

Dear Friends

(Alan 19 November 2004)

I hate to start with a cliché, but a man must do what a man must do:

“And what a year it was”.

There, that’s better.

Although I was on Sabbatical, I started the year by setting and marking Supps. Marvellous. *Mental note: Never again do a July-to-July Sabbatical!* I then set fourth-year projects since by the time I got back to work they would be running. *Mental note: Never again do a* Also got involved in various workshops and committees. *Mental note.*

Looking back at what I *said* I would do during the Sabbatical Research was quite a laugh, and I did not achieve much of it. I did however, achieve quite a few other things, not foreseen, including writing a book! It was an extremely valuable experience.

I am now the ripe olde age of 40. Its quite scary. Two days ago, my mother had been dead for 38 years. Even more scary. I have been in the Vineyard for 20 of those years, representing all of my adult life, and half of my physical life: Very Scary. I mean, simply put: “I am Vineyard :-)” (For Heaven’s Sake, don’t translate that to Hebrew :-) :-) Each Move of God has a *purpose*, and the Purpose of the Vineyard was *Worship*: I have met *so* many people that have Vineyard music on their shelves, but “didn’t know that it is a church” :-)

I came to the Vineyard in my Student Days in June 1984, via Phil “the Drummer” Oléjnik. We met in the old Parkview Cinema, but my goodness did we move around after that!! When, after about a year, we moved from the Cinema and into the Parkview School, some idiot called Matthew welcomed me to the church. Matt was always a bit forgetful. (Hello, Matt :-) Someone else who was introduced to me there one Sunday night in ’87 was some obscure girl with a huge fuzzy head of hair by the name of Lesley. . . The rest, as they say, is History.

Eventually, we were part of the leadership that planted a new church “in the East”, which we eventually Christened “KingsGate”. (The East Gate was called the King’s Gate (Ezk44:1–3,46:12,1Chron9:19)) We were with KingsGate Vineyard Christian Fellowship for 14-odd years.

Madam felt strongly that the kids were not getting the best deal (there were few other kids of their age, and KingsGate is a small church): I felt strongly (and was right) that I would not experience Worship at the level of Kirkus’s elsewhere. There has been much “discussion” in the past four years :-) So it was a bloody hard decision to leave the Vineyard. (For many years Madam’s term-of-endearment for me has been Dr. Stick. (as in: mud.))

We spent 4 months at Cornerstone New Covenant church, which is a great church with wonderful people, and a vibrant children’s church; but anyone who knows us and our kids will be wondering what we were smoking at the time. Put two shy and reticent kids in a Ra-Ra, Super-Hype, Come-to-the-Party setting and you are asking for trouble. Put a Dyed-in-the-Wool Non-Hype Vineyardite into a service where a “I see a Red Light” prophesy interrupts worship, likewise. I thank God for their Enthusiasm and size and youth, but its just not us!

So, as of June, (“Ye Gods and Furry Animals”) we have thoroughly settled into an ****ANGLICAN**** church!! Hymns (with genuine pipe organ) and liturgy at 07h30, vineyard-style

worship and a sprinkling of liturgy at the 09h30 “family service”, and raise the roof with drumkit at 19h00. No “Bells and Smells” so far :-) The kid’s ministry and “youth” is awesome stuff. Notably, the major emphasis on children and youth is only two years old.

A couple of months after we left KingsGate, Kirk decided to leave the fold of the Vineyard and to fall under Cornerstone New Covenant: a very good choice for (I think) very good reasons, but not something I could have *easily* supported.

There *is* a God.

His Timing is *Perfect*.

(Its just the spelling really: *we* seem to spell the last word above ell-ay-tee-ee). Anyway, its a lovely old Stone Church, with very good (uninterrupted) Worship (not Kirk, but then (IMHO) other Vineyards weren’t up to that either).

One thing that was always a bit of an “add-on” in the Vineyard was “Holy Communion”. We tried several styles over the years: from full-on meals (Yes, that’s what it was! (We were proud of the subtitle: “The First Church of the Knife-and-Fork”)) , bits of bread and bits of grape juice; bits of bread and common glass of grape juice; bits of bread and dunked grape juice (“by tincture”, they tell me); three times a year; once a month; once every six weeks; in little groups; by coming up; by being in the seats. . . I just think that we found it hard to fit the solemnity into our style of service.

Well, Anglicans go to Town on this one. The Eucharist is the very centre of the service. Of every service.

It has been absolutely wonderful to see the Beauty of the Eucharist, and the Beauty of the Liturgy. From a Vineyardite’s perspective, this is truly weird, repetition stuff: We dropped the Ball on this one. Every week I am called to face my sin, to confess my sin, to face Christ’s redemptive work, to Glory in His Forgiveness, to resolve to Walk. Its different, and very good.

Naturally, in the Vineyard we used Real bread and Unfermented grape juice. The Anglicans do it the other way round: Unleavened bread (“the wafer”) and Knock-your-socks-off-Real-Genuine-200-proof wine. Comes as a bit of shock the first time :-) The Altar (don’t for Heaven’s Sake call it a Table) lends the correct atmosphere to the Eucharist. Which reminds me: I learn’t a new word: Sacristan :-)

I went to the Optometrist. My eyes, “had changed”, the man said. Fair enough: the last visit was five years ago. “How old are you”, the man said. “40”. “Ah” said the man.

Apparently 40–45 is the main “eye-change” when the focusing distance gets longer, ie you pull the page away from your face to get it focused. He muttered about bifocals, multifocals, varifocals. I said “I’ll stick with the old prescription”. He said “I’ll see you in a year or so”. Philistine. Savage. Brute.

I am very happy to report that he was entirely wrong. I don’t pull the page further from my eyes to get it in focus. I pull my head back. Dinkum.

We popped into Pilanesberg (Bakgatla) in late March and to Ballito in early May. A scan though madam’s diary correctly confirms that we have not done any more camping this year, which for a “camping family” (Oh, every 3 months at least) is not very good. We will have to try harder! It’s too hot now though, and a quick look at my rain page on my website will show the reason why: Nada.

Just before the end of the Sabbatical, I built a Greenhouse: A Gum-pole and plastic sheeting job. Have had great fun propagating seeds, potting them on, and planting them into the veggie patch. A competitive amount of fun has been had in chewing the seedlings before potting-on stage. I have invested in a box of SnailBan.

I simultaneously (and together) built a gum-pole, chain, angle-iron-and-wood set of swings for the kids. Apart from having to increase my Blood-pressure medication, I'm doing fine. The key phrase is "If you fall off, Duck". I don't think I have personally built anything that has afforded greater pleasure to the kids.

Robert James Clark is now finally FIVE (5) Eff-Aih-Vee-Ee and is (actually) a cold-fusion reactor. The amount of energy produced by my boy could easily power Sub-Saharan Africa. Not only has he out-run both his parents (easy), but most of his contemporaries. Witness the Certificates from the "Annual Home-Schooling Athletics" Event. He attained two 1st places and one 3rd place. Kathleen Brenda Clark (THREE-AND-A-HALF) did similarly with two third places.

Having Children challenges you. I have noted (last year) that there was not much difference between their physical development. This has narrowed. There is now not more than an inch difference in their height, but an amazing difference in temperament! It is wonderful (if confusing) to be a part of it all.

We have been the great recipients of "Hand-me-Downs"; being in the teaching profession (I'll let the rest of the sentence remain unsaid :-); and throughout the year we have "lost" many sources (Baaaaa...) such that our only current source has female offspring. Robert enjoys dresses, but his father is not amused...

I stopped Piano lessons after the Sabbatnic, since I knew (correctly) that the pressures of Term would be too much, and practise less frequently, but have a lot of fun. I don't think that those around have as much fun as I do, but its my house :-)

Towards the end of the year I invested in a new Digital camera and Digital Video camera to replace the "Shopped" one. I will update my photo page on my website before this (eventually) gets to you, so click away :-)

On the technical interest front, I have a new-found interest in EMC (ElectroMagnetic Compatilby) and in Solar-based (non-PhotoVoltaic) Renewable Energy, including Stirling Engines, so watch the Nobel ceremonies.

As most of you will know, Homegroup has always been a priority for us, which is why we have led so many for so many years, (famously starting with Costa (Papa) phoning us in Hillbrow so many years ago, asking what we were doing tonight, as there were a bunch of people coming to our flat.....) so slotting in with St. Luke's has been particularly eased by being a part of a vibrant local Homegroup. Ironically, the house is 100m away from where KingsGate met for many years in York Street. We have been blessed out of our socks with this fellowship.

(From Lesley)

This year has been a difficult one in many respects. Health being one aspect that I have struggled with quite extensively. My spastic leg has been plaguing me and, at the beginning of the year I was diagnosed with a pre-diabetic condition. I test my blood glucose levels before and after meals. Alan and I have changed our diet quite extensively and are generally eating much healthier meals.

Persuading my husband to leave KingsGate was no small task. (It took some years :-). The first six months of this year was spent where all four of us were unhappy church wise. I felt

terribly guilty as I thought I had made a mistake and now my family were so unhappy.

However, God is good and it has been amazing how gently God lead us to, and has been integrating us into St. Luke's. Coming out of a context where relationship is valued so highly I have found it difficult going into a congregation where we are total strangers, not having history with a single person in the congregation. Fortunately the brand new phase is behind us and we are starting to build relationship with some people.

Growth is always painful—I have been growing in many areas this year. Fortunately the growth has been worth the pain.

Some of the highlights this year: Ann Michler visited us briefly from the States. It was wonderful spending time together and catching up.

My father has always been a "white wall man" and my husband is a "white wall man :-)" so I have lived with white walls all my life. Until May, when I painted our bathroom primary colours. It was a project that I initiated, did all of the dirty preparation work for, and IT WORKED. A major boost to my self confidence. (Thanks Dot). I then painted our kitchen yellow and front burglar bars green. Don't worry??? they look great! I am suddenly discovering things I can do that I would never have dreamed of doing previously. (Thanks Dot :-) Robert has taken off artistically too. His work is stunning and he does experiment widely. It has been wonderful to watch his development.

This year I decided (on a high confidence day) that I would host a birthday party for myself. I invited all the ladies who have impacted my life this year to come and share a tea party with me. Twelve ladies came (no kids this time) and it was wonderful to have my different friends meet each other. It has been great now that they know each other. The feedback I received from all twelve ladies was very positive and has made me decide to have a birthday party every year. I have been overwhelmed by the ongoing commitment by some of these ladies towards myself this year. I have a physiotherapist (who has become a friend), whose dedication to her profession and to myself has kept me on my feet this year.

Robert's birthday party was also a wonderful success. Many special families came—moms, dads and children had a ball. Some family members came over the next day and this was also a very special time.

In September my dad, sister and I spent three wonderful days exploring Cape Town. A time of spending quality time and of making memories together.

In September Robert and I flew to East London to spend four days with our friends living there. Good time of being together and making memories.

This summer has been the summer of silkworms. We have had them since the beginning of the season until the very end. Not having a mulberry tree has made this an interesting challenge.

We have a "pet" Button spider. She is a fascinating creature. We have had her for about a year. Her physical growth has been tremendous. We have watched her spin webs to hold down her prey (flies supplied by Robert). She then injects a poison into the fly which makes its contents liquefy and later sucks the liquid up. We watched her eat her mate and then spin a sack for her eggs. We are waiting to see what happens next.

On the homeschooling front:

We are not doing anything formally yet but are exposing ourselves to many educational memories. One such memory that

was a highlight for us as a family was “St. Luke’s Spring Cleaning Day.” A number of people met at the church property early one morning as set about the mammoth task of cleaning the beautiful stone building. Robert and Kathleen were the only children in the work party. They were fantastic in their participation. Dusting stone walls, polishing pews, and working in the beautiful gardens. Being part of the work team helped them develop a sense of belonging. The next Sunday Robert was very cute. He approached a number of people in the congregation and asked them, in quite an accusing tone, why they had not been present at the Spring Cleaning. In the children’s minds St. Luke’s has become “our church”. There is often a mad rush to get to church on time on a Sunday morning so that we can hear the church bell being rung.

We have had numerous outings with our homeschooling support group:

Edenvale Fire Department. Monte Casino Bird Park. Annual swimming gala. Annual sports day—Robert won four out of the five events in his age group. Professor David Block’s presentation on outer space. Lambing time at a sheep farm. Sheep dog trials. Delta Park pond dipping and museum. Melville art and craft morning. Many different visits to the children’s theatre. Behind the scenes at Pick ‘n Pay. Catching tadpoles at Emmarentia dam. No tadpoles yet but lots of fun in the water. Butterfly farm.

On the social side: I have made a number of good friends through homeschooling. We see each other on a fairly regular basis and have often only returned home from “coffee” after 23h00.

I try to keep up with my friends from KingsGate. Have been successful so far.

Robert and Kathleen are an absolute joy at times and an absolute frustration at others. Alan and I love them and couldn’t imagine our lives without them. They are good friends and have started sleeping in the same room. Robert on top of the Bunk bed and Kathleen at the bottom.

Robert has been swimming very nicely this summer. Lots of confidence and stamina.

Kathleen continues to have a passion for babies and wants to touch all those babies that she sees: humans, silkworms, earthworms, piglets, birds (both kids watched a canary chick hatching. Are these kids receiving an education?). She has my personality. It has been fun watching her grow and develop and seeing so much of myself in her: good and bad.

(Last touch from Alan, as usual.) Incy, the button spider, has passed on to the Great Web in the Sky. She has been replaced by two jug-loads of tadpoles, purloined from Emmerentia Dam. If the silkworm attrition rate is anything to go by, we should get a (one) mate for our Gutteral Toad, who is still occasionally seen in our garden, on his visits.

Every year we have a weaver that builds nests in our Pepper tree, in the front yard, and in our WitKaree above the pond. He has been known to build 20 nests in a year. He has also been known to destroy 20 nests in a year. The pollution and debris from this activity is non-trivial, as anyone who knows weavers will tell you. Afraid of snake attacks (apparently) the bird removes most of the foliage on the tree: add that to the actual nest material, and you can see why I make such good compost. This year, for the first time, the female did not reject him/the nest, and we now have baby weavers to accompany our baby Black-Collared Barbets and Natal Robins.

Do have a Blessed Christmas, and a Great 2005. (Les’ Dad will be 90 in March!, wow)

’t Clark’s