**** **CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MTHATHA**

**NEWSLETTER – October 2023**

**The New isiXhosa Hymn Book**

In a conversation with one of the faithful, a comment was made about hymns that have changed in the new Xhosa Hymnbook and prayers, rites and services that have been left out. It then became clear to me that even though the rationale behind the revision of this Hymn is explained in the foreword (*Imbulambethe*), it appears that it has not been noted or some have not read it. I invite the priests and pastoral workers to explain the rationale of this revised hymnbook, noting the continuity and discontinuity between it and the previous one. I wish to use this newsletter to stimulate the explanation of the new isiXhosa Hymn Book.

**A balance between cultural relevance and being true to Faith.**

The previous Xhosa hymnbook and other liturgical books are not reviewed because they were bad, nor is there any intention of casting doubt on those who reviewed and translated them. They are reviewed to render the truth of faith that the Liturgy seeks to express relevant to today’s cultural context, language and pastoral needs.

In short, they are revised for a continued culturally relevant faith without distorting the truth of that faith. Let Vatican Council II speak for itself on this matter.

For the Liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted and of elements subject to change. These latter elements not only may be changed but **ought to be changed with the passage** of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy **or have become less suitable.** In this restoration, both text and rites should be drawn up **so as to express more clearly the holy things they signify** (Vat. II *Sacrosanctum Concilium*/Sacred Council 21)

The Council is also clear about who has the authority to make these changes. It is the Holy See (office of the Pope), the bishop and the bishops’ Conference, and “no other person, not even a priest” (Vat. II *Sacrosanctum Concilium*/Sacred Council 22). Having explained this general principle about the regular revision of Liturgical books, let me explain the rationale behind revising the Xhosa Hymnbook, which is a liturgical book.

**Alignment with the revised Roman Missal**

We will recall that in 2011, a revised English version of the Roman Missal (book for saying Mass) was published and replaced the older English version. The older English version, published in 1973, was a loose translation of the original Latin version, while the one of 2011 was a more strict or literal translation.

There were many opinions against the 2011 translation, but ultimately, the Holy See and the English Bishops’ Conferences of the World decided that the literal translation of 2011 would subsequently be used. The motivation for the decision in favour of the 2011 more literal translation was that it restores certain theological concepts that were obscured in the former translation.

The Bishops of the Pastoral Conference of the Xhosa Region (PCXR) also decided to revise the 1970 Xhosa Missal and adopt the translation of 2011. In the whole Pastoral Conference area, the Xhosa Region is the only region with a revised Missal according to the 2011 English Missal. Consequently, this demanded that the Xhosa Hymnbook be revised, whose translation of the Order of Mass (uHlelo lweDini) and Rites (iinkqubo-nkonzo) is according to the 1970 Xhosa Missal.

**Creating a strict hymnbook with prayers**

As it will be recalled, in addition to being a songbook, the previous Hymnbook had other rites as well, like Priestless service, celebration of the Sacraments and Eucharistic Prayers. A decision made was to keep it as more of a hymnbook and prayers than a book of rites, keeping only the family and community services like service of praying for the rain, for the dead, for boys’ initiation, etc. So, in this revised hymnbook, we have more songs and prayers than rituals (iinkqubo-nkonzo).

**Revision of Prayers and Hymns**

Prayers and hymns have been revised in this new edition of the Hymnbook. Revision of prayers includes adding new prayers and changing certain words, e.g., iNtombi eNyulu for Virigo. Revision of the hymns includes the addition of new hymns, adding verses that were left out, and revising some words to make them more theologically precise. An example of some words that have changed is verse 2 of hymn No. 18, which originally was:

*Thina nabahlanjwayo izono emlilweni* which has now been changed to *Thina nabangasekhoyo abahlanjulwayo*

**Removal and revision of Priest-less service**

The Priest-less service, which in the previous Hymnbook was designed to be done by three people, though in practice, for the most part, we have one person leading the service, has been removed. Only the responses by the people are now left because the actual Priest-less service will be in a separate book to be available and used by the leaders.

The Priest-less Service is revised and will contain elements of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Priest-less service, particularly the praying of the Psalms and the aspects of the Priest-less service in the previous Hymnbook.

**Take time to study the New Xhosa Hymnbook.**

Because of the new organisation and additions in the new Hymnbook or clustering, before using it, it is necessary to look at the hymns before the service. This will help to become aware of the following:

* Many of the Hymns have changed numbers.
* Take notice of the restored verses left out in the previous hymnbook.
* Take note of the changed wording
* Take note of the added new hymns that were not there before.
* Take note of the changed words of some prayers
* Take note of the changed pages of prayers
* Take note of the added prayers.

**Thank you for the fruitful Diocesan Pastoral Conference**

I express profound gratitude for our successful annual Diocesan Pastoral Conference, especially since everybody could attend even though the original date was changed. Your dedication, particularly the laity, is greatly appreciated. Thank you for not only attending but also, more importantly, for your active participation, resulting in substantial deliberations.

Thank you for the reports informing us about your efforts in the past year to grow in holiness and zeal to serve the needy. With the challenges you reported, particularly some members' lack of passion and commitment, let us keep going and motivating. Given the trying financial situation for everybody, your contribution to this year’s bishop’s fund was particularly generous, presently sitting at R720 834 50, which is anticipated to increase with money still expected to come in. The final figure last year was R683 291 25. Thank you very much.

**The Mission and Rosary Month of October**

We are beginning a month of Mission, inviting us to deepen our missionary consciousness or call to evangelise. I am grateful for the reflections that the Pontifical Mission Society has availed, which Fr. Mchunu has dutifully distributed to all priests and Pastoral workers. I, in turn, am sending it with this newsletter by way of broadening its distribution.

This month is also the month of the Rosary, in which we are encouraged to intensify our meditation on the mysteries of faith with Mary’s accompaniment. Let us do this by praying the Rosary at least once a day and teaching children in our care how to pray the Rosary. I want to share that I have discovered an audio app for praying the Rosary, and I find it helpful, especially when driving.

**Hopelessness, the most worrying concern of our time**

During the MDPC, Mr Kanise shared the bad news about this single mother who poisoned her three children and killed them and, after that, killed herself. She is reported to have been a struggling single Mother. That a mother would actively kill her children can only be explained as due to mental sickness or an extreme sense of desperation and aloneness in a sea of insurmountable difficulties in life.

I am tempted to point fingers at the stinking rich 1% of our population owning 55% of the wealth of our country and their counterpart 1% of the world population holding half of the world’s net wealth, supported by the free market economic system that makes only a few rich. At the same time, the majority languishes in abject poverty and utter destitution.

I am tempted to point at the overpaid, corrupt, inefficient political leaders. I guess in my position, I should do that. As a person, however, I must also do what I can, no matter how little; as Mother Theresa humbly stated: “We cannot do great things on this earth. We can only do little things with great love”.

I have researched about this person, who is only reported in the media as an “eastern Cape mother who poisoned her three children and killed herself”. She is Ntombizane­le Mtsizela, 35 years old and her lovely children she felt compelled to end the lives are Iyapha, 14, Inganathi, eight, and four-year-old Phila. I am praying for them and, in my shortsightedness, commit to be attentive to those in a similar situation like hers.

 With kind regards



+Sithembele Sipuka

Bishop of Mthatha