

January 2016



Dear Friends and Family,

Next month Alun and I will have lived in South Africa for a decade! What an adventure of faith the first 10 years here have been. Many of you have prayed with and for us since the beginning – thank you for your long-term commitment to us and to gospel work on the Cape Flats; it really does encourage us. We start the year with two exciting pieces of ministry-related news and one big piece of family news – we hope that entices you to keep reading!

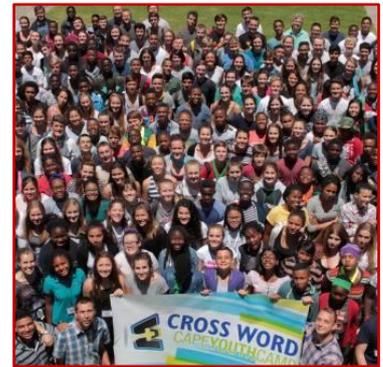


Turning first to the youth ministry Alun heads up, we are delighted to report that all six of our teens passed their National Senior Certificate (written age 18yrs) this year, including three with bachelor passes. Thank you to all of you who prayed for St. Thomas' matriculants over these last few months. These teens have overcome many, many challenges along the way and we are so thankful for all who have prayed and contributed in other ways. Their results represent a significant achievement for these teens growing up in a community where so many don't finish school. Now we look forward to welcoming them all into our young adults bible study group next

Thursday. Do continue to lift them to the Lord as they explore options for employment or further study, but for now, give thanks with us!

Another tremendously exciting venture is the birthing of a pre-school at St. Thomas! This has been Gary's (our minister) brain child and dream for the last year as it provides such an obvious way to reach out with the gospel in our context. Preschool provision in Heideveld is, generally speaking, appalling – meaning many children enter school with no foundation whatsoever. What a great opportunity to reach kids and their parents/caregivers with the good news of Jesus and see his church grow here in Heideveld! Gary has appointed a teacher, a Christian lady from Heideveld, who he is impressed with. He has raised funding for her salary, as well as for the upgrades to the St. Thomas kitchen that are needed to cater for a pre-school. Since most of the kids will come from homes where money is very scarce, the kids will be given two meals a day. Gary has appointed a board of directors, made up of educationalists from Heideveld and wider Cape Town. He's vacated his office at the church to be used as a classroom, but is planning to build proper classrooms on our property before the end of 2016! As well as providing an avenue for evangelism and church growth, we believe it will become a great partnership with Arise whose family centre is also built on the church grounds. We hope that many of the families will be able to benefit from the professional services Arise offers, but will equally be able to link us to kids that would most benefit from the school. We expect that the school will begin in February, although there are a few things to organise first.

In other ministry news, we had a wonderful and fruitful time away at the regional Crossword Youth Camp in Stellenbosch in December – a week long denominational camp that brought together 190 campers and 60 leaders from a great diversity of our churches in the Western Cape. This year's studies focused on the books of 1 Samuel and 2 Peter – the sessions were excellent as we have come to expect over the years. As well as a crop of youth, St. Thomas was thrilled to be able to send five leaders – two trainees, one co-leader, one group leader and Alun, who now serves as secretary on the Senior Leadership Committee. They all worked *extremely* hard to serve the teens and greatly benefited from the time. Debbie and the kids were thankful to be able to attend for the last three nights – Debbie enjoyed fellowship with the wives of some of our other ministers and our children found plenty of playmates. Crossword is a strategic ministry in many ways and we are grateful for our growing involvement with this project.



Young adults' ministry continues to be an area of real encouragement with real gospel growth. Our end of year Christmas dinner took the form of two potjies served on long tables outside on our driveway – a far cry from those cold winter evenings we grew up with at Christmas time! 29 attended so there much laughter and plenty of washing up afterwards!

Arise's Annual Adoption Conference at the end of October was the biggest and best yet, with over 150 current and prospective adoptive parents attending for the day. Debbie is heavily involved in this event and spoke at three of the sessions. She was encouraged by the adoption culture that is slowly beginning to seep into our churches. It is wonderful for our own kids to see more Christian families that look a bit like ours. It is humbling to see Christian parents grapple with complex issues and to observe their willingness to sacrifice, learn, and tirelessly serve the children God has brought to them. Arise is now recognised as a key player in terms of adoption advocacy and post-placement support within Cape Town and it is a real blessing that we can have this influence and yet remain unashamedly Christian. We are encouraged that every year we hear of delegates going on to adopt; we smile when we hear of children moving from children's homes into families and yet there is so much more to do. Adoptions nationally are still declining year on year, there are tens of thousands fewer social workers than needed and policy pertaining to adoption on the ground is often at odds with the law. Arise is committed to permanency for children and we continue to soldier on.

Turning towards home, many of you will have already been made aware of the big news from the Burt household this quarter – the news that Likhona, Ilana and Malachi are awaiting the arrival of a baby brother due at the end of March! Having been planning to adopt another daughter, it was a huge change of direction for our family and took some processing both for us and then for our kids. We are very thankful for this precious life that God has given to us. We are so excited that both sets of grandparents are planning to visit us when their newest grandson makes his arrival. It is going to be a hot third trimester for Debbie – temperatures are regularly mid to late thirties at the moment!

We were able to enjoy a wonderful few days away last week in a beautiful part of the Western Cape. Having got through a very busy six months, it was refreshing and just what we needed before starting 2016. Based on a fruit farm, the kids loved the freedom of running around, picking fruit, swimming and boating on the river and visiting a local cheese factory. Likhona and Ilana return to school tomorrow to begin Grade five and two respectively. Malachi is looking forward to 'tivities' (activities) with Debbie in the mornings as he continues to pre-school at home. There are an ever-growing number of excellent homeschool resources and groups in Cape Town that have enabled Debbie to feel supported as she teaches Malachi at this stage.

Thank you for all your prayers, financial support, emails, cards, requests for prayer, facebook chats and skype – please don't stop!

Every blessing, Alun, Debbie, Likhona, Ilana, Malachi and bump x

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