

REMARKS BY MS THEMBEKA PAMA, GFS WORLDWIDE PRESIDENT
(JULY 2017 -JULY 2021)

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

9 JULY 2020

Greetings to you all, in all corners of the world from which you are participating in this webinar. The corona virus (Covid 19) has shut the whole world down and our World Council this year became a casualty of the international lockdown. Let us give thanks for the 4th Industrial Revolution which has made it possible for us to meet this way. Thank you for being available. I invite you to join me in remembering those who have lost their lives during this pandemic, and in giving thanks for all the health workers on the frontline of responding to the crisis; and as we together pray for God's loving care and comfort for all those who have lost relatives to Covid 19.

Can we please have a two-minute moment of silence as we thank God for the dedication of our health workers and pray for their divine protection and as we remember those that have passed on and those that have lost loved ones **(2- Minute Silence)**

Welcome to all of you to this worldwide virtual special conference of the Girls Friendly Society (GFS). We feel honored to be part of this important and the only worldwide Association of Young people of the Anglican Communion. We are truly the Church of Pentecost, drawn from all over and bound together in prayer and service. Give yourselves a big hand for touching the lives of so many young people.

We meet during difficult and trying times. The whole world is gripped by fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Death has become a pall over our countries. Our churches, schools, highways and our factories have fallen silent. I am sure this is an unprecedented experience for all of us. Never in our lifetime has there been silence of this magnitude. However, in these uncertain times, we continue to put our trust in our loving God. As the Anglican hymn by Isaac Watts, puts it:

***"God has been our Help in Ages past
Our hope for years to come
Our shelter from the stormy blast
And our eternal home"***

We are also encouraged by the words of assurance found in Hebrews 13 verse 8: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*. God is with us even in these trying times, God's faithfulness and love will never desert us. Let us be steadfast in our prayers - seeking God's guidance and light to illuminate our path as we go to an uncertain future. Nonetheless, let it be His future.

I am happy to report that our program which focusses on Fighting Abuse and Violence against Women and Children, Curbing Climate Change through taking care of Creation and Spiritual Growth has been embraced in all 32 countries where we have GFS. Media reports from around the world tell us that during this time when the world is confronted by Covid 19 there

has been a spike in family violence; and in as much as nations have had to cope with natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, severe low temperatures and higher than usual temperatures caused by the summer heat. In the midst of all of that, humanity is failing to be their brothers' keepers.

It is in that regard that we should continue to use the 25th of each month as a focus day of prayer and activism for nurturing respect and human dignity for all people, and calling upon all citizens to acknowledge creation as a gift and to be reminded that we are its custodians, not only for our own satisfaction, but for future generations as well.

Let's share ideas, program and liturgical resources to strengthen each other's program interventions. For instance, I was honored to be invited by Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya (of Swaziland) to the Eco-Bishops' Conference of Southern, Eastern and Central Africa. It was a great privilege to share with them the initiatives of GFS and to be part of the Anglican Communion as it deals with issues of environmental degradation and the restoration of ecological justice.

During this term, I had the honor of visiting branches in different parts of the world: England GFS branches and Anglican Communion offices, Ireland GFS and being part of All Ireland Synod of Bishops with 12 Bishops and 2 archbishops, Wales, Cameroon, Uganda, Rwanda, different Dioceses like Los Angeles, New York and many other States in the United States of America. I also visited and supported the establishment of new branches in a number of countries on the African continent: Angola, Malawi, South Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. New branches have also been established in other Dioceses in old GFS African countries - Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique.

Thank you GFS Worldwide for opening your hearts and homes and making me part of your families. Your hospitality and generosity were overwhelming. GFS now has ambassadors who are building the Kingdom of God around the World. We also want to express our heartfelt gratitude to all those who generously contributed to the Travel Fund of the World President, other funds and the GFS World Project in Sri Lanka, an education program which has been empowering many girls through the teaching of English in an effort to improve their employment prospects. Thank you, Jeanne, for always reporting on the progress. Let's all strive to give - a giving branch is more blessed than that which receives.

GFS Worldwide, your support lit the light of GFS across the world. A word of gratitude also goes to GFS Country Presidents for their support and guidance. The information you provided about your countries enabled me to speak with authority in support of GFS Worldwide work.

As we prepare ourselves for the World Council in South Africa next year, the world will be a different place. It will demand of us to think anew though still guided by GFS World Rules of the Council and, as Christians, to work differently given the hope and promise of a new world.

One of the highlights of this term was visiting branches presenting GFS Worldwide work in different platforms and hearing the Voice of the Church silencing the guns in schools, churches and communities. I cannot omit emphasizing the importance of the GFS World buy-in by Anglican Communion which now recognizes GFS and offers the necessary support. The

All Ireland Synod of Bishops' response by archbishop Michael Jackson also pledging support in All Ireland on behalf of the synod and his promise to be the Voice of GFS in Lambeth when meeting other archbishops was a huge boost to the work of GFS Worldwide.

However, despite our achievements as highlighted above, we have to ask ourselves the following questions:

How do we integrate these issues into the life and the Ministry of GFS, going forward?

How do we change the lives of the young and the women of the World for the better?

What programs will we come up with to change the negative stereotypes often held by a boy child and to instill the positive values ordinarily reserved for a girl child in our society?

How do we advise young women and men when preparing them for marriage? Do we tell them that if they find themselves in abusive marriages they must persevere and remind them of their "Until death do us part" vows? Do we tell them that divorce is a sin?

What do the canons/regulations of the church in general say in connection with a priest who gets divorced? Do they allow them according to their callings to occupy positions of higher office in the church?

What contribution will GFS Worldwide make in addressing oppressive patriarchy so that the world we live in becomes a better and a more equitable place for all?

In closing,

World Executive, thank you for being my pillars of strength during this term. Your efforts of making solid bricks to build this temple did not go unnoticed. Any difficulties encountered made me stronger and added to my repertoire of life lessons. Your support has been very much appreciated. Val, a special thank you for having a listening ear during rough and challenging times.

To the GFS leadership and to the leadership in general, whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability, don't expect everyone to say, "Good work faithful servant!" Do it for yourself and for God. Reward is promised in Galatians 6:9 where it says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

GFS Past World Presidents, you have been always in the thoughts and prayers of GFS Worldwide, as you are the veterans of this association. We all have not forgotten the legacy that you left behind.

GFS Leadership, please accept my word of gratitude. It is you who made it possible for me and this executive to deliver on your mandate, who made it possible for the World President to visit and to bring home good practices and share the lessons learned with other branches. My special thanks go to the previous GFS leadership which came up with the idea of a fund to support the World President's travel.

May our Lord continue to give us strength during this trying time, keep us safe, save the World and its inhabitants while we all stay home, keep our distance when we have to go out, wear our masks, sanitize and wash our hands regularly.

See you all at the coming World Council in July 2021, God permit.

I love you all and Jesus loves you too.