

## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER December 2023

Warm greetings! It was another month of using an awful, dangerous dirt road as part of the long detour to Hermanus... there were 38 accidents over 8 weeks! Thankfully the valley road opened in mid November. It's a temporary fix still with two stop and go roadworks delays, so with great gratitude, the drive to Hermanus is now anything from 10 minutes if one is lucky or 20-25 minutes if unlucky. We'll take it! It felt life-changing to be able to drive straight down the valley again. The terrain is unrecognizable. Instead of green vegetation, there are enormous canyons stretching wide and deep, all the way down the valley. Dark peat underground means these are almost black, with dark brown sand all through the canyons. And still some green vegetation. No photos as I am driving! Where the road is damaged, still so much water flowing down next to the road, which has been deeply gouged out by water damage.



As always there is enormous reason for gratitude. Volmoed continues to mop up and clear up. The huge bent over bluegum trees near the staff housing and my neighbours' had to be taken out. The trees are a wind buffer also, so some had to be left. The view from my back door is very different now. The tree cutters leave all the debris behind, so a lot of work remains. This is a serious fire hazard but as it is now fire season, no controlled burns are allowed. Your prayers for how Volmoed should tackle this are appreciated.

The life-giving ministry that I love, continued this past month. Four Anglican clergy from Paarl archdeaconry came on silent retreat. They loved discovering the prayer hut and other beautiful places to pray and reflect. Each one had strong encounters with the Divine, and shared some beautiful experiences and learnings.

I attended a clergy event with IAM, Inclusive and Affirming Ministries, as part of a larger conference. It was creative! They used the Open Space Technology method, which I love and have never used in SA. It works every time – a way of engaging many different people in varied discussions, in order to come to an action plan. All this is intense, moving, often with profound sharing from individuals. It can take a lot of preparation, and is always a meaningful and inspiring experience.



The Shalem course on transforming communities through contemplative retreats continues. The seven session course on Spiritual Practices and Silence just ended. It has been inspiring and energizing. Four sessions in Zwelihle and three at Volmoed. They loved coming back to Volmoed after 8 weeks away! The sessions seemed easier here, though maybe they were becoming familiar with the process. We've had fascinating discussions about culture and contemplative prayer, and some language sharing in pairs and in the larger group. The struggle to find any quiet space at home to pray is their largest challenge. We explored practices that can lead into silence, always a part 1 experience, followed by part 2 in silence, using a bell to mark the time.



They explored embodiment using breath prayers, Be Still on in breath, And Know on out breath, and the Jesus prayer; written text using a 5 minute version of the Ignatian Examen; praying with scripture using Ignatian imaginative prayer; creativity by colouring in mandalas to help focus (they loved this!); external images and icons, using pictures to gaze at in silence, chosen from a lot of different picture cards; sound and silence, using Taizé chant, different indigenous instruments and the Tibetan singing bell. This included a fascinating discussion of

how and why and what music they listen to, what music helps them pray, including some who love Hillsong worship songs in English as well as all things gospel in isiXhosa. They loved this last session! We closed with a guided meditation using the small river rock they took home on the first day, together with a small LED candle. The rock symbolises their sufferings, as well as their inner resilience, and then the way they wrap their hands around it making it warm, symbolises God's love for them that surrounds and encompasses them always. They sat in silence experiencing God's love for them. Most loved that and a couple of them struggled. What a learning and growth process it has been for them. They always leave calmer and feeling better than when they arrived. Some are now using this in their lives and discovering it helps them with their struggles and gives them strength. Their evaluations were positive and helpful. What a joy! I have loved seeing them begin to make connections, like looking at the pond or a bird, and making connections with their lives and how God is



working in them. Many are trying to continue this during the week. They want to continue so we will see how to integrate this into their daily and weekly programs, on the three days a week they work making drums, and at the Thursday program at Volmoed. All very exciting! One of the most inspiring experiences since I came to Volmoed. Now for the course, I write a reflection paper on the whole experience.



I have been able to walk a bit more this month, and the pulled muscle is not complaining too much, which is cause for rejoicing. I hope to return to swimming and boogie boarding this month though the summer ocean temperatures here can be 12 or 13 degrees or lower! And 16 or 17 degrees on a good day! Lucky I have Viking blood...

Another highlight was the Volmoed youth drummers/leaders' visit to UCT graduate school of business, to facilitate the last class of the M.Phil students, from seven countries, working in NGOs and companies in Cape Town. For the powerpoint, director Edwin Arrison shared the origins of VYLTP and they told the story of VYLTP, each one speaking in public in their second language, about their role in making the drums. UCT ordered 30 small drums to give to each



student, which they used to create community and drum with Bevil and our drummers. Towards the end they heard they could take the drums home and decorate them. We drum med in the beautiful courtyard of the GSB! What an incredible experience for them all. The 2024 class want us back next year! Lunch at the Spur and a visit to the Langa Anglican church to drum and learn more about drumming, topped off a memorable day.



Globally, with all of you, I continue to weep and lament for the scale and horror of death and war in so many places, some hidden and not in the media; for the scale of violence and abuse of gender based violence and femicide, so rife in our beloved country. As we enter advent, I weep for Israel and Palestine, for the lies and fake news; deaths of the innocent, for the systemic violence that has killed so many for so long, for the insanity of war and horrific violence. The UN statistics say the average age of those who died in Palestine is 5 years old. I cannot wrap my head or heart around that. Nor the IDF soldier who asked to bomb a house with a family in it as a birthday gift to his daughter. I pray that was fake news. I pray for the ceasefire and hostage release to continue one day at a time, for hard hearts to open and realise that mutual destruction solves nothing.

I pray that like in SA, there will be realisation that ultimately leaders must come to the table and negotiate together to forge a future where all are respected and valued as human beings. I pray for a miracle while wondering how many more thousands will die, and if a solution is even possible. I still have no adequate words. I still sit in silence and pray while weeping, holding or wearing a beautiful black and blue shawl I bought years ago, made by a Palestinian woman. I still 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. How long Abba, Amma, how long. My heart cries out as we head into advent, for the coming of the Prince of Peace in tangible ways in our bleeding, hurting, beautiful world. I pray for hope and cling to Christ while struggling to hope. I receive the strength to somehow continue day by day. We pray this together, I know. Thank you.

Locally, please pray for our staff, for our young people in leadership training, for direction and energy as I discern how best to grow a more formal retreat program at Volmoed. I want to do this in collaboration and partnership with others, there seem to be many potential partners. I give thanks for so much life-giving ministry in the midst of enormous struggles, and for the opening of the road. Let's keep praying for compassionate hearts towards others and ourselves, as we enter advent. I find hope in the Advent Credo written by Dr Allan Boesak decades ago yet still completely relevant in these troubled times. May we be people of hope!  
May we follow the light of the star towards the One who is Immanuel

Love,  
Wilma

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—  
This is true: For God so loved the world that God gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in God shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—  
This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—  
This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon their shoulder, whose name shall be called wonderful counsellor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—  
This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—  
This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—  
This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.