



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

Tuesday, 08 September 2020

Dear friends

As we emerge from the first wave of Corona virus infections with relatively few deaths and a positive recovery rate, let us not become complacent, but remain vigilant as we begin to open our churches and return to in-person services.

This month I want to bring you up to date with some of the challenges that we have been coping with as a family over the last while.

In October 2019, at the very start of the first part of my visit to the eThekweni Presbytery, I was hospitalised with a DVT in my right leg. I was sent home, told to rest and I was put on blood thinners for three months. I had just fully recovered from the DVT when Lockdown hit and we were all plunged into virtual house arrest, which we understood was necessary to keep the most vulnerable in our society safe and healthy.

My mom suffered from a congenital kidney disease, Polycystic Kidney Disease, which led to her kidneys being enlarged and causing her to struggle with abnormally high blood pressure along with other complications. During 2019 they removed the right kidney and she began dialysis. The plan was to remove the other kidney and she was admitted just before lockdown, but she picked up an infection. The doctors decided simply to contain the infection and then send her home. Then on the 24th July, she had a fall at home and broke her hip. She was admitted and was doing pretty well but developed pneumonia on the 27th July. Sally and I saw her at lunch time on the 28th July and we knew that she did not have long to go. She knew we were there but was struggling to breathe and was on oxygen. Her blood pressure was abnormally low, and we could see that her heart and lungs were taking strain. We came home to tell the family and then, on the way back to the hospital my lifelong friend and colleague, Raoul Comninos, phoned to say that she had gone to be with the Lord. He had been allowed to see her and had spoken the 23rd Psalm over her before praying for her. During his prayer, she went to be with the Lord.

During lockdown both Sally and I contracted COVID and then, just after my mom passed, I developed a severe and painful gastro infection. I was treated for that, but they also tested my kidney function and it transpired that the COVID has negatively affected my kidney function.

I share this with you not because I believe my problems are any more or less serious than yours, but because I know there are many praying for me and my family. I want to thank and ask you not to stop doing so, and let you know that your prayers for us and our family are being answered.

This last weekend, after consultation with the GS, I attended the memorial service of Glen and Vida Rafferty, killed on their farm outside Newcastle on the 29th August. The service was led by retired Methodist bishop, Sandy Dickie, an old friend of the family and I brought a

message on behalf of the UPCSA. Here is what I said to them on Saturday on your behalf:

The 29th August was my birthday, I spent the day quietly with my family and we went out to dinner as a family. I serve a congregation in Durbanville and we opened our church for in-person services on Sun 30th. As I celebrated my birthday and prepared to lead a service I did not know who Glen and Vida Rafferty were. I didn't know about the beauty of Normandien.

Before today, most of you didn't know me. If you knew anything about me, I was a signature at the bottom of a letter to our churches or a name on an official document or a picture on a calendar that might hang in your church office. But as I prepared on Sunday morning to lead a service, you, the friends and family of Glen and Vida were waking up to find a world that had shifted significantly overnight. As many of us enjoyed the new freedoms of this lockdown level 2, spending time with family and friends, attending worship, and going about our business, you were dealing with the brutal and senseless killing of much-loved family and friends.

While it is good to know that, at last, in part due to this horrible tragedy, the Deputy President, the Legislature, the Police Minister, the Premier of KZN are all joining the chorus of ordinary South Africans who have been saying, "Enough already", but it seems such a waste that it took this random act of wanton violence to shock our decision makers into action.

The Hebrew Bible, the OT, is very clear that the shedding of innocent blood pollutes the land, brings a curse on the soil and that the blood of those who were killed innocently cries out to God, like the blood of Abel, for justice. We need justice to stop this curse on our land. I think we have forgotten, as I heard two people say yesterday in different contexts, that we seem to have forgotten that we are all bound to one another, we all exist together, and we are all dependent upon one another. We do not live in a vacuum, the actions of one impact us all. Because we are all dependent upon one another and need each other, we all need the unrestrained violence and lawlessness to stop. We want farmers and farm workers to be safe in their homes. Food security is a buzz word, but what of the security of those who provide the food? Surely that must be addressed.

We trust that the shift in the political atmosphere will lead to real action for those who farm the land. Unfortunately, such action will be too late for Glen and Vida. We can only hope that the politicians, police, and prosecutors will have the determination to do something for citizens in rural areas that will yield tangible results. Sadly, no matter what happens: when the perpetrators are eventually caught, convicted and sentenced; when the time comes when those who work the land can farm in peace and rest in safety, none of that will restore what you have lost: an amazing couple who were well loved and highly respected by all who knew them.

I wish I had better words with which to offer you some comfort, but I do not. I am here because the Bible says that when one part of the Body grieves, we all grieve with it. I am here to tell you that the whole Church, which I represent here, in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (from the congregation I serve in Cape Town, to Kitwe in N Zambia and Zimbabwe) we are all with you in your grief, we mourn with you over your loss and stand alongside you in your pain. In this, a trying and difficult time, your Church is with you.

Please stay healthy and stay safe



Peter

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