

Warm greetings from summer in South Africa and finally summer in Hermanus! Though it still rains well once or twice a week, which helps with watering the garden plants. That's a good thing, as water is still a challenge after all these months since the September floods. It is discoloured, so the staff are conducting scientific experiments using ammonium phosphate to stick to the dirt and weigh it down so that it sinks, then the dirty water is run off, leaving the clear water behind. Fine enough for irrigation, toilet, etc and awaiting results as to whether it is drinkable. The joys of living on a farm in the valley of heaven and earth!

Gratitude prevails as always. December and Advent, Christmas and new year have been a wonderful time of end of year events, warm weather, visitors from abroad and around South Africa, and a mix of continuing to give retreats and also get some good holiday time.



The life-giving ministry that I love, of giving retreats, has continued. A young twenty year old, daughter of friends did a two and a half day silent retreat to discern her future. What a joy that was, as she took to silence and spiritual practices like a duck to water. She started reading Parker Palmer's classic, 'Let Your Life Speak' and loved it, and is still reading it now that she is at home. Another retreatant from November came back before Christmas as she loved her silent retreat so much. Another joy is that she loves my books in my office and sitting there in quiet amongst them – a sure sign of grace!

Our annual Christmas carol picnic had to move this year, due to the damage from the September floods. St Peter's Anglican Church graciously hosted us in their beautiful gardens, with the usual



Manenberg Church band, our drummers, lots of carol singing and even more spectacular raffle prizes from wonderful wineries, restaurants, shops and more, in the valley and in

Hermanus. We made R9000 this year, the most ever, which is shared between the band and Volmoed. A huge thank you to everyone for their generosity!





A few days later our 2023 VYLTP cohort graduated and received certificates at the Thursday eucharist. That night we were able



to enjoy an end of year dinner at a local restaurant at the new harbour, whose owners are one of the restaurants that helps provide lunches for our drum makers.

Historically, VYLTP signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Drumba and Bevil Spence, our drum master, trainer. This formalizes an exciting partnership that will increase the possibilities for our young people to learn, drum, make drums, and develop as leaders.



Between Christmas and the new year, together with Bevil the drummer, we held a healing service for a local drum leader who is sadly losing her vision. It included singing, drumming and prayers for her healing. Many of the participants encountered Volmoed for the first time, and now want to return for similar events.

Our first international group of 2024 has already been and gone at Volmoed this past week. Michael Battle's 'Tutu Travel Seminar' is a regular twice a year event, in Cape Town and at Volmoed. Two friends I made a year ago at this event returned this year, a joy and grace that was gratefully received and enjoyed.



I was delighted to be with family this year for Christmas, my niece and nephew and their spouses, and my sister's inlaws. I stayed another couple of days up the west coast with my niece, then came home for some nesting and sorting papers and stuff in my home. Then the double treat of five days at Grootbos Environmental Centre with long-time friends

Robin and Heather Petersen and several of their friends. Walking trails, beautiful fynbos, a dam to swim in, shared meals and great, interesting company, plus time to relax, chill, read, and nap, was restoring. Then I simply changed venues, and drove to Pringle Bay via my home to get



some clean clothes. I

joined Beatie

Hofmeyr, Hildegard Fast and other friends from over the years for the beach part of my holiday, including ocean swims, snorkeling in the gully, more naps and good conversation and company, and also, in both groups, the most amazing food with very creative cooks.



I returned well-rested, well-fed, well-nourished in body, mind and spirit - so grateful for these friends that I don't see often but treasure the friendship, memories and community we share at these moments.

This year is shaping up wonderfully with life-giving events. I especially look forward to giving a three-day retreat to fifty-five Methodist clergy, requested by Bishop Yvette Moses, who is the spouse of my new bishop, Bishop-Elect Stafford Moses. I hosted them at Volmoed for two days in December and got to know both of them, another gift of grace. Your prayers for this retreat and large group of retreatants are appreciated.



The Shalem course on Transforming Communities through contemplative group and individual retreats continues through the end of May, with monthly seminar and peer group meetings, and another six day residency in March in Maryland, USA. This continues to be a fantastic source of learning, discovering new resources to use, inspiring reading, and more.

Globally I continue all the prayers and laments for the Holy Land, praying and petitioning for an end to violence, a cease fire that results in all the parties coming around the table to negotiate a shared future. Those prayers also go towards all countries mired with ongoing war and violence, too many to name. May 2024 hold the prospect of glimmers of peace for those whose lives are tragically traumatized – continually impacted in ways that defy descriptions in words. As the wise ones followed a bright star over long distances, reaching the babe to be king that brought

deep joy, so may the light of Christ continue to inspire us to cling to the hope for peace, day by day.

BE THE LIGHT

Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world.

All things break.

And all things can be mended.

Not with time, as they say, but with intention.

So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally.

The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you. (L.R. Knost)

Locally, please continue to pray:

- for the Volmoed staff, especially those with children at school, which are not easy places for young children on their formative journeys.
- for the young adults in our youth leadership training program, as the year is now beginning - some will continue, others move on to start studies, and some new participants are being recruited.
- for our youth program leadership team planning meeting at end of January.
- for the Volmoed trustees and council, meeting on 24 January with a facilitator, to explore the way forward for Volmoed, how the vision and mission is expressed in these times, succession planning, and more.
- for myself, for discernment how best to grow a more formal retreat program at Volmoed in 2025, in collaboration and partnership with other people and organisations.

My heart is joyful and grateful for all that is life-giving in the midst of enormous struggles. As this new year takes shape, let us keep praying for compassionate hearts towards others and ourselves. To help us along the way, below is one of my favourite New Year's prayers, by Joyce Rupp.

Love,
Wilma

Standing at the Gates of the New Year

Sacred Mystery,
waiting on the threshold
of this new year,
you open the gates
and beckon to me:

“Come! Come!

Be not wary of what awaits you
as you enter the unknown terrain,
be not doubtful of your ability
to grow from its joy and sorrows.



For I am with you.
I will be your Guide.
I will be your Protector.
You will never be alone.”

Guardian of this new year,
I set aside my fears, worries, concern.
I open my life to mystery, to beauty,
to hospitality, to questions,
to endless opportunity
of discovering you in my relationships,
and to all the silent wisps of wonder
that will draw me to your heart.

I welcome your unfailing Presence
and walk with hope into this new year.
---Joyce Rupp

