

Alun and Debbie Burt

January 2025



The kids on Christmas day

Dear Family and Friends,

'The Joy of the LORD is my strength.' Nehemiah 8:10

2024 was eventful! With two rounds of Hepatitis putting the younger boys in hospital in May, severe Salmonella landing Ilana eight nights there in November, eye issues for Debbie, crime at church and home, we learnt to hold routine lightly. Yet, our hearts are full of joy and thankfulness for the way he carried us through, provided for us and grew/matured St Thomas despite it all.

The gospel brings a deep joy and rock-solid steadfastness for our fragile lives. Joy in seeing folk in our congregation move closer to Christ, even when murder and abuse became an unwanted part of some of their human stories. Joy in seeing church members share generously without prompting, youth bringing friends to church, growth groups welcoming newcomers, a church council serving with increased skill.

One real joy has been to see Sieraat Dreyer (19) matriculate from school with excellent results and join our staff team as a gap year student this month. We have watched Sieraat who over the last decade has grown from a fearful, timid child at kids club, through a rebellious patch as a young teen, to a

mature young adult who loves Jesus and wants his community to know him. Sieraat has been serving at St Thomas for a number of years already and is widely respected in our congregation. It is a thrill to see someone for whom hardship is well known, make such wise choices and desire to grow so much. Rarely will you find someone so faithful, available and teachable – we are privileged – please pray for Sieraat's protection, physically (as he is a young man living in a more volatile part of Heideveld), emotionally and spiritually – the evil one would love to love to derail and entice him away from faith and ministry.



St Thomas teens at Senior Crossword (Sieraat on the left and Ilana in the centre)

Another joy was to hear from the St Thomas teens just how much they loved Crossword Youth Camp again in December. A huge thank you to those of you who prayed for and gave financially towards this strategic Bible-teaching camp. Our Ilana attended the Senior Camp and enjoyed the books of

Philippians and Jonah taught over six days. She has made new friends, appreciated great leaders and grown in her faith. We are grateful. Crossword has doubled in size to over 650 people in the last two years and is looking to add another camp again this year. Please do pray for Alun and the rest of the Crossword committee as they meet soon to start planning for December 2025!



Christmas lunch

Women's ministry at St Thomas has brought joy to Debbie this year. Responding to feedback from the women, Debbie is looking to start a women's-only Bible study, discipling a young adult one to one and leading a one-day women's convention at St Thomas entitled 'God in Motherhood'. It is so encouraging to have women ask to study God's word and to ask for teaching on specific topics, in order that they learn how to live Christianly. With the Villiersdorp camphouse unavailable until 2026, we are looking at alternatives and are praying for God's provision as we don't have the finances to hire an expensive venue and would love to run a 2025 women's camp if possible.

The morning of 1 January 2025 was again a reminder of the community we seek to reach with the gospel. By 6:30am, a car full of drunken gangsters had driven through the church perimeter wall, the fourth time such an incident has occurred since we have been at St Thomas. Thankfully armed response were able to de-escalate what could have been a dangerous situation, but it is a reminder that violence, drugs and crime are all around causing ongoing trauma to the community. We would love to continue our biblical counselling ministry again in 2025, as a place of healing for those in our congregation and outside. Testimonies from those who have been helped over the past two years bring our hearts joy. We know that we can't take away people's present-day suffering with all its complexities and baggage, but we know that lives filled by the Holy Spirit, whose confidence lies in Christ, can and do undergo transformation. In addition to the professional and therapeutic work counselees are offered, people can be plugged into the church and crucially into its growth groups, where they can experience new family. As Sireaat's testimony shows, these new communities can be life giving. Please pray for God's provision for all that is needed to run this ministry.

A final brief word on the family. Likhona is starting his second year of college having completed his first bridging year in Bookkeeping. The younger kids have just begun Grades 11 (homeschooling), 7 and 3 (at Grace Primary). Malachi is hoping to join a soccer club. Timothy is loving piano. Alun and Malachi are moving ever closer to their aim of producing the lion-share of our family's vegetables.

Thank you for all your messages, your faithful giving, your extra gifts (which this last year particularly has been so timely and carried us), and your phone calls.

With every blessing,

Alun, Debbie, Likhona (20), Ilana (16), Malachi (12) and Timothy (8).