

## DECLARATION

Of the

Priests of the Diocese of Oudtshoorn

5 September 1976

At our annual Pastoral Conference under the chairmanship of our Bishop, Rt. Rev. M. Gottschalk, we the Priests of the Diocese of Oudtshoorn, wish to make the following Declaration:

We wish to express our loyalty and thanks to our Bishops in their recent statements to the present grave situation in our country. For many years they have called on us to weigh before our conscience matters of grievances and conflicts existing in our country. In their "Call to Conscience" they said:

*"Your bishops have addressed you several times on social and interracial justice. They have also repeatedly referred to documents of the Popes and of the Second Vatican Council on these issues. Regrettably there has been little significant response. But we can try again. We can renew with greater vigour and urgency our efforts to do our share in creating a just, stable and peaceful Christian Society in our country. (6) ...a bold and sustained effort is not yet beyond us, even at this stage."*

We thank Bishop J. P. Murphy of Port Elizabeth, acting Chairman of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference for his statement on the SOWETO crisis in which he said:

*"I regard the present unrest and rioting as a symptom only of feelings about wrongs much greater than the small local complaints that occasioned the present crisis. This is not haphazard rioting, but the expression of feeling of people deprived of the most ordinary human rights, and the greater responsibility for any violence or counter violence lies with those who so deprive human beings of their dignity and rights."*

We identify with the most recent statement of the Board of the SACBC and we quote:

*"We consider the present wave of unrest that is sweeping the country to be at most the inevitable result of unjust and oppressive laws against which we with other churches have continually witnessed for almost three decades. We renew our protest against these laws in the strongest possible terms and urge that they be repealed forthwith."*

*"At the same time we request that it be recognised that the phenomenon of Black Conscientiousness correctly understood is an inevitable demand by the Black Community for recognition of their human dignity and legitimate aspirations. We appeal to the Government to relieve the present tension not by rapid and practical moves towards full citizenship and shared responsibility."*

We declare our solidarity with those people who in spirit and true Christian love and justice are prepared to suffer even detention for their convictions.

We, the priests of the Diocese of Oudtshoorn, do not deny that we have our faults and shortcomings. We confess with you that we are sinners. We beg for your forgiveness, patience and your support in prayers. We know that we are under judgement of Jesus Christ. Together with our fellow priests all over the country we repeat what was said in the Statement of the South African Council of Priests in January:

*"Jesus Christ will judge us according to what we have done to the least of His brethren and we admit our failings towards Him and His brethren in our blindness to their needs and our deafness to the Gospel call. When people are paid unjust wages in industry and domestic service, it is He who is hungry and thirsty. When people are detained without trial, it is He who is in prison and not visited. When people are unwelcome in our homes and barred from public places, it is He who is a stranger and not welcome. When people are stripped of their dignity and remain unprotected, it is He who is naked and not clothed."*

We call on all people of good will to make use of peaceful means to bring about a just society. With others we reject violence. Violence creates violence and hatred. We pray that soon the time will come that all people in South Africa can take their rightful place and contribute to the building up of a just society in peace.

On Sunday, September 12, we are asked to show our solidarity with those who are unjustly detained, imprisoned, banned; with families who have lost their beloved ones in recent days. We shall pray that justice may prevail and peace follow in our country.

*"Lord, open to us the treasures of your love;  
Our hope is all in you, Lord God." (From The Divine Office)*

*For the Pastoral Conference*

**Manfred Gottschalk**

*Bishop of Oudtshoorn*