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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish you peace, goodness and well-being in the Lord Jesus, King of the Universe.

I hereby, invite all of you to participate actively, consciously and fully in the international celebration of the “Season of Creation 2021”. Christian Church Communities, all over the world, including the Orthodox Church (for more than 30 years) have marked this annual event for several decades. Since the publication of the Papal encyclical *Laudato Si*, in 2015 this celebration has gained traction within the Catholic Church.

During the Plenary of January 2021, the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference resolved “that the Season of Creation be celebrated annually in the dioceses of our region beginning with the Day of Creation on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September and concluding with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October” (SACBC Resolutions, Jan, 2021). So, with my Brother-Bishops I call upon all the Clergy, the Religious, Institutes of Apostolic Life, Lay Associates, Parishes, Small Christian Communities, Sodalities, Charity Organizations, Catholic Homes, Families, Schools and all God’s Faithful to make a profound journey of faith from the head to the heart so that our personal relationship with God our Creator may be deepened; our interpersonal relationships transformed and healed that we may be perfectly reconciled with the whole of creation. This calls for nothing short of conversion, that is, *metanoia* which means the radical change of heart, our mindset, our attitudes and behaviour.

The focus of this month of the Season of Creation is on bringing a greater awareness of the Encyclical of Pope Francis “*Laudato Si*” and to encourage a living connection between environmental well-being and the Gospel. In the words of Pope Francis: “What we all need is an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effect of our encounter with Jesus Christ becomes evident in our relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience”. (#217)

## 1. Prayer and Reflection

The Season of Creation is the time for Prayer and Reflection. When Jesus sent seventy-two disciples his first instruction was that they must “pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers into his vineyard” (Lk 10: 2). Prayer is therefore the soul of all our evangelizing activities and mission. In the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis; “I strongly encourage all the faithful to pray in these stipulated days, which are the result of a timely ecumenical initiative on behalf of our common home. It is an opportunity to draw closer to our brothers and sisters of various Christian confessions. This is the season for letting our prayer be inspired anew by closeness to nature, which spontaneously leads us to give thanks to God the Creator. Creation is the first “book” that God opens before our eyes, so that, marveling at its order, its variety and beauty, we can come to love and praise its Creator. In the silence of prayer, we can hear the symphony of creation calling us to abandon our self-centeredness in order to feel embraced by the tender love of the Father and to share with joy the gifts we have received. We can even say that creation, as a network of life, a place of encounter with the Lord and one another, is God’s own social network”.

We are called to pray as individuals, families, church communities, associates, movements, sodalities, catholic formations and organizations.

## 2. A call to change our attitudes and lifestyle.

The Season of Creation gives us a golden opportunity to reflect on our lifestyles, and how our daily decisions about food, consumption, transportation, use of water, energy and many other material goods, can often be thoughtless and harmful to the environment. Too many of us act like tyrants with regards to creation. Let us make an effort to change and adopt more simple and respectful lifestyles! Now is the time to abandon our dependence on fossil fuels and move, quickly and decisively, towards forms of clean energy and a sustainable and circular economy. Let us learn to listen to indigenous peoples, ancient wisdom can teach us how to live in a better relationship with the environment.

### Our Earth Family.

Let us treasure every toad and tree, the waters and the soil and the atmosphere, the microbes and the butterflies, the great variety of species who are brother and sister to us. We bear within our body minerals from rocks and water from the seas, the wisdom of the worms, all that has gone before. With them we form one intricate, balanced, close-knit family of life on earth. (*Kolping Africa prayer book*)

## 3. A call to action

The celebration of the Season of Creation summons all of us - children who have reached the age of reason, youth, adults of all ages, rich and poor alike to stand out like a sore thumb, be counted, take action and start doing something positive in our families, neighborhoods, schools, churches, workplaces, townships, towns, parks, rivers and oceans. We can create awareness about the ailing state of our planet, advocate for its restoration, campaign against pollution of all types, cleaning all our environment and promote sustainable farming, tree-planting and agriculture.

Many young people all over the world are making their voices heard and calling for courageous decisions. They remind us that the earth is not a possession to be plundered, but an inheritance to be treasured and handed over, intact to future generations.

This planet, our common home, “Our Mother Earth” is precious but fragile and she must be handled with great care. Otherwise, she will reach a stage where she will not be able to breath any longer and we will perish as well.



### Season of Creation 2021 Prayer

Creator of All, We are grateful that from your communion of love you created our planet to be a home for all. By your Holy Wisdom you made the Earth to bring forth a diversity of living beings that filled the soil, water and air. Each part of creation praises you in their being, and cares for one another from our place in the web of life. With the Psalmist, we sing your praise that in your house “even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow

a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.” We remember that you call human beings to keep your garden in ways that honor the dignity of each creature and conserve their place in the abundance of life on Earth. But we know that our will to power pushes the planet beyond her limits. Our consumption is out of harmony and rhythm with Earth’s capacity to heal herself.

Habitats are left barren or lost. Species are lost and systems fail. Where reefs and burrows, mountaintops and ocean deeps once teemed with life and relationships, wet and dry deserts lie empty, as if uncreated. Human families are displaced by insecurity and conflict, migrating in search of peace. Animals flee fires, deforestation and famine, wandering in search of a new place to find a home to lay their young and live. In this Season of Creation, we pray that the breath of your creative Word would move our hearts, as in the waters of our birth and baptism. Give us faith to follow Christ to our just place in the beloved community. Enlighten us with the grace to respond to your covenant and call to care for our common home. In our tilling and keeping, gladden our hearts to know that we participate with your Holy Spirit to renew the face of your Earth and safeguard a home for all. In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

Each Christian man and woman, every member of the human family, can act as a tiny yet unique and indispensable thread in weaving a network of life that embraces everyone. May we feel challenged to assume, with prayer and commitment, our responsibility for the care of creation.

May God, "the lover of life" (Wis 11:26), grant us the courage to do good without waiting for someone else to begin, or until it is too late.

St Francis of Assisi! Pray for us!

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vincent Mduzi Zungu OFM". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop Vincent Mduzi Zungu OFM