

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

THE WIDE DIVIDE BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICANS (16/6/87)

The wide divide between the people of South Africa is most evident in the way they regard the various days set aside for commemorating important events in the history of our land and its people. Thus June 16 is generally seen by some as a day on which the forces of revolution muster to plot further actions aimed at overthrowing western civilisation, while for others June 16 is a day for commemorating the heroic sacrifice hundreds of people have made over the past eleven years in a concerted effort to throw off the shackles of oppression, the yoke of injustice and the stigma of being regarded as non-persons. They are remembered for their willingness to sacrifice all, even their lives, in order to see the noble ideals of justice realised in the mutual acceptance of responsibility to each other.

For the churches, Soweto Day is a source of deep worry and concern, for it brings into the open the wide rift that continues to exist between black and white members of the same church. For in spite of a union which they profess in and symbolise in the sacrifice of the Lord's body and blood – Holy Communion – they are in fact, and remain, tragically divided by things that have no place in the church Jesus Christ established specifically to live in mutual acceptance and love.

We therefore call on all Christians of goodwill to implore the Almighty Father to transform this and all similar days, that at present are signs of division and occasions for separation and alienation, into opportunities for developing and spreading understanding and love among people.

For this to happen we all need to realise that the spirit of freedom, like the spirit of love, is planted deep in the human heart and it cannot be imprisoned indefinitely. This spirit of freedom causes us to rejoice for those brothers and sisters who in the past have stood up for human rights and dignity, and also for the many who continue to work for proper respect for the human person.

It is our hope and prayer that Soweto Day will be observed as a sign of hope that the spirit of humankind can and will rise above itself and any challenge, and any challenge if given the chance.

The challenge we face today is to overcome the divisions that separate us, and to strive together for the noble ideal of liberation that along the path of justice be realised in every aspect of life in our country.

May God bless us all with His gift of peace and love.

Signed by: Bishop Wilfrid Napier, president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.