

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER October 2023

Warm greetings! It has been a full and intense month, and I am grateful for so much. At Volmoed we emerged from the flooding and all the damages, and the challenges of using water sparingly while the pump was not yet fixed, along with the reality that driving to Hermanus now takes anything from 40 minutes to an hour or even more if the traffic is bad. The cleanup started and will continue for many months. We are hoping that the valley road will be back in use by early December. Thankfully most groups did not cancel their bookings and there were groups and individuals on retreats.



The Anglican clergy from Elsie's River archdeaconry came on silent retreat; I accompanied two people on an individual retreat, at the beginning and end of the month. I also worked with staff from IAM, Inclusive and Affirming ministries, to help facilitate a group of young clergy on retreat. Some of the retreat

work has been quite intense, and it takes a lot of preparation, but it has been a profoundly meaningful and inspiring experience to do this.



As part of the Shalem course on transforming communities through contemplative retreats, I do quite a lot of reading and writing, participate in monthly zoom meetings, and also a few projects. One of these is to lead a seven session course on Spiritual Practices and Silence. I had planned to do that at Volmoed, with the young people in the leadership program. The roads have made that impossible, and they now meet on

Thursdays in the Anglican church hall in Zwelihle, where they make the drums on the

other days of the week. This changed my plans, adding to the challenge of introducing young people whose first language is not English, whose culture does not make much room for silence, to prayer practices that lead to silence and quiet.

The course began with a quiet day, in All Saints Church, next to the hall they usually work in. I introduced and laid the groundwork for contemplative prayer and silent prayer, and introduced them to breath prayers. I used Psalm 46 and the familiar song, Be Still and know that I am God, which we sing in 3 languages.



They are starting off with 5 minutes of breath prayers, saying 'BE STILL' on their in breaths, 'AND KNOW' on their out breaths, followed by 5 minutes of silence. Perhaps by the end of the course we will be at 10 minutes of a practice and 10 minutes silence – we will see! In the second session I introduced them to a 5 minute version of St Ignatius' Examen, a great tool for daily reflection and processing at the end of a day – built on the assumption that

God is present in our days, present in all things, whether we know or experience it or not. By the time they leave the session, they generally feel calmer and more peaceful than when they arrive. They are giving good feedback during the sessions thus far, and I am looking forward to the rest of the course.

The local members of the VYLTP Leadership team also spent a morning with a facilitator, to put together a strategic business plan for a grant application. This will be very helpful as we continue our planning and work on our organizational infrastructure.





One of the great joys of this month was the 90th birthday of Mama Leah Tutu, which I attended in Cape Town - a service at St George's Cathedral and a celebration at the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation offices. This included a fantastic exhibition launched in her honour, 90 Voices of Herstory, with 90 posters hanging from the ceiling, of SA women who have contributed to change in

SA – along with QR codes on the posts that could be scanned to hear their interviews. Many women were also actually in the room! What an incredible moment it was, to see them and their stories and pictures, and celebrate them – we burst into singing! and then someone told me that I was also on one of the posters! I had forgotten I had done a series of interviews for their oral history project. The event itself was beautiful, a very fitting tribute to a wonderful woman.



I also celebrated my own birthday the next day after Mama Leah, and had the joy of gathering a few friends together, and a couple of coffees, a breakfast and then a lunch in Hermanus with a newish friend. All very good and so much joy!

I continue to do physio exercises for a pulled muscle (back in July while boogey boarding) that did not improve after 8 weeks, and the exercises have helped. I am not walking with a limp now, for the most part, and can walk further. I hope to get back to swimming this month and maybe even boogey boarding again. We will see...

Globally, along with so many, I weep and lament for the scale and horror of death and war in Israel and Palestine, for the deaths of the innocent, for the systemic violence that has killed so many for so long, for the insanity of war and horrific violence. I pray that like in SA, there will be the realization that ultimately the leaders have to come together and work out a future where all are respected and valued as human beings. I pray for a miracle while struggling to believe a solution is possible. I have no adequate words and sit in silence, holding a black and blue shawl I bought years ago, that was made by a Palestinian woman for a craft market. I now use that shawl as part of the retreats and sessions I lead, as a visible reminder of the suffering and violence that seems never ending, and a way of lifting up the agonies of the Holy Land.

Locally, please pray for our staff, for our young people in leadership training, for the course with the young people on Spiritual Practices and Silence, and for direction as I discern how best to grow a retreat program at Volmoed, in collaboration and partnership with others; for patience while we wait for the road to be usable again; for compassion towards others and ourselves.

Love,
Wilma



After community prayers on a school holiday Wednesday, and Yohane's wife Martha, visiting from Malawi.