

## DERBYSHIRE RURAL CHAPLAINCY

*Thought for the Week*

from David Legh, Chair of the Steering Group

In a normal year Jane and I may well have just returned from South Africa. On our trip we would have spent a few days visiting the primary schools and other projects supported by the charity, SASP, for which I am a Trustee, in the Eastern Cape – one of the poorest areas of the country. Most of the schools, drawing their pupils from the local townships, are severely over-crowded, sometimes with numbers doubling their original capacity.



An exception to this is Uitvlucht. This primary school is 45 minutes down a dirt road and principally serves the local agricultural community. It is small, and has been threatened with closure for at least the last three years. Much of the infrastructure has been provided by the charity including a shade-port, an additional classroom, the provision of mains electricity and a safe water supply. Most of the children are collected up along the way by the head teacher in a ramshackle bus; the remainder

walk in from up to 5 miles away, often bare-footed. When we visit, Jane delivers a bible story from the 'Open the Book' series and I sing songs to them which they have learnt and rehearsed on the bus to and from school.

On the first occasion Jane sent the story of 'The Good Samaritan' in advance of our visit with a video of her recent performance, with adult volunteers, in a local Derbyshire primary school. She and I were expecting to do the same at Uitvlucht. Not a bit of it. The pupils had learnt the story word for word, prepared some costumes, and THEY performed it to US flawlessly. It was deeply moving.



Remember that, for these children, English is their third language and that, but for the bursaries we offer to the most promising children, schooling may come to an end at the age of eleven. Their main, perhaps only, meal is the one the school provides. For them education is not a right, but a privilege. Faith for them is not something to take up and put down at will, it is the glue that binds their fragile community together.

I wonder if, when we emerge from the pandemic, we will re-calibrate our attitude to the education we receive, and I pray that it will be our Christian faith that underpins our attitudes and priorities as we go forward.

