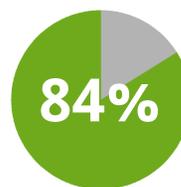


**JOURNALS** POSTED ON JANUARY 4, 2018

## Looking Back to Move Forward



MARILYN RAATZ



SUPPORT PLEDGED



SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Kind Friends,

I pray you are well. In this season of celebration, I send you warm greetings and good news! We can rejoice that Jesus Christ is with us, closer than our breath, and continues to call us to an ever-deepening intimate relationship with him; and through this love relationship, Christ calls us to be in mutually supportive relationships with our fellow humans, all sharing the Imago Dei. How exciting!

These two wonderful precepts of our faith kept me steady and chugging along since moving to Cape Town, South Africa to teach at Cape Town Baptist Seminary in late spring. Or perhaps I should say, autumn, since Cape Town was rounding the corner into winter when I arrived.

Lucky for me, winter is mild, flowers bloom, and snow falls only on the mountains. South Africa is a beautiful place with warm and welcoming people. I thank God for all the supportive hospitality shown to me by faculty, staff and students, and I couldn't have survived without them. They have helped me learn new ways of thinking, working, and living within multiple different cultures. And believe me, they have been patient!

I've had so much to learn. Driving on the 'other' side (I won't say 'wrong', as we in the US are prone to say!) in a foreign and often dangerous place has been tricky. Pronouncing African names, such as Mzoxolo Mbongwana and Ntsikelelo Ngcenge, two of my students, hilarious. You should hear me trying to make the famous clicking sounds of the Zulu and Xhosa! My students have a grand time laughing with me. And then there is the issue of candles: when I lit a candle in the classroom before reading Scripture, students nearly ran out of the room. Candles are *not* a part of African Christian worship, I discovered. So throughout my first few months in Cape Town, nearly every day brought a new challenge for me—and for my long-suffering new friends at the seminary.

Teaching both Biblical Peacemaking and Spiritual Formation during my first semester, I had about thirty students in the day and night programs. Peace and Justice are my areas of expertise, so I was thoroughly surprised to find that the course that gave me the most joy was Spiritual Formation. What a delight it was for me to help many students move past a concept of God as the retributive punisher and begin to believe that God loves them and is welcoming, kind, and merciful. I hope my students were as blessed as I during these past months of reading, writing and dialoguing together.

After the Christmas/summer break, classes will begin again with a new group of first year students, and I am eager to meet them. What will be their unique talents and special giftings from our gracious Father? What will be their obstacles, such as learning to study in English, not their mother tongue; or healing from terrible past experiences and the trauma they carry? Which ones will be funny? Impish? Who will need extra-sensitive help and encouragement? I will be teaching a new course, Restorative Justice, a topic critically important to the ongoing, dramatic economic and social imbalances, and the emotionally damaged national psyche after Apartheid. We all will be on steep learning curves but we will reconcile our joint and separate challenges as a team, a community in Christ.

Soon, I will be working also on a peace-training project in Khayelitsha, one of the shocking slums of Cape Town, an area that still lacks electricity, clean water, and a sewage system. It also has appalling schools, high unemployment, and the crime that comes along with crippling deprivations.

Will you pray that I follow God's lead, since he is already there in the community? Please pray too that I stay mindful of the blessings rather than the difficulties. And just as importantly, that I come as a servant to a project that belongs to the local residents, not me.

And will you please know how deeply grateful I am for your loving support? You are the flowing stream of God's love to his people

In Christ, Marilyn