

October 2021

Dear Friends,

This letter is long overdue but it is not because we have been laid low with COVID-19. It just seems that we get busier and busier and this keeps us occupied. Life has certainly changed but we have adjusted well as we were already used to working from home. We have taken all the necessary precautions, and follow the protocols carefully. We have had our two vaccinations with almost no side effects! We are fortunate that in South Africa our government's policies have meant that we have less than 500 new infections per day and less than 60 deaths per day. This is excellent progress as the roll out of vaccinations progresses well. We are now down to Level 2 of the lockdown which is part of the government's measured response to the pandemic. Our current recovery rate is 96.3%.

Graham had a sudden memory jerk at the beginning of the year when Pat Baxter, our Ministry secretary said to him that her new personal assistant, Ntombi Currie, told her that she remembers him teaching her: '*UYes' uyandithanda; oko ndiyakwazi mna*': 'Jesus loves me this I know'. She was brought up in Gqumahashe Phantsi village in our Lovedale congregation, so this must have happened sometime between 1978 and 1981!

Sandra has been incredibly busy with proofreading. This is possibly because with lockdown and people working from home, students have more time to devote to their research. It is a never-ending stream. In addition, she keeps the students sane when they are under pressure from their supervisors.

She has also been busy with our elder, Violet Mashao at Mamelodi. We have written before:

Thankfully, due to ongoing support from Scottish partners, particularly Cumbernauld Old and Brightons, we have been able to increase our involvement with the orphans' project at Mamelodi East congregation. These kids are a special risk at this time. The support given helps them understand that when all else around them is collapsing, the church is still there helping in times of great need, and that church means far more than the local congregation which nourishes them (see attached photos).

Just before Easter, Graham was invited by the minister, Rev Dr Fundiswa Kobo, to lead a seminar on the role of the eldership. This was a good opportunity to catch up with elders he had not seen for some time.

We have had spells at church where we went totally on to Zoom services but with the change in lockdown regulations we are back to 'normal' worship with Zoom for the elderly. On Good Friday we had an offering of Dan Forrest's *Requiem for the Living* by Unison voices, one of Pretoria's superb choirs. This was a performance of hope for Easter and during the continuing pandemic.

Graham has been involved in an increasing number of Zoom sessions. He taught our Post Academic Training (PAT) students contemporary spirituality, preaching and church law. Then he was one of the respondents to the memorial lecture given in honour of our recently deceased colleague, Rev Prof Vuyani Vellem. He is also involved in a UPCSA project which is working on determining the contours that the UPCSA may take cognisance of in doing theology.

After a spell of online teaching at the Baptist College, we returned to contact teaching in July. The semester has now ended and students are about to write their final end of year exams. This year he was asked to prepare a new module for our Higher Certificate in Biblical Studies on South African History of Christianity. The college has been taking the teaching the History of Christianity more seriously since Graham joined the staff; this is gratifying.

St Augustine's College has been on online teaching since the first lockdown, so that was another online teaching experience: a week long honours module in Historical Theology. Students all passed!

In July, one evening, Graham received a phone call from our Moderator of General Assembly, Rt Rev Siphon Mthethwa, a former student, in Pietermaritzburg. He was stranded at the airport due to the ongoing rioting (resulting from internal ANC problems and poor service delivery) in Natal Province. His flight had been cancelled. As a result, Graham was asked to conduct the funeral of one of our ministers the next morning. So he was off to Brakpan at 5.30 the next morning and missed the SMS to go for his second job. Fortunately, that was attended to the next day. That was Sandra's birthday and friends came to take her out to lunch as Graham had intended. He joined them all later!

The major change we have had to face is the lack of family and friends visiting us from the UK; hopefully, that will be resolved next year? We are fortunate in having local friends who keep us in good company in the meantime.

As we write this, we are preparing for a brief visit to the UK during November to see our family. For the most part we will be self isolating in Brighton with our sons and then with our grand-daughter and her partner in Longcroft. We will not be 'doing the rounds' as we normally do. It is just that we need to see our family. Please excuse us if this appears to be selfish but we are at a great distance and it is almost two years since we saw them. We have struggled so hard in South Africa to overcome the pandemic, which is not our opinion of the situation in the UK, especially England. We acknowledge that this is not the case in Scotland as we see from international news broadcasts and reports. However, at our age and both having diabetes, we have decided to take a 'conservative' approach to our visit.

We are grateful for the ongoing contact. They have been a particular blessing during the past two years. We hope all is well with you and your congregations. If all goes well, we hope to make a visit to the UK during June/July next year.

With our Love and Best Wishes!
Graham & Sandra