

DR GRAHAM'S HOMES, KALIMPONG

Thursday, 15 April 2010

Greetings and God's many blessings from a continually warm and humid Kalimpong – not that I'm complaining. I continue to be blessed in so many ways, with the children continuing to be a huge source of inspiration to me. It was very special for me being able to celebrate Easter Sunday in the Katherine Graham Memorial Chapel, and we had a wonderful Easter Fun Day on Easter Monday with the children. I've been conducting the morning assemblies – Junior School and Senior School, after which I go down to the Kindergarten and conduct a short assembly – with all 170 of them – all of whom are just as cute as I am! The entire school (and Kindergarten) now know how to sing "Halle Halle Hallelujah" and "He's got the whole world" – and there's more to come! I rather feel that they, along with the staff, are still wondering, "Who is this guy?"

As I'm walking around the campus and meeting the kids, often they'll break into a verse of "Halle" or "He's got the whole world". The other day, early evening, as I was walking into town (around 25 minutes), a few wee ones were playing at cricket (on the main road!) . . . "Good evening Sir . . . "Halle Halle Hallelujah"!

I meant to say in my first report, that you really can't go anywhere! While hanging around Greggs and having a Steak Bake at Newcastle Airport, I spied Graeme Aitchison from Lochton – there to collect his mum and dad, returning from Australia. As we were then queuing up to get checked in – bumped into a couple from Yetholm/Morebattle (their names escape me), on their way to Australia. On arriving at Dubai, it was necessary to have a short ten-minute bus trip to the main terminus. We boarded, and as we were standing, hanging onto the roof handles, I said to Eleanor, "This is much better than Munro's". A voice a few feet away piped up, "Do you come from the Borders?" She was Michelle, a new chef at the Cross Keys Hotel in Kelso! She was on her way home to South Africa for a holiday before the start of the World Cup. As we were talking, another couple (from Galashiels) overheard us, and piped up, "Our daughter is a Police Officer and is based in Kelso!" . . . spooky, or what?

Before I came away, on the evening of Palm Sunday, I received an e-mail from a couple who had been at the Palm Sunday service at Kelso North. I think I may have spoken to them at the door – but as you know (hopefully), it's often difficult to engage in any real form of conversation, as so many people are passing through the doors. It now transpires that this gentleman heads a company in the Borders, and would like to sponsor a child . . . his other 5 co-directors would like to do the same, as would his wife and mother! Amazing that there is a possibility of 8 new children being sponsored – an all on account of a couple (very possibly being in church by chance – sorry God) and hearing me spouting forth about DGH – God really does work in mysterious ways!

I've been visiting the hospital (The Steel Medical Centre) on a number of occasions during these past two weeks. It really needs some investment in order to make it more child-friendly. In conversations with the Chief Executive Officer and Bursar of DGH, I would recommend that the money raised by the very generous people of Kelso North and Ednam be used for this purpose. I trust that this will be acceptable to you. A painting programme will be undertaken, with murals being depicted on some of the walls, and new curtains hung. I've also been using some of the funds to

give treats to some of the children - Easter Fun Day, Hospital, Kindergarten, Nursery and prizes for the Easter Fun Day and football. Visiting the hospital on Monday again, I took up some sweets and lollipops – one little girl quipped, “But Sir, why do you bring us treats again?”

This week I've covered a class (Year 12B – final year) of 48 students for an absent teacher and another Year 12 Class of 63 students, again for an absent teacher. But it's still a bit strange teaching a class where some students are 14/15 years of age, and some can be as old as 18/19/20.

Again, kids continue to humble me with what they say and what they do – “Sir, how do you remember all our names? “Sir, I will miss you when you go”. “Uncle, if you want, you can stay here forever. You can go full-time”. God bless them all!

Last weekend DGH hosted the Inter-Schools Girls' Basketball Tournament. Our girls reached the final and put up an enthusiastic performance – they led for the first and second quarters and most the third, but ran out of steam in the final quarter, losing narrowly by 39-32. It was a great, carnival atmosphere with lots of singing, clapping, and hooting – especially from !

As well as the Sunday School, “A Listening Ear” has been started up. I've offered my services after school on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1515 hrs to 1615 hrs, for anyone who might want to chat about anything that might be troubling them – school, personal, family, relationships. The issue of Guidance/Careers Advice within DGH is in the whole plan of things, but is very much in an embryonic stage, and this will hopefully be developed in the future. I've already had a session with one Year 12 student, a Prefect, and as he was leaving said, “And by the way Sir, I am very much enjoying your Ministry here”.

There continues to be power surges and power cuts. There have also been a couple of spectacular thunder and lightning evenings – with downpours, and with rain running down my bedroom wall. On Tuesday, it was spectacular, in the form of a mini hurricane. The power went off at around 2000 hrs and didn't come back on until 0640 hrs on Wednesday. On Wednesday, the bedroom curtains were opened at 0530 hrs, and there in the distance was a wonderful sight I had been longing to see since my arrival a fortnight ago – the Himalayas, covered in snow. This could perhaps be our next church hillwalk, with overnight accommodation at DGH! Philip, Eleanor and I then set off on a walk at around 0645 hrs to take photos, and as we did this, we could hear the thumping on the balls in the basketball courts and on the football field! Just where do they get their energy from? With regard to the thunderstorms, it's perhaps quite ironic in that at the beginning of the week Kalimpong was suffering a severe water shortage, with many hotels and restaurants being closed or offering a very limited service.

I've visited the SUMI (Scottish Universities' Mission) in Kalimpong, where the other year the Kelso Rotary Club raised money to build a new toilet block at the Robertson Hostel there. The comparison to the older, previous toilet block is awesome. Unfortunately, there is now no involvement/association with the universities.

Yesterday (Wednesday) was the Nepali New Year and so it was a school holiday. It was a scorching day and I had been asked to referee a football challenge match between Assam Cottage and Scottish Canadian Cottage. The match began at 1330 hrs in blistering heat. It was a very competitive (but clean) game, (I had even gone to the bother of making yellow and red cards which weren't needed – Bah!) which was

very evenly balanced. 'Bah' is another expression often used at DGH, as is 'Umbo', roughly translated as 'Dash'.

Assam took the lead through Kyle. However, Lendup put Scottish Canadian back in the game with a cracking goal. In the dying seconds of extra time, Bibek secured the match for Assam with a well-taken goal. "When's the next game, Sir?" Possibly not today, as I had just a few aches and pains with all the running about. Old age? Surely not!

Tuesday was the Thai New Year and today is the Bengali New Year, though no school holidays, though apparently a number of Bengali teachers decided to treat the day as a holiday! I've been covering three classes today – 12B (only 59 students today!), 12A (a mere 32 students) and 12C for Accounts (only 35). They have a test on Friday and so I was able to be of use to a number of them. The students all stand up as you enter the classroom, and as they were doing this I didn't see Mr Banerjee, the Headmaster up the back – he also has a teaching commitment. "reverend Tom, I'll only be two minutes". I retorted, "Mr Banerjee, you are the Headmaster, so you can take as long as you wish!", which brought a chuckle from the class. Today started with the Junior Assembly in the Chapel, after which I trotted down to the Kindergarten for their Assembly, where there was some super singing – and lots and lots of hugs, cuddles and kisses - from most of the 170 kids!

Tomorrow I'll be heading into Kalimpong after both Assemblies to watch the Junior Boys Basketball team who are taking part in a tournament at St Augustine's School. On Saturday I'll be heading off to Mount Hermon School in Darjeeling to cheer on our Junior Girls, who are in the Inter-Schools Volleyball Tournament.

Believe it or not, Sunday's service is all in the bag – honestly – with a power-point presentation; there have also been PP presentations at the assemblies. Each Sunday the girls from one of the Cottages do a piece. I was down 'coaching' them on Wednesday – they'll be singing "God gave me eyes" and "We are marching the light of God", which hopefully the whole school will eventually learn. They were just super at the 'rehearsal'. Mr Upassak, the music teacher, is equally amazing. You just have to give him a piece of music and he's away. Very often he plays with no music in front of him, and all this on a small-ish Yamaha keyboard. However, the School received an e-mail the other day from couple in England who had visited the Homes, offering them a pipe organ. It would be dismantled, shipped from the UK and assembled in the Katherine Graham Memorial Chapel, all for a modest cost. If this ever materialises, it would be a great asset to the Chapel.

After today's assembly, I spoke with Mr Upassak about the hymns for Sunday. He concluded, "And at the end we will be having 'Halle Halle' . . . as usual?" I must be getting very boring and very predictable in my dotage!

Just around 1330 hrs the thunder began, and by 1400 hrs the rain appeared, and a power cut. Things got worse with more thunder and lightning and then torrential rain. I had been in Kalimpong for an hour this afternoon, and there were many people filling their buckets and containers with rain water - which reminds me, that when we've been into Kalimpong for a drink and a bite to eat, the toilets leave a lot to be desired. They are 'self-flushing', in that you fill a bucket from a tap and throw it down the pan - often several times! The rains abated by around 1730 hrs, although there was still some lightning at 1900 hrs.

Well, that's Report Number 2 . . . far too long – yes, I know, just like the sermons!

Please be assured that you are all very much in my prayers every single day, and I am very conscious that I am in yours. I know that you will all be looking after each other, and I'm very much aware that many people (especially little people) are constantly looking out for me and looking after me. Again, my grateful thanks for giving me this wonderful opportunity – or as Francie and Josie would say, "This wonderful opperchancity".

God bless, and me He continue to hold all of us in the palm of His hand.

Tom x