



## **A significant time in more ways than one...**

We write this newsletter at a significant time. We are about to enter Holy Week, following Jesus as he is welcomed into Jerusalem, but knowing that the cross is looming as well as the joy of the empty tomb. Today is also a significant moment in the life of this country as we prepare for protests against the leadership of President Jacob Zuma, with all that this might mean for the future.

### **Lent and Easter**

We used to think Lent and Easter was a busy time in the UK, but only to find that Holy Week in particular is far busier here in South Africa! Easter is much more significant than Christmas here, largely because in Germiston many of our members go home – either to Zimbabwe or other provinces of South Africa – to spend the long holidays with their family. Christmas is a much more muted celebration than it is in the UK, but Easter is a greater celebration.

This year, it has been a joy to work with colleagues in this circuit and surrounding circuits during Lent. We are following a theme from the words of Jesus: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:35). We have been looking at some of the human barriers which have kept us apart, and how they might be overcome. We have held weekly Bible studies in local churches, with the facilitators coming from other churches. We have both enjoyed the opportunity to share in discussion with members of local township churches in a way that would not normally be possible; equally, our members in Germiston have been able to share with other local ministers that they would not normally see. We hope that this sharing will form the basis for further sharing throughout the year.

Germiston will be celebrating Palm Sunday in a new way this year. We will begin by going out onto the streets of Germiston with palm branches and singing, before worship in the church. Our combined service will involve seven preachers sharing about different aspects of the meaning of Palm Sunday; some of these preachers will be from other local churches, continuing the theme of sharing.

From Palm Sunday, we will move through Holy Week with services every evening. From Thursday evening, there will be a circuit Easter programme, which will be in a tent seating several thousand people, based in the township of Katlehong. One of the features of this programme will be the Seven Words service on Good Friday morning. This service will probably last about five hours and involves seven preachers (including Steve and two other preachers from Germiston) preaching about different words of Jesus from the cross. On Saturday, we will have a programme lasting all day, encouraging us to look deeper into the theme of Easter as we prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day. We know that next week will be a busy and demanding week, but it promises much of great value as it models sharing in a way that hasn't been seen in Germiston before.

## **Protest and Lament**

South Africa finds itself in a time of instability, with today seeing marches and general expressions of protest and lament about the leadership of President Jacob Zuma. The mood of protest has been building for a while, but has been largely a result of the unpopular sacking of the Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan, as part of a cabinet reshuffle, which has caused much political and financial instability. We wait to see what will emerge...

## **Time in the UK**

Since we are now coming to the end of our three-year term as Mission Partners, we will return to the UK from late-June to mid-September. We look forward to spending time with family and friends as well as reflecting on the last three years and looking forward. We will be visiting the churches and circuits in Cardiff, Leeds and Huddersfield which have been particularly supportive. If you would like to meet us and find out more about our experiences in South Africa, we will be in Cardiff on 8-9 July, Huddersfield on 18 July (and other dates to be confirmed), and Leeds on 5-6 August. More details will follow in our next newsletter.

## Christmas visit

Last year, we enjoyed welcoming a number of friends who visited us. Steve's parents were with us to celebrate Christmas and then stayed into the New Year. We had a great time together and went to KwaZulu-Natal. We stayed a few nights in St. Lucia, enabling us to explore the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, before going to stay a few nights in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve. It was a wonderful time looking at the wildlife and soaking up the atmosphere.



## Prayer Points

We would be very grateful for your prayers in the following areas:

- For the people of South Africa facing a time of great instability;
- Setting things in place as we prepare to leave Germiston and return to the UK;
- Opportunities to reflect upon the experiences of the past few years and how they will shape what is to come;
- For us to be able to experience times of rest and refreshment alongside sharing time with people who have been journeying with us.



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