

MISSION PARTNERS' LETTER

December, 2016

Dear Friends,

It is now just over a year since the FEES MUST FALL campaign began. Universities opened a little late and have been dogged by problems throughout the year. By September almost all were closed. In Pretoria we moved on to online learning for which a contact university is ill-equipped. As always the poor students suffer and those without computers and access to WiFi are totally disabled. The basic problem seems to be the inability of government and university authorities to grasp the message that the students will not pay fees when they were promised free education. Some university vice-chancellors have engaged with students; ours has disappeared from sight. This was followed by the ZUMA MUST FALL campaign and the formation of SAVE SOUTH AFRICA in attempts to bring the African National Congress government to book following disastrous election results for the ANC in August. This followed the President having been found guilty of disregarding the constitution and various corrupt acts. The ANC has failed to take control of the situation and the ship of state is adrift in stormy waters. Already plans are in effect not to reopen universities next year. At Pretoria, the situation is especially ironic. The Faculty of Theology celebrates its centenary. Our motto is 'Gateway to ... the future'. The original gates of the university have been reinstalled in a permanently open position at the front of the Theology building; yet the gates of the university are firmly locked against its own students.

At the beginning of the year we will face a new crisis due to the increased number of failed students looking for places in addition to the new intake for 2017. In the midst of this, Graham still manages to maintain his research output mainly focussing on the history of Presbyterianism in South Africa. For the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, he has written an article on John Knox and education with special reference to the critical education crisis in South Africa. He has also prepared another article on the recent history of the faculty with a focus on the future of theological education in South Africa as an African experience.

He has not given up teaching as St Augustine's College in Johannesburg asked him to teach Church history during the past semester with students who are mainly Anglican and Roman Catholic.

Other than that, he remains busy with work for the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the National Research Foundation where he will convene the Theology and Religion panel in 2017. The CHE work has been intense as he has been part of a panel to investigate private theological education colleges since the government is closing all colleges which do not meet the requirements of the South African Department of Education. Many have been operating without accreditation.

Other than that, church work continues at St Andrew's on a regular basis. Last weekend the congregation honoured its senior members with a lunch provided by one of our elders Edna, a general in the South African Defence force, with catering provided by the Defence force catering Corps. Yesterday (11 December) our organist, Neil, and choir master, Chris, prepared a wonderful performance of Karl Jenkins' 'The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace'.

We had two unplanned visits to the UK this year due to Sandra's aunt slipping into Alzheimer's Disease. This began with a fall in January and slow deterioration which kept her hospitalised until a care home could be arranged in July. Other than that, Sandra has been kept busy with proof-reading and language editing. Recently she has also been busy with our Session Clerk at Mamelodi, Violet Mashao, arranging the annual Christmas Party (18 December) for the AIDS orphans in our congregation, supported by donations from congregations in Scotland. It is gratifying to hear that some of the students who have been supported in their studies have completed successfully.

At the close of this year we are particularly conscious that we are not alone in facing severe problems in our nation. Chaos seems to be characteristic of post-Brexit 'United' Kingdom, Trump's election victory in the USA, and continuing strife in the Middle East. Yesterday's 'Mass for Peace' brought all these and many other life struggles throughout the world to the fore of our minds and hearts as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace!

We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Lots of love!

Sandra and Graham