



**IGREJA EPISCOPAL ANGLICANA DO BRASIL – IEAB
DIOCESE ANGLICANA DO RECIFE – DAR**

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Pastoral Letter

Rt. Revd. Sebastião Armando

Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Recife

The Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil (IEAB)

**Feast of St. Augustine of Canterbury,
26th May 2008**

THE STATE AND FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

**To the Clergy and People of the Diocese,
And whomsoever it may concern**

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

THE ROOTS SPROUT UP IN RENEWAL

In this time, we are “reinitiating” the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil in the Northeast, with the sense of being small and poor, and at one and the same time fragile and courageous, saddened and generous, perplexed and ready.

The branches were cut off, but the roots remained. We appeared like “a stump in dry land” – an image that the prophet Isaiah uses to describe the People of God. Yet, we maintain the same hope that “the roots will sprout up again in renewal” (cf. Is. 53.2).

We should not be surprised, even less downcast. The Church of Jesus is not measured by the quantity of members, neither by money, property nor worldly prestige. The Master already warned us: “Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, I will be there in their midst.”

The Church of Jesus of Nazareth is measured by faithful witness to the values of the Kingdom of God and by the active presence of her members in the heart of society.

Where there is water, the Book of Common Prayer, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, service of others (*diaconia*), bread and wine, people assembled around a table, there one finds the Anglican Church, a community



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reunited around the Crucified One who rose from the dead to abide with us for ever.

What is necessary is that we have the courage and generosity to assume our calling as His disciples and go out to the world to incarnate and announce: the dignity of every human being; solidarity as the only human path; and justice as the requirement that Life may be possible for all.

OUR PATH CONTINUES FORWARD

In October of 2006, the new diocesan bishop was installed, but so started to reside in Recife in December after his departure from his former Diocese of Pelotas.

In those days the Diocesan Office was installed in a room generously ceded by the Anglican Seminary – SAET.

The priorities were to re-establish relations of trust and fellowship, and to revitalise the communities and institutions of the diocese.

The symbolic mark of these new times was the conclusion and consecration of the new building of the Cathedral, constructed exclusively by contributions from members of the congregation, irrefutable proof of the generosity of our people. The Parish of the Holy Trinity is increasingly assuming its role as the seat, the *cathedra*, of the Bishop and mother church of the Diocese. During the year it acted as a space of welcome and a reference point. Praise be to God for the witness and effort of fellowship! The missionary work proceeds through movements of evangelisms, which strengthen the attempt to provide spiritual and theological maturity to the people.

With the help of the United Thanks Offering – UTO of the Episcopal Church of U.S., it was possible to purchase a building for the Missionary Point of Freedom, in Jaboatão, where new work has started with young people. They are a key group needing formation, encouragement, in order to spread the news about the church and promote ecumenical relations. The culminating point of last year was the *Day of Combat Against Aids*, an event involving seventy people, to stimulate debate and clarify the facts around this terrible disease.



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Also with the help of the Episcopal Church, this year the work to complete the temple of the Parish of the Good News, in Caapora, Paraíba, will be concluded.

The Missionary Society, USPG helped us to give new impetus to the work in the interior of Pernambuco, supporting a missionary couple resident in the Parish of the Reconciliation, Caruaru. A new missionary point of St. Francis of Assisi in Lagedo is being in preparation, and the continued growth of our church in Arcoverde.

In Umbuzeiro, on the frontier between Pernambuco and Paraíba, the Mission of Mount Zion, through the generosity of some people, managed to acquire a building for its services. With this, the community took on new vitality, with more active pastoral work so that the community felt itself able to launch a Sunday School, music, prison visiting and the social action of soup hand-outs.

In the northern part of the Diocese, the “Pastoral District of Natal-Fortaleza” was formed, allowing for the exchange of information, sharing of experience and regional meetings. In Caucaia, a city of the metropolitan region of Fortaleza, developed an interesting work of solidarity with the poor, with the aim of visiting homes to reveal the hidden pains and potential of the poor. With part of the grant of UTO it was possible to buy a plot of land for the Missionary Point Mandacaru. A Lay Minister from Natal visited the work in Fortaleza and a group from Ceará went to Natal in order to join in the missionary work at the Parish of Jesus of Nazareth.

I went to St. Louis, Maranhão on a missionary visit for a few days. Two groups are forming: one of the middle class and the other of the working class. Both groups are musically talented. Various people from St Louis came to the Diocesan Synod and were received and confirmed in the Church. One lady even came to Recife for the recent Diocesan Women’s Meeting, promoted by the Mother’s Union.

The Missionary Point, Mount Sinai, Setúbal, in Recife, passed through some difficult times. The small congregation that remained faithful showed a maturity and perseverance in confronting her problems, elaborating a plan for 2008 and has continued in her life with new pastoral leadership, under the supervision of the Cathedral.



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In Cabo, a part of the metropolitan region of Recife, the Missionary Point of Bethel received another Lay Minister and accomplished good work in evangelism.

In Bahia, in addition to the continuity of the parishes of the Good Shepherd, in Salvador, and of Christ the Saviour, on the island of Itaparica, developed a new missionary point in the suburb of Periperi. Effort is invested in liturgy, ecumenical relations and in partnerships within the theological education sector.

Last December a new community of the diocese started in João Pessoa, capital of the State of Paraíba.

In Russas, Ceará, we received a church community with their local minister, who participated in the Synod in March and was received as a full member of the Church.

After many crises and even scandals, and knowing that we struggle desperately in the face of many difficulties, it is a miracle of God that various people are still being attracted to the Anglican Way. Some of these people already have been received; others are still to be. Even so, they are already integrated to the extent that they are ready to collaborate in communities and with diocesan commissions.

Our task is to “reinitiate” the IEAB in the Northeast. The many needs of our people present the great challenge that God has called us to face with faith, perseverance and in the ever active consecration of our lives in service of the Kingdom of Christ. Our innumerable and serious difficulties, far from disheartening us, should, on the contrary, stimulate hope and strength and mutual support.

FUTURE HORIZONS

Looking at the future, we could summarize our dreams in the following words: a Church animated by the Holy Spirit, faithful to the Anglican model of adoration and, at the same time “charismatic” in her spirituality and liturgical expression, a Church with a deep understanding of the Word, through the study of the Bible, and aware of belonging to the Anglican Communion, a



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Church both catholic and reformed, open, really committed to society and firm in the struggle for the restoration of justice.

For this, I believe that we must be well aware of some points in which it is necessary to invest our efforts.

1. To heighten the awareness of the people of the Church to the *urgency of mission*, always in the framework of the integral mission of the Church, having socio-political *diaconia* as an essential dimension of evangelization, in conformity with the famous “Five Marks of Mission” of the Anglican Communion and the “Fourteen Reference Points of Mission in IEAB”;
2. Deepen between us, starting with the clergy, an Anglican spirituality and theology, fed by the meditation and study of the Scriptures, by knowledge of the Anglican tradition as found in the Book of Common Prayer, and by the “sense of reality” that directs our attention to society and inspires us to commit ourselves to socio-political action in favour of human dignity, solidarity and justice.
3. To help all the people of the Church to be aware of our “Christian responsibility” or “stewardship”, so that we perceive that the baptismal consecration and confirmation commit us to the work of God, demanding dedication of time, talents and treasures in order to maintain the Church, rescue the needy and care for the whole creation. Our commitment must express itself in regular monthly financial contributions, the duty of every confirmed member, the manifestation of gratitude for the blessings received and always having the reference of the biblical understanding of tithing.
4. Within the clergy it is an urgent task to strengthen the *esprit de corps*, through the conscious and dedicated effort to reconstruct relations of trust, friendship, collaboration and exchange, in such a way that new relations would be encouraging testimony to the people and facilitate the reconstruction of diocesan institutions. It is not enough to think, “I was hoping so much that in this new phase...”, it is necessary to ask ourselves with honesty and generosity, “what I can and truly am doing so that this new phase can happen.”
5. For theological reasons and given the reality of the Diocese, it is very important to deepen a “secular” spirituality for the clergy, in such a way that we feel ourselves to be “priests” in all moments of life (family, profession, relations within society and public positions, relations within the Church) as is the condition



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of all baptized people, and not only “priests” in specific “religious” roles. Our ministry must always acquire more of the nature of prophetic and missionary ministry, as in the New Testament. It is necessary to indicate some elements that would be foundations of this “secular” spirituality: the daily discipline of prayer, as an exercise in the conscious renewal of our consecration; the frequent meditation and study of Holy Scripture; the coherence between the option for the ministry of Christ and the style of family life (love and soberness of life) and professional (competence and honesty); the coherence between commitment to the values of the Gospel and the political project that this requires (strategic objectives, parties and other organizations of society); to live a missionary consciousness, in such a way that it is not enough to “do mission”, but “to be in mission”; the similarity with Jesus, which, according to the Gospel of John, consists of “being sent” by the Father; a pastoral heart, which expresses itself in the attitude of permanent compassion for all human beings and in care for everything in the universe; teamwork, as an exercise and concrete witness to love and fellowship, through the inspiration of faith in God, which is the radical and eternal relation of communion.

6. Due to its very nature and because of the needs we face, it is necessary that pastoral ministry more and more takes a collegial and participative form, each person collaborating with his talents and availability of time. This is to make concrete by conscious effort teamwork in the decision and the execution of the tasks of pastoral, missionary and social action, articulated with lay leadership as well, and according to people’s gifts, and together sharing in reflection,. Naturally, the lay leadership hope to receive special care from the clergy in spiritual formation, in the growth of theological understanding, in a deeper perception of social reality and ways of going about things, including planning and permanent evaluation. This will be the concrete way of realising what for us is theologically so important, the *common priesthood of all believers*, the antidote which saves the church from falling into the clutch of clericalism;

7. Finally, Anglicanism is not the house where “anything goes”, where respect for freedom concedes to all the bourgeois right to do what individually suits one. If this were so, we would betray the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor 10: 23-24; Gal. 5). Certainly, the Church does not characterize itself by LAW, but by the pedagogy of GRACE. “You my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love” (Gal. 5:13). The freedom to love is not given to us in order to stay meanly on the side of the Law, but generously to go beyond it. Only in this way is Anglicanism



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worthwhile, if we are Church which allows itself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, where the “fruit of the Spirit” flourishes (cf. Gal. 5: 22 – 26), so that we become witnesses of the holiness of God in the world, salt and light. Only if we submit ourselves to pay the price of discipleship of “precious grace”, as the great Lutheran martyr and victim of the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhöffer, exhorted us, grace that moves us to undertake the steep “scaling of the heights” of a demanding and unending experience whose summit is the mystic assimilation with God. Whatever feeling of self-satisfaction, of spiritual superiority, of individualism, in the final analysis, only shows that we have been diverted from the path of holiness. The gift of God moves us to live a process an unending of the experience of grace, which, in its turn, overflows in gratitude and in gratuity, in other words, we become grace for other people. In Anglicanism, one is called to always go ever more beyond the LAW, the minimum which is obligatory, and assimilate the rhythm of superabundance without measure, true to the dominion of GRACE (cf. John 1: 16 – 18). Anglicanism, a Church marked by inclusiveness and comprehensiveness, is a Church called to holiness, not to submit herself to the moralism of the LAW, but to assume the risk, the cost, even if heroic, of the Divine decision to love – the heroism of holiness – the imitation of God which assumes all risks, even the extreme gift of one’s own Son, in Jesus of Nazareth (cf. John 3:16; Phil. 2: 1 – 11). Anglicanism is called to holiness in freedom.

CONCLUSION AND INVOCATION OF THE BLESSING OF GOD

Dear brothers and sisters, we continue firm in our course! Our courage and perseverance comes from the Holy Spirit. God has helped us up to this point, and will continue to do so, as the light in our path and energy to strengthen our weaknesses. We have nothing of which to be afraid. He is the source of our happiness. I remember the famous phrase of Dom Helder Câmara: “However much the problems mount up, it is in this that the challenges captivate us”. As the prophet Zachariah says to us, “we are captives of hope.”

Recife, 26 of May, 2008

Feast of St. Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury

+ Sebastião Armando, Recife
Diocesan Bishop.