



# Archdiocese of Cape Town

— ARCHBISHOP SITHEMBELE SIPUKA —

NEWSLETTER: March 2026

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This is the first monthly newsletter I plan to write to communicate with you as your Archbishop.

## **Gratitude**

As I write to you for the first time as your Archbishop, I am filled with gratitude for the extraordinary welcome you have given me. The installation Mass on March 14 and the taking possession of the Cathedral on March 15 were not merely well-organised events; they were also true liturgical celebrations that lifted the spirit and witnessed to the faith of this local Church.

Many who attended, including visitors from across South Africa and beyond, remarked not only on the seamless logistics but also on the prayerfulness, the beauty of the liturgy, and the sense of joy that filled the Arena, the Cathedral, and the hearts of all present. This was no accident. It was the fruit of careful preparation, countless hours of meetings, attention to detail, and above all, a spirit of collaboration and love for the Church.

## **Thanks to the Organising Teams**

I wish to thank all who made these days possible. To those who prepared the liturgy with such care, ensuring that every element spoke of the sacred; to the choirs who lifted our voices in praise at both the installation Mass and the Cathedral possession—your ministry of music was truly a prayer; to those who managed the intricate details of protocol, receiving and honouring with grace and dignity the Apostolic Nuncio, Cardinals, brother Bishops, leaders of other Christian churches, Muslim leaders, government officials, and civic dignitaries, your skill and charity made everyone feel welcomed and valued.

To those who attended the many planning meetings, whose minutes captured every logistical detail and whose diligence ensured nothing was left to chance; thank you. To priests and religious communities who provided hospitality to our many visitors, your generosity was admirable!

I must make particular mention of Bishop Sylvester David, Auxiliary Bishop of Cape Town and Vicar General. While the Archdiocese was still administered by Cardinal Brislin from Johannesburg, Bishop Sylvester was on the ground, attending to the practical episcopal tasks and ensuring the Archdiocese ran smoothly. His faithful stewardship and pastoral care have been invaluable, and I look forward to working closely with him in the years ahead. His knowledge of this local Church, his pastoral heart, and his administrative skill will be essential as we discern together the path forward.

I intend to host a lunch in the coming weeks for all those who were involved in the preparation of these events, to honour you properly and to thank you in person. You have given me a gift I will not forget: a beautiful beginning to this new chapter of my ministry.

## **Thanks to the Senior Priests**

I was happy to see some of the senior priests at the installation, including some retired ones. I value your dedication over many years and the wisdom you have acquired for the good of the Archdiocese. I will soon pay you a short visit at the retirement home.

## **What Happens Now: Listening and Learning**

As I settle into this new role, let me share what I intend to do immediately. I have not come to Cape Town with a blueprint, as my appointment took me by surprise. I have come to serve, to learn, and to walk with you. For this reason, I am keeping all existing administrative and pastoral structures in place for the time being. I need first to understand how things work here, to listen to those who know this local Church far better than I do, and to discern, together with you, what the Lord is calling us to before modifying the structures.

Over the coming weeks and months, I will be convening a series of listening sessions with key pastoral and administrative bodies. These are not meetings to announce decisions, but meetings to hear from you, to be informed by your experience, and to begin building the relationships that will sustain our work together.

I plan to meet with:

- All priests of the Archdiocese
- All deacons of the Archdiocese
- The Archdiocesan Pastoral Council leadership
- Presidents of sodalities
- Seminary leadership and formation teams
- Religious provincial superiors
- The Catholic Schools Trust
- Leaders of Catholic institutes and organisations
- The Archdiocesan Youth Leadership

I ask for your patience as we schedule these meetings, and I ask for your honest and thoughtful participation when we meet. If there is any group or entity I may be leaving out, whose listening meeting with me will be beneficial, I am happy to be advised.

#### **Meeting with PPC**

When visiting the parishes for confirmation or for whatever requires episcopal service, I request at least a one-hour meeting with the PPC for me to hear how the Parish is doing in terms of what is going well, the challenges it faces and way forward with them as well as the plans for pastoral and structural development of the Parish.

#### **Relating the Chrism to Unity and Mission**

The Chrism Mass, which we will celebrate on Holy Thursday, offers a profound opportunity to reflect on my motto and the vision it represents: United and Sent.

##### *The Unity of the Presbyterate*

The Chrism Mass is the only occasion in the year when the entire presbyterate gathers with the Archbishop around a single Altar. This is not merely a practical gathering to collect oils. It is a visible, sacramental sign of the communion of the Church.

When priests gather around the bishop at this Mass, we are proclaiming something essential: that the priesthood is not a collection of individuals, each doing his own thing in his own parish, but a communion, a body united in Christ and in service to His people. When the priests renew their promises at this Mass, they are not "re-signing a contract" or fulfilling an annual formality. They are reaffirming that their authority to preach, to sanctify, to shepherd, vests in Christ through their union with the Bishop, who in turn is united with the successor of Peter and the college of bishops throughout the world. The unity expressed at the Chrism Mass proclaims a truth we must never forget: no priest is an island. We are brothers, and our ministry is a shared mission.

##### *The Oil That Unites*

The oil blessed at the Chrism Mass will flow to every parish in the Archdiocese of Cape Town, from the Immaculate Conception Parish to the most remote mission station. It will be used throughout the year in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick and Holy Orders. This means that when a child is baptised in a small parish far from the city centre, that child is being anointed with the same oil that was blessed in the presence of the whole presbyterate. The oil links us. It connects the most distant believer to the centre of our local Church and reminds us that we are one body.

We are all anointed with chrism. In Baptism, we are anointed and made members of Christ, who is the Anointed One of God. In Confirmation, we are anointed again and sealed with the Holy Spirit for mission. In Holy Orders, priests and bishops are anointed for service. Because we are all anointed with the one chrism, we are united with Christ and with each other. We share in His mission. We belong to one another.

The chrism oil is mixed with fragrant balsam, a sweet-smelling aroma that represents what St. Paul calls the "good odour of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:15). Just as the fragrance of the chrism spreads when the vessel is opened, so too are we called to spread the fragrance of the Gospel

wherever we go. This is what it means to be sent. We are not united for our own sake, not gathered to enjoy each other's company. We are united and sent back to our parishes, our neighbourhoods, our families, our workplaces, and especially to the poor and marginalised, to proclaim the good news and to witness to the love of Christ. United and Sent: this is not just my motto. It is the vocation of the whole Church.

### **A Call to Peace in Troubled Times**

On May 8, 2025, when Cardinal Robert Prevost was elected as the 267th successor of St. Peter, his first words to the world were simple and profound: "Peace be with you." These were the words of the Risen Christ to His frightened disciples, and Pope Leo XIV chose them deliberately as the keynote of his papacy.

Since that day, our Holy Father has continually called for peace. He has called for ceasefires in the Middle East, for dialogue between Iran and Israel, for an end to the violence in Sudan, Syria, and other conflict zones. He has reminded us again and again that peace is not merely the absence of war, but a gift of the Risen Christ—what he called "an unarmed and disarming peace" (2026 World Day of Peace). Painfully, as usual, in these wars orchestrated by the powerful, often for no serious reasons, the innocent are the ones who suffer.

The Holy Father's concern is not abstract. The escalation of war in the Middle East is not a distant problem; it has global ramifications that touch our lives here in Cape Town. Air travel has been disrupted. Oil prices are rising, which inevitably leads to increases in the costs of transport, energy, and food. And as always, it is the poor who bear the heaviest burden of these economic shocks. The global instability caused by war makes life harder for those who are already struggling.

### **Peace Begins with Us**

We must join the Holy Father in praying for peace. But if our prayers for peace are to be meaningful, they cannot remain at the level of grand global concerns. Peace must begin with us, personally and concretely.

We must examine ourselves: Are we people of peace in our own families? In our workplaces? In our interpersonal relationships? Do we cultivate attitudes and behaviours that make for peace, or do we contribute to division, resentment, and conflict?

St. Francis of Assisi prayed, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." His prayer continues with a challenging line: "Where there is hatred, let me sow love." The prayer does not say, "Where there is hatred toward me, let me demand that others love me." It says, "Let me sow love." It calls us to take responsibility, to be the ones who change, who forgive, who reach out, who make the first move toward reconciliation.

We cannot pray for peace in the world while remaining obnoxious, rude, or provocative in our daily interactions. We cannot ask God to bring peace to the Middle East if we are unwilling to make peace with our neighbour, our colleague, our family member. Peace is not something we delegate to politicians and diplomats. It is something we practice every day, in small and ordinary ways.

### **Remembering Mthatha**

Finally, I ask you to remember in your prayers the people of the Diocese of Mthatha. They have let go of their bishop so that you could have an archbishop. This is no small sacrifice.

I was deeply moved to see so many people from Mthatha travel to Cape Town for my installation. Their presence in such numbers was a powerful witness to the bonds we forged over eighteen years, and their support meant more to me than I can adequately express. Even in practical matters, they continued to care for me. The Director of Administration and Finance, Sr. Hermenegild, and her assistant, Sr. Margaret, travelled to Cape Town days before the installation to help me settle into the Archbishop's residence. Their faithful service, which sustained me throughout my years in Mthatha, followed me even here.

I have already been invited for a farewell in Mthatha, and I look forward to being with them to express my gratitude properly and to formally entrust them to the care of Bishop Thulani Mbuyisa, who has been appointed Administrator of Mthatha. I am confident of Bishop Mbuyisa's

ability to provide the pastoral and administrative care needed during this transition. Let us pray that, sooner rather than later, Mthatha will like you, rejoice at the ordination of their own bishop. May the bond of communion between our two local Churches of Mthatha and Cape Town, forged through this exchange, remain alive and fruitful for years to come.

**A closing Word: Witness to Unity**

Brothers and sisters, we live in a world that is becoming increasingly fragmented. Division is the spirit of the age. Polarisation, geo-politics, tribalism, and the breakdown of trust mark our politics, our media, and our discourse. Even within the Church, we are not immune to these forces of division.

This is why the call to unity is not optional. It is essential. It is a matter of Christian witness. Jesus prayed that His disciples "may all be one" so that "the world may believe" (John 17:21). Our unity draws people to Christ, while the lack of it drives them away.

Let us, then, strive for unity. Let us practice it in small ways and large. Let us listen to each other, bear with each other, forgive each other, and work together for the common good. And in doing so, let us witness to a fragmented world that there is another way, a way of communion, a way of peace, a way of love and NOT war.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He make His face shine upon you and give you peace.

+Sithembele Sipuka  
Archbishop of Cape Town

