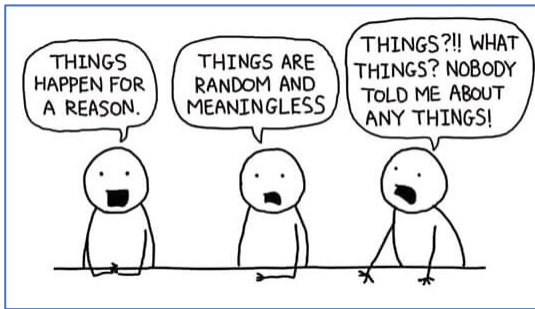


Newsletter from Isabel and Jonathan Hill, June 2021



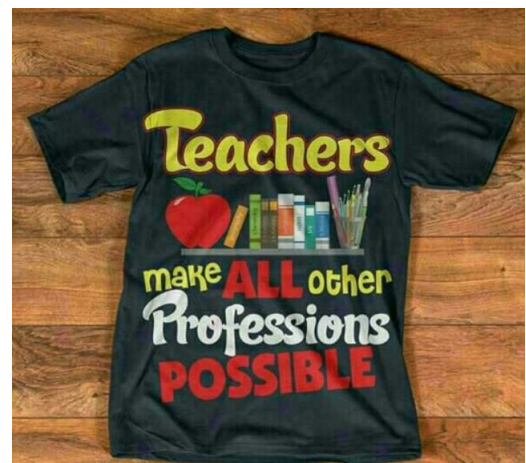
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8 v37-39.

These days you can't have a newsletter without at least a mention of "the virus", so here you are: We had our first dose of the Sinovac vaccine on March 31st and the second on April 28th. Zimbabwe had been keeping a careful control of Covid-19 until January, when there was a sharp spike, but it has been reined in since then and we hope that people will continue to come forward for vaccination and will be careful and patiently follow the regulations about distancing and wearing masks and so on. So far, only about 5% of the population has had the first jab and about half of those have had their second.

Isabel: I recently participated in a programme organised by the TCZ (Theological College of Zimbabwe) prompted by reports of an increase in teenage (and even pre-teen) pregnancies since lockdown began last year. How can these girls be helped? How can it be prevented in future? What should the church, the families and the community be doing? Sex education in schools, the role of society, traditions and culture were examined. Upsetting stories came from a doctor who had helped girls deliver their babies and from the Victim-Friendly Unit of the Police who handle rape cases. Lawyers too contributed details of their work helping to find secure shelter and other help for young rape victims. On a happier note, one lady told how she had given birth as a schoolgirl years ago, but with the support of both families she had been enabled to finish her schooling and she and the child's father are now married.

I continue to work from my office at the Central Methodist Church in Bulawayo. Part of my day involves helping people who come in off the streets, giving them food, sympathy and advice. My work in the rural circuits has been severely curtailed for over a year now because of the Covid-19 situation. A chicken rearing project was badly affected by the lockdown and a brick making project was put on hold until circumstances improve. The programme of setting up Kids' Clubs is also waiting for sports and games to be allowed again. I help to organise assistance for orphans and other vulnerable children, by providing school fees, uniforms and exercise books and so on where possible.

Jonathan: At Thekwane High School, we somehow managed to do enough last year for the school to get a 100% pass rate at A-level and 89.5% at O-level. Sporting and other co-curricular activities remain banned so 'Jack' is becoming 'a dull boy'. Two new classrooms are being built and two big tents have been set up so that the classes are less crowded. I am still teaching Mechanical Mathematics at A-level (trying to encourage more of our students to follow a career in engineering) and Statistics at O-level (because Statistics is everywhere these days).



I have been looking after the Hillside Circuit website for quite a few years, but last year it suddenly gained a new importance and popularity when we had to stay at home. Since the end of March 2020, I have been posting Sunday worship items and other online material on a regular basis. Not many of our members have good internet access, relying on rather expensive and slow mobile data, so I don't put much video content. It's difficult to cater for the Sunday School, but I sometimes put quizzes or other pencil and paper activities. Not many people have computers and printers either, so that puts a limit on what can be done.

We are back to physical church services now, but attendance is very low compared to pre-pandemic. I am planning to restart Sunday School this month on the basis of "let's see how it goes and then decide how to continue".

Zimbabwe: From October last year to March this year we have had one of the best rainy seasons that most people can remember. Those who planted this season have had a bumper harvest. This is really good news for Zimbabwe. The majority of the population depends on a good rainy season for their food. The national economy also is heavily dependent on agriculture.

Family news: We are generally keeping well. My Mum is glad to be allowed out of the house again, now that some of the restrictions have been eased in England. Tony, Stephen and Susannah are all working in various places near Cambridge and keeping an eye on each other.

Pray for Zimbabwe: We are very thankful for the rains we have received and for the beauty of creation seen in gardens and fields. We give thanks for the opportunities to use technology to bring people together. We pray for the end of the pandemic and a return to something like normal for all those whose lives have been made difficult by lockdowns and restrictions, especially schoolchildren. We commit ourselves to learning from all the experiences of the past twelve months. We pray for an end to the extreme polarisation in national and international politics. We dedicate ourselves to see that the Methodist Church will "build back better" and that we will not just complacently go back to our old habits and routines.