

NEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA – JUNE 2017

Dear Friends,

Well Christmas came and went and so did Easter and Pentecost. This is being written on the eve of Trinity Sunday. All of this testifies to how busy life continues to be.

The year began late as a result of the *Fees Must Fall* campaign. There were no significant protests and things remain apparently peaceful despite ongoing negotiations between students and university authorities. This led to a delay in the opening of the Faculty of Theology's Centenary Year until March 13. A well attended opening service was held during which Graham presented the Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof Cheryl de la Rey with a copy of the Centenary book he had edited. This was followed by the opening of the reinstated original university gates at the front of the Theology building. That afternoon a symposium was held at which Graham was presented with a *Festschrift* in honour of his academic achievements to which over sixty colleagues in South Africa and around the world had contributed.

Since then the Faculty has hosted several memorial lectures as well as a conference on 'Deconstructing the Past' where the partner churches involved in the faculty presented their histories under apartheid. Our Faculty was a base for the promotion of the theological justification of apartheid though it also produced a number of opponents of the evil regime. Graham presented a paper on the complicity of South African Presbyterianism with apartheid.

This was the day after graduation where two of his students received doctoral degrees and the highlight was the award of an honorary doctorate to Prof Jurgen Moltmann, the world's leading Reformed theologian. Moltmann is 89 years old and was a great hit with the students.

Just before this, Graham paid a short visit to Scotland to officiate at the funeral of our longtime friend, Barbara Ross who died tragically on her way to Abu Dhabi to join husband Dave. One positive result of the trip was that he met up with some Youth Fellowship friends of the 1970s whom he hadn't seen since.

Graham has continued with his research on South African Presbyterianism as well as teaching in the Faculty and at St Augustine's College. He has been commissioned by the church to oversee the production of a history of Presbyterianism in South Africa for the twentieth anniversary of the 1999 union which brought the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa into being. Work for the Council on Higher Education continues and the major task of the year is his Convenership of the Specialist Committee on Religious Studies and Theology at the National Research Foundation. Last week he was called out at 24 hours notice to attend a NRF workshop and to present a paper on the work of specialist committees.

With a change of personnel in the Ministry Committee Graham has been asked to develop an academic module for Presbyterian Formation along with colleague, Zwai Mthyoblie, our minister at St Andrew's, Pretoria. Four ministers will teach the module which will include: history of the denomination (Graham), church law (Zwai), spirituality (Ministry Secretary, Pat Baxter) and mission (Jerry Pillay).

As always, Sandra provides the stability at home which allows for all these things to happen. She is constantly offering hospitality as well as continuing with her language editing work for students. Then there is her work with Violet Mashao at Mamelodi, helping with the orphaned children's feeding project.

This past weekend, Graham was asked by the Moderator of the General Assembly to represent him at an Associations' spiritual *imbizo* (consultative gathering), the first of its kind. Our women's, men's and youth associations have sadly been in conflict since the union in 1999 and it has been a lengthy painful journey to bring them to this stage where they can even meet together for worship. It was a wonderful occasion at which Graham preached and celebrated communion before leaving at midnight as the revival service began. The eve of Pentecost spirit was clearly present and we hope and pray that this is the beginning of a process that will lead to the full union of the associations. Many of Graham's Fedsem students were present which added to the joy of the *imbizo*.

It is clear that both of our nations are experiencing troubled times at present. The recent Manchester bombing was yet another example of the fundamentalism, of whatever kind, that is a violent lethal and destructive force in our societies and throughout the world. Our prayer is for a world characterised by peace, justice and the care of the environment which supports and maintains us on our journey towards the kingdom of God.

Lots of Love!

Graham & Sandra



The new doctors with their promoters and Prof Moltmann (in front row in red gown)



Graham with Dr Wonke Buqa and Dr Philip Musoni



Graham with two student members of the Men's Christian Guild, Celani Mbhele and Nkululeko Nojoko, at the spiritual *imbizo*