

February 2024



The Burt family on Christmas Day

Dear Family and Friends,

This week as I was casually signing the umpteenth parental consent form for one of my children, I took a double look at the date. I realised that 18 years ago, I flew to South Africa to live. An awful lot has happened in that time; in our family and in ministry. Eighteen years ago, Alun and I knew nothing of parenting or leading a church, much less one on the Cape Flats. We had never eaten Akni or Melktert, we had never been a victim of crime or gone to bed hearing gunshots; loadshedding was not a word in our vocabulary, day zero meant nothing; the only Afrikaans we knew was a few short phrases learnt on our short-term stints. Never had a friend tell us they hadn't eaten for several days as their wages simply weren't enough; only seldom had we ever thought about our race or the privilege of education and healthcare. We didn't yet know the trauma of adoption or its beauty. As we 'come of age' in Heideveld, we reflect on the tremendous bounty that this community has shared with us – a bounty that is rooted in deep relationships and the gospel. A bounty that has embraced us as foreigners; a bounty of people that have generously shared life with us, trusting us to share their deep pain and rejoice in their wonderful joys. We have grown. God's kingdom has grown.

'Not to us, oh Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness'. Psalm 115:1

Seasons come and go, but the thread of God's presence and leading hold us. January saw a very significant farewell to Dillon Solomons who has been such an important part of the staff at St Thomas in recent years. As farewells go, however, this was one of the best. Dillon got married to Candice in December and together they have relocated to Johannesburg where Candice begins work as a

trainee attorney. The gap at St Thomas will be felt for a long time, especially by our youth and young adults, whom they both served so faithfully. Times like this cause us to trust the Lord more and it's our prayer that new leaders will rise up to fill the void. Already this has begun and we were delighted to have over 20 teens attend our youth Bible study last Friday.



Junior Sunday school learning about Daniel in the lion's den

As part of the staff shake up, we are delighted that Katleho Meslane (our children's pastor) will be sharing the preaching with Alun this year. We believe this is a wonderful move for the gospel and praise God for the strong relationship we enjoy with the Meslane family. Nadene Clark, our biblical counsellor, will be joining us full time this month. Whilst we still have some work to do in fundraising for this position long-term, we have been blessed with funds to employ her for 2024. Her pastoral heart and skill are invaluable.



One of our adult Bible studies during the Christmas break

What are you excited by in 2024? St Thomas has the opportunity to run two courses this term and we are eagerly anticipating both. Christianity Explored begins on 22 February and will see two of our Bible study groups acting as table leaders. Last year's course saw a handful of people come to understand and accept Jesus and we are prayerful that the Lord might once more open hearts and minds this year. From older teens upwards, we are encouraging people to come along and to invite their neighbours and families. Please pray with us.

Griefshare, a grief recovery programme, will begin its third cycle under Nadene's leadership on 13 February. This has proved a tremendously fruitful course last year both for people in our congregation and in the wider community. People have come to church services through these courses and we are thrilled that an increasing number are sticking and becoming a regular part of the St Thomas community.

Likhona wrote his SAT exam in December and graduated from high school with his American Highschool Diploma. His tenacity over many years shone through and we are super proud of his results. Accepted by Boston City Campus, (a South African college despite its name), Likhona is set to begin studying a Higher Certificate in Accounting Practise later this month. With this, the Burt tribe will be spread from Grade 2 in Primary School through to University! Ilana continues homeschooling although is heavily involved in programmes both at a local art centre where she joins a class of Grade 10 design students to study illustration and a music centre where she is making wonderful progress in piano and cello. Our creative butterfly, Ilana is also enrolled in a live online class in graphic design – so far loadshedding (rotational powercuts) has not caused havoc. Malachi is going on his first school camp this week – two nights away in Stellenbosch. He has a fantastic group of friends and is sure to have a marvellous time. Timothy will tell you that Thursdays are the best day in the week this year, duly elected as his favourite 24 hours because of Lego Robotics club.

We take comfort in the truth that the God who calls us is faithful. In the uncertainties and challenges of life (and they are abundant), we are grateful that we see tangible expressions of God's spirit at work shaping us, providing for us and chipping away at our hearts to make us more like Him. Thanks for your ongoing support – we thank the Lord for you.

Every blessing,

Alun, Debbie, Likhona (19), Ilana (15), Malachi (11) and Timothy (7) x

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