

Christmas 2016

Dear Friends,

This comes, as always at this time of year, with my best wishes for a happy Christmas and peaceful New Year, and gratitude for whatever prayer support you have been able to give me during the past year.

It was a great pleasure to meet many of you during my three months furlough in UK from mid-May to mid-August this year, and I am only sorry that it was not possible to visit more. The main reason for this was that, early on in my furlough, it was decided that I needed a prostate operation, which had to be followed by a month's convalescence. Nevertheless it was still possible to visit many relatives and friends, and three of my former UK circuits: the Ripon and Masham Circuit (where I was from 1979 to 1984), the Poynton and Hazel Grove Circuit (where I was from 2003 to 2008), and the Peak Circuit (to which I belonged while I was at Cliff College from 2008 to 2013). I also enjoyed a week at the Keswick convention and time for study at Birmingham and Cambridge. All in all the furlough was a wonderfully refreshing and invigorating experience.

Before and after the furlough, I have continued my work at KEMU and in the Methodist Churches of the Meru region:

At KEMU we have had a difficult year for a variety of reasons. At the level of the University itself, we have experienced a period of austerity due to reduced student recruitment. (The provision of university education in Kenya is a highly competitive market, and KEMU has been undercut by other universities which offer similar courses for lower fees). The consequent loss of income led to a general cutting back on expenditure, including reductions in staff. The outlook improved in September, when we received a large number of government-sponsored students, but there are no obvious signs yet that KEMU is able to loosen its purse strings.

At the level of the Department of Theology, Religious Studies and Counselling, we have had difficulties of another kind in the form of rapid changes in leadership. At the start of the year, our Chair was transferred to a circuit. He was followed as Chair by our longest serving lecturer, who took the role in an 'acting' capacity for one trimester, and then by a new appointee, who also lasted only for a few months. Last of all, the role was offered to me, and I am currently struggling to get on top of the job without any proper induction. I would be grateful for your prayers for my handling of this new responsibility, so that I may be able to give stability and direction to the department during my tenure of office, however long or short it may be.

Another difficulty has been to do with the renewal of my work permit, which is necessary not only to legalise my residence in Kenya but also to renew my Kenyan driving licence. My first work permit expired in January this year, and it has proved extremely difficult to acquire a new

one for a variety of reasons. Eventually progress was made through contact with a Methodist who happens to work in the Immigration Department in Nairobi and I am now reasonably confident of being able to collect my new work permit within the next few weeks. I would like to thank especially those of you who have been aware of this need and have prayed for it. Meanwhile I have continued driving, but only on the basis of the informal permission of the local police chief!

On a happier note, I am pleased to be able to report that in September we admitted four Ugandan students to train for the Methodist ministry at KEMU, and expect a fifth to come in January. Most of them have attended the training weeks which we have been holding in Uganda over the past three years. Their acceptance for ministerial training is a sign of hope for the future of the Methodist Church in Uganda.

Outside the university, I have continued to have many opportunities to preach in the Methodist churches of the Meru region, and, as always, have found well-filled churches, a warm welcome, lively worship, and an attentive receptivity to God's word. When I have not been preaching elsewhere I have attended the church at Kinoru (a suburb of Meru Town about 2 miles from KEMU) to which I was attached by the Presiding Bishop at the beginning of the year (replacing my former attachment to the church at Kaaga). The Kinoru church is one of the most dynamic of all the Methodist churches in Kenya. It has a community of over 1000, and has managed to raise enough money over the past 2 years to enable it to build a new sanctuary capable of seating 2500. This magnificent galleried church was officially opened by the Presiding Bishop in a 7 hour service on Dec. 4th, and stands not only as a convenient place of worship for those who live in its vicinity, but also as a sign of the continuing growth and optimism of the Methodist Church in Kenya today.

Yours in Christ,

Peter