



I look forward to getting to know colleagues and fellow Christians in the Bromley area. I have spent five years in Twickenham and Hampton Hill and enjoyed the ecumenical fellowship prior to coming to Bromley.

I grew up on a sugar cane farm in South Africa and spent many a holiday on my grandparents' farm in Kwa Zulu Natal. We were susceptible to droughts, fires and all sorts of dangerous snakes and insects. Yet there were wide open spaces, and much to explore and discover as young children. Two memories stand out; firstly there was a lot of very hard work directed at sowing for a harvest. A farmer generally could only harvest what he had sown. There is a spiritual parallel there that we reap what we sow and therefore careful attention needs to be given to sowing in the areas of good returns and with good seed. The variety of fruits, grains, vegetables, poultry and livestock is remarkable and characteristic of the diversity of God's creation and grace.

Secondly, as a family we would spend many hours sitting under the African night sky, hearing stories from the family past, observing the falling stars and listening to the night life. Here was a different sowing, of family tradition, history, values and mentorship. We learnt about hopes, fears and the challenges of living. A strong supportive bond was built within the family in the context of an expansive universe which formed a fascinating canopy above. For me life was not always easy but one could count on a benevolent Creator and intimate God.

My father died suddenly and my grandparents retired from the farm, moving into the city; and we moved to live with them. My first profession took me into working on a gold mine. This meant travelling a mile and a half down into the earth. It involved

walking along miles of tunnels and travelling down inclined shafts with the twin dangers of methane gas and pressure bursts. Here was a harvest of a different kind. You had to identify the ore body, extract it with explosives, transport it to the shaft, hoist it out and relay it to the Reduction Plant. It was sorted, crushed, washed, milled, treated, filtered, treated again, smelted and poured into gold bars. Much of this was done at risk to life and limb; however the gold price had just broken free of the \$35 per ounce. It was here the hard realities of the 'hidden' price became evident. The injustices of job reservation, cheap labour, mass housing, inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms, apartheid and white privilege. This was uncomfortable for I was privileged and my new found faith posed challenges. A second question nagged: 'Did I want to spend my life pursuing gold so that it could be refined and stored in vaults, as my contribution to humanity?' The fruits of this harvest were too narrowly distributed, built on using others to risk their lives to secure it. From mining gold the call came to serve God in terms of commending faith in Jesus. These fruits include a broad grace, a defined body of revelation, an inclusive justice, a multifaceted peace, forgiveness, healing and everlasting hope to name a few.

We live at a time when religion has been fingered as the source of threat and violence. Danger and injustices threaten our many harvests. It is a season of enormous challenge for Churches, Governments, Nations and individuals. How shall we sow in order to secure a good harvest? Fortunately there is a gracious Lord to guide and inspire. A happy and blessed harvest to you all.

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COMMON GROUND

In this edition Terry Sparks writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC