nonse who asked us for the day off as they said they had been told to move off the farm Wolseley Estate where their fathers had been born and bred (it has been established that many of the young children living there are fourth generation) by the end of December. They said the farm had been sold to Syd Knott (which we knew from passing conversation) and they needed to find alternative accommodation. We had employed Fashion and Michael on a temporary basis for approximately fourteen months but when we discovered that they were the sole bread winners in their respective families we decided to try and keep them on for as long as we could afford to. We realised we could not house them as we only have a small holding, not a farm, and we do not receive farmers assistance for staff housing from the government.

As a result of this conversation with his staff Tony contacted Donald Knott who confirmed that they did have to move but only by the 31st of January. Donald quite rightly pointed out to Tony that farmers were under no obligation to house people who were not employed on their farm. Although they had offered work to Michael's father Jack Nonse he had turned it down. Donald said to Tony that he felt that they were being perfectly good Christians by sending these people out to look for work and alternative accommodation as this would rid the community of layabouts which he felt these people were. Donald pointed out that Jack had moved a few months before and Tony felt he was implying that Michael and Fashion just wanted "another day off".

Naturally we were annoyed that Michael and Fashion should have found it necessary to spin us a yarn to get a day off as we have never been unreasonable about this. We resolved to get to the bottom of the story. Tony decided to find Jack and with the help of another member of his staff eventually found Jack at a squatter camp in the Ciskei. Jack told Tony that he had received a permit to live there with his family on a temporary basis from a Ciskei "lawyer". His son Michael and daughter were with him, waiting for transport to take them to Stutterheim so that Jack could see his doctor there. They told Tony that Jack seemed to be so short of breath and they were very concerned about him. Tony gave them a lift to Stutterheim where Jack consulted a Dr Vaandrager. After the examination Tony asked the doctor what was wrong with Jack and he said that Jack had been his patient for some time and was suffering from hypertension which now included a development of enlarged kidneys and fluid on the lungs. As Tony had visited Jack's shack in the squatter camp and seen the living conditions there and as there was obviously something seriously wrong with Jack he determined to have him examined at the hospital in Keiskamerhoek where full X-rays and tests could be done. Under questioning to find out about his relocation Jack told Tony his full story and confirmed to Tony that he moved off Wolseley Estate before the 31.1.1990 because he could no longer stand the mental strain of being told regularly that he had go as he felt very ill. Because this did appear to us to be the case and he was obviously unable to work we asked Jack what pension he was receiving and what his severance pay was so we would have some idea of his circumstances. Jack said he had no savings and implied this was in part due to the low wages he had received all his life. In order to get an idea of the pattern in the district we asked Clyde Ranger to give us an idea of current wages and if a pension scheme for farm workers existed (besides the government scheme). It seemed to us that if Jack could receive medical attention he might be able to find work and start all over again.

However as you all know, Jack died approximately eight days after we had first found him before we could get him to hospital. His family are still trying to find a permanent place to live.

We were now faced with a situation where:

1. Syd was perfectly within his legal rights to evict these people.
2. Donald, quite rightly, challenged us as Christians to put them up in our own home - after all two of the men in the community did work for us.
3. Cobongo is a really small property by farming standards; not even the size of one camp on an average farm in the district. Our existing staff (much to our shame) does not yet have adequate housing. The property does not have the natural resources to house another 30 odd people without compromising our own efforts to farm the land on a small scale.
4. We had no experience in finding housing for ex-farm labourers. (We knew that in our previous business we often wrote to the township board to appeal for staff housing - but where did we start in this case?).
5. If the people moved out of the area the sole bread-winners (Fashion and Michael) would be jobless and we know from previous experience in local industry that jobs are difficult to get in this area.
6. We enquired about housing in the Kei Road township but were told that because there were fears of overcrowding the Depot of Bantu Affairs was not keen to have any more ex-farm workers moving in there.

In the light of all these apparently insurmountable problems we called in other people with more experience from resource centres and the like to try and help us. However we were appalled to discover that nothing could be done for evicted farm workers. Everyone generally agreed that the one and only hope lay in asking the farmer to be compassionate. What else could we do but ask Syd to be kind to these people and allow them to remain; if not on a permanent basis then at least to extend the time limit in order to give an opportunity to try and sort something out. After all since he is a neighbour and one of the leading farmers in our area as well as a fellow worshipper at Christ Church we hoped he would understand the problem.

Tony's mother who was visiting us at the time referred us to James 2: 14-17 which says "Dear brothers, what's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will that kind of faith save anyone? If you have a friend who is in need of food and clothing, and you say to him, "Well goodbye and God bless you; stay warm and eat up." and then don't give him clothes or food, what good does that do?"

We got an opportunity to approach Syd following an unfortunate incident on the farm Wolseley Estate and it was then that Tony asked him if he would consider letting the families stay on permanently or at least until we could sort something else out. Syd was adamant that they had to go by 1.2.1990.

Now we were really in a pickle as it was obvious Syd would not listen to any more pleas from us and had made it quite clear that he felt it was none of our business. However the farm workers still faced a housing crisis! We then remembered that the Peelson people had been put up in the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist halls in King William's Town so we asked Martin Glover to see if the church could make a plan. As he felt this was a little different from the Peelson problem he decided to contact Bishop David Russell and ask him for advice.

Bishop David offered to come and personally appeal to Syd and put the matter in the light that it was intended. We were hopeful that the matter would now be resolved confident that Bishop David would be able to obtain a reasonable extension.

We were not at this meeting but we do know that after the Bishop and Martin had seen Syd and Donald they were asked to meet a group from the district. As both Martin Glover and Bill Roach were present at this meeting and would, we are sure, be available

for questioning we do not feel it proper to deal with what was discussed in this letter. However after this meeting Bishop David told us that he had not been able to persuade Syd to extend the deadline.

Thus an event involving four soon to be homeless families had now it seemed turned the district into a turmoil. Fr Bill Buckley who is the Catholic Priest in Kei Road came to see us as two of his congregation were amongst those being evicted as well as eleven children attending Smiling Valley School. He suggested that since none of our efforts had availed it would be of some value, at least, to let people know of the total lack of basic legislated protection afforded farm labourers. Martin Glover also suggested appealing for help to the Border Council of Churches. In the event both courses were followed.

We were told that from the point of view of the press (in the form of the Daily Dispatch) the issue was clear. Why had a plea to give these people some grace developed into such a major issue? Certainly the farmer was within his legal rights - no one denied that. It seemed the farmers, as a body, were confident that their workers were adequately paid and well looked after. They said they received many perks and were better off than employees in town and were a contented lot of chaps. So why were these people faced with this problem of no money, no alternative home to go to, no food and apparently no savings and desperately unhappy? This apparent contradiction surely needed an answer? Were they indeed the "bad blacks" that they had been called and different people to all the other workers in the district? To try and find out some answers to these contradictions, Jenni Middleton of the Daily Dispatch (who has proven to be a responsible investigative reporter) decided, on her own initiative to develop a questionnaire which she handed out to farm workers.

Before criticising this action we need to remind ourselves they are perfectly entitled to express their opinions to whomsoever they please. The farmers too, are at liberty to state their case and if they are found wanting to voluntarily take the steps to put matters right.

As you know an article appeared in the Daily Dispatch which we think gave a reasonable but rather watered down version of the real cruelty inflicted on these people. There may be further articles published based on the questionnaires now in circulation.

As a result of Martin's recommendation the Border Council of Churches provided tents and a toilet which have been set up at Cobongo. The people are now living there in great discomfort and confusion and we are trying to come to terms with this new situation in what used to be a fairly tranquil existence. Their worldly possessions are piled up in one of our garages and between 30 to 40 people, some elderly, are crowded in four small tents. It has been swelteringly hot (as you know) with temperatures in our valley going over 40 degrees, the tents being a few degrees hotter still.

We ask ourselves. Was this all really necessary? Should we not bear in mind the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

They both died. The beggar was carried by the angels 'to Abraham's side.' The rich man went to hell where he was tormented and cried out: 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in the fire.' Abraham replied: 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us

(Luke 16:24)

Are we to be shunned, pilloried and even threatened for trying to help families faced with homelessness; for trying to get to the bottom of their problems? It does not matter to us if they are black, pink or green - a homeless family is a homeless family.

As servants of the Lord, holding responsible positions of Wardens and Councillors in the church, we have to live by the truth so that we can come into the light. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

"Their sentence is based on this fact: that the Light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the Light, for their deeds were evil. They hated the heavenly Light because they wanted to sin in the darkness. They stayed away from the Light for fear their sins would be exposed and they would be punished. But those doing right come gladly to the Light to let everyone see that they are doing what God wants them to."

John 3 (verses 19 - 21 {LB})

Can you explain to us what is "political" in an act of love toward a fellow human being. Apartheid which is the ultimate expression of "white" hate towards "people of colour" is a sin and not "politics". Our State President has invited the churches to participate in his decision making. Every true Christian of whatever denomination or non-denomination will have to confess this sin of hate and fear as they search for the Kingdom of God - then true upliftment will follow.

In conclusion we would welcome any questions you may have but above all we would ask you to help us in solving this very difficult problem of those now living in tents on our small holding. Surely those of you born and bred here and knowing the language and opportunities on a wider scale than we do could help these people better than we can. We appeal to you fellow Christians to have the courage to put an end to this schism amongst us and in the name of our Lord do the right thing.
yours in Christ,

TONY AND LAURA GOODYER

Laura 