

CHAPLAINS CORNER

Warm greetings!



It has another month filled with gratitude for things small and large, and big events. The visit of former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams was very special.

He did the annual colloquium organised by University of Stellenbosch and Volmoed, on Passions and Freedoms, focused on his most recent book, 'Passions of the Soul. Highly recommended. There was a good mix of diverse, intergenerational academics and students, some international. I put together morning and evening devotions using contemporary words for familiar hymn tunes, Taizé songs, silence for reflection, and prayers I wrote based on the attachments of the passions, connected to the freedoms of the beatitudes. The colloquium was followed by a five day retreat on 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches in these days'. The focus was on the prophetic and the Spirit, using Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and the Spirit in Luke 4 and Jesus' proclamation in the synagogue.

His mix of scripture, theology, philosophy, pertinent stories, and his relaxed, undefended demeanour as he handled some thorny questions and sometimes pushback, was inspiring and memorable. It was a highlight of the year for me, as I ended up getting bits and pieces of time with him to talk about content of the morning devotions and shared a couple of meals with him and others, and also helped to facilitated the Table Talk discussions after supper where people could ask questions about anything, and they did. It was also a huge delight to reconnect with Stephen Martin from UCT Anglican chaplaincy days, from Canada, and to meet his wife Sue, who is also a priest. The week ended with a public lecture on Faith and the Arts in the public sphere, and our young drummers welcomed everyone to the lecture in great style.

These young drummers were the group that stayed behind, while the twelve experienced drummers went on an almost three week tour of the Midwest USA, together with Edwin Arrison and Bevil Spence and Ivana Schaefer, our drumming coaches, and René August.

Of course they left on the Thursday of the Rowan Williams visit – big events always seem to coincide! The group came to the weekly service and drummed, and were blessed by Rowan and the congregation before leaving for the airport.



It was an enormous amount of work as none of them have travelled before. We raised money and bought and borrowed and got it together, by hook and by crook! One of them sewed a gorgeous uniform for them – wrap around skirts and overshirts together with doeks for the women, worn with black pants, shirts and shoes, for the cold weather there. Beaded accessories put it all together.



The trip was entirely made possible by the extreme generosity of a group from Indianapolis who visited Volmoed last year, the Indianapolis Center for Middle East Peace. A serendipitous moment while all in a drum circle together, when Bevil the drummer spoke about PASIC, the annual Percussionist Convention in Indianapolis, which they knew about, and said, You have to come and visit and make a tour. They group ended up playing in ten cities in Indiana, Michigan and then Chicago, and had the most exhilarating, exhausting, challenging, amazing, unforgettable time of their lives. They only returned 2 nights ago so only one of them made it to the weekly

service. We await more stories and photos but these will give you an idea of what they did. One of them said, 'wherever we go, they all love us.' Bevil has said they were the stars of the show at the convention, always being asked to perform, as they sing and dance as well as drum. It was a 'Drum tour for Unity and Hope' and the timing immediately post the US election meant that this was much needed. They brought joy and hope and tears and much more to literally thousands of people. We are very proud of our Volmoed Youth drummers and it seems they have a bright future.



Please pray for us as we discern invitations back for next year, given how time and labour intensive it is to prepare for trips like these. We are a leadership training program as well as a drumming and drum making organisation, and to both well is challenging. We need greater capacity and more people to help



Personally I was relieved not to be on the tour, though I had been asked. Having been in the US twice this year due to studies and holiday, this was not possible. However I was not off the hook! I was responsible for the team of drummers who stayed behind, to drum for the Rowan Williams event, and to lead the now annual visit to the UCT Graduate School of Business. We are invited to the last session of the part time MBA students who meet on Saturdays, who come from numerous countries, to tell the story of VYLTP and the drumming. They order 30 small drums for the students, who are gifted with these drums at the end of their course. The master drummer/storyteller Themba Lonzi helped our group to prepare the drumming, and I worked with them on public speaking as they told the story of how a drum is made. Starting with dirty wooden pallet planks, donated by a local farm, each one describes what their task is in the process, and shows their equipment, from the pallets to the sandpaper and varnish, the holes, the rings and the ropes and knots, the decorating.



This was their first time ever doing public speaking and they did well. The UCT students are invited to give their comments and suggestions. This particular group was amazing – fully engaged and gave excellent suggestions that we have recorded. We all drummed together and ended up drumming, singing and dancing outside in the plaza of the GSB. It was memorable and inspiring and fun!

The young people then went to Wynberg, to St John's church, to have lunch and play for a 70th birthday party at the church. Though thoroughly exhausted, they managed well enough and went home to sleep. I went on to be part of a memorial service for old friend Peter Moll, who was one of the first conscientious objectors in SA and had just published his memoirs before he passed away. This was a gathering to watch the livestream of the service celebrating his life. I met up with old friends from decades ago, including Richard Steele whom I had not seen for about forty five years! What an inspiration and joy it all was.

Needless to say after the first half of November I was rather tired and slowed down for a week or so before moving forward to preparing for December's big events – the wedding of my godchild Thea de Gruchy and George Thomas, and then our annual Christmas carol picnic on 14 December.

The difficult news of the last week has been the discovery that I have Grade 4 osteo arthritis in my hip and that the only option is hip replacement surgery. I have had increasing pain in related areas over the past year, so my prayer had been for clarity. I got it! There is a lot of info to take in, and it is all rather overwhelming. Your prayers are appreciated as I decide on a date to do this, probably mid to late March, and how to manage post surgery. It will be with the help of good friends in Pinelands. And yes, this has definitely slowed me down this year and will continue to do so. I had a cortisone injection that helps me to

function without much discomfort, and I am grateful for this.

I am grateful too for advent coming, in a couple of days. It is my favourite liturgical season, though so challenging in the busy summer holidays, to slow down and find quiet space to anticipate the coming of the Christ-child, the coming of Christ.

May your advent include time for quiet, for loving service, for anticipation and the light to come, in these troubled global and local times. May the Prince of Peace bring a sliver and glimmer of peace into our lives and our world as we struggle yet try to hold on to hope and look for the light of the star.

Enjoy this (northern hemisphere) Advent poem below by Edwina Gateley.

Love,

Wilma

Advent

Edwina Gateley, *Soul Whispers* (2015).

Advent means
we are waiting for something,
we are to expect
something good and up-lifting
to make us feel better.

And why not?

We struggle so,
and we only want
peace, security and even
a little happiness.

We dream of it—
like a lost treasure
in an empty desert.

Then, in the very dying of the Autumn Season,
along comes Advent
with candles, prayers, songs
and promises
of new possibilities.

And, all tingling
with excitement and expectancy,
we are seduced
into hoping once again.

Oh—thank God
for Advent—
and its perennial promise—
pointing to a light
which never dies.

