

NEIGHBOURS

*"Becoming good friends to our neighbours
and good neighbours to our friends."*

JUNE 2020 BRANKEN FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS NEWSLETTER

*In this newsletter, we share with you some of our journey,
lessons learned, highlights and challenges encountered and share
some progress towards our goals for 2020 and how you can
partner with us to make it happen.*



Financial Support to Neighbours for 2020

Please consider committing to giving once off, monthly or both by following one of the links below, or use the following bank account:

Account name: Neighbours

Bank: ABSA Bank

Account number: 9310110831

Branch code: 632005

SWIFT code: ABSAZAJJ

<https://www.james127trust.org/donations/general-sponsorship/neighbours/>

You can also support the Branken family directly. Contact Nigel for details:

nigel@transforming.org.za or 062 546 9913

"Virtue is not left to stand alone. He who practices it will have neighbours."

Confucius

"Neighbourliness is not a quality in other people, it is simply their claim on ourselves."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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BRANKEN FAMILY UPDATE

Lockdown has meant we have had to reimagine quite a bit. Some of our funders have really been challenged at this time and have not been able to continue to support us. Also during this time, we have encountered some incredible generosity.

In order to supplement our income and support some of our work, we have taken music lessons online. Trish now has quite a few students and it is beginning to really be something of value. We have also been able to offer sponsorship for lessons to people unable to pay the fees. If this is something you would like to help with or are interested in music lessons yourself, please email trish@musiclessonsonline.co.za



Our children (as with all children in South Africa) have been at home and so we have been doing homeschooling. Rachel and Jordan are still receiving lessons from Greenside High School, sometimes online, while Daniel, Sarah and John started home-schooling mid way through last year, which is alternately a privilege and quite a challenge to say the least.



Hannah is doing well at Wits University and still getting top marks for all her assignments. She recently got 100% for an essay and the lecturer wants to use her work in next year's class.

#StillProudParents

We are also enjoying our new home in Orange Grove and can't wait for the end of lockdown to get more involved in building community in our physical neighbourhood.

Church work at Melrose Methodist has mostly been around being good neighbours during lockdown. We have been trying to stay in touch with folk and ensure that especially vulnerable friends are cared for. Thank you to many of you that have helped financially to meet needs of friends.

Otherwise, for now, most of our work at Neighbors is happening online as we seek ways to support our neighbours through WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype, Zoom and even the good old phone!



NEIGHBOURS BOARD NEWS

At the beginning of the year, a new board was put in place for Neighbours consisting of three new amazing peeps (Gugu Nxumalo, Beibie Rakaki and Loice Chaza)– each one of whom has been involved in the work of Neighbours for years!



Gugu Nxumalo
Chairperson



Beibie Rakaki
Financial Officer



Loice Chaza
Fundraising Officer



Trish Branken
Secretary



Nigel Branken
CEO

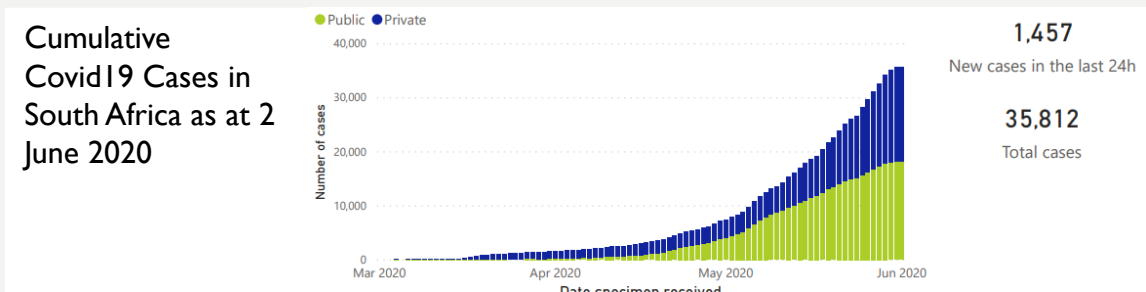
Neighbours Board 2020

Gugu Nxumalo - The first words that come to mind when I think of Gugu are: “hopeful, courageous, persevering, innovative, joyful and remarkable”. Gugu is no stranger to adversity. She came with her two refugee parents to South Africa, fleeing Zimbabwe’s economic meltdown in 2007. She got her O levels at the Albert Street Refugee school, which was set up by refugees staying at the Central Methodist Church. Despite the lack of resources at the school, she managed to achieve remarkable results and got awarded for her excellent results from the British Council. She was accepted into African Leadership Academy to do her A Levels and is currently applying to various universities around the world to study development studies so she can help people like herself out of poverty. Gugu is a true neighbour and we are so excited about the leadership she brings.

Beibie Rakaki – “joyful, energetic, persevering, compassionate and courageous” are words that describe Beibie. She was one of our neighbours who lived in the same block of flats as us in Hillbrow. She worked for Neighbours on our refugee programmes and has volunteered with work with the homeless and in our learning centre. She is currently worked at the Jakes Gerwel Fellowship and volunteers part time with administering Hillbrow’s Judo For Peace club.

Loice Chaza – “Mother, counsellor, dedicated, fun, compassionate, hard-working” are words that describe Loice. She started out as a domestic worker to the Branken family and was involved in their journey of discovery about a living wage and has assisted with advocacy for this. When the Branken family moved to Blauwberg Flats in Hillbrow, Loice became the hospitality manager of Neighbours’ hospitality flat in the same block, and was involved in creating a welcoming environment to Neighbours’ volunteers. She has since moved on to work at BeanThere but still volunteers as a neighbour in the Hillbrow community.

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN - THE BEST AND WORST OF TIMES



“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times” Charles Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities

This quote for me sums up 2020 to date at every level. Somehow being under pressure does bring out what is inside us and sometimes it is beautiful and sometimes it is ugly and destructive. We have found this to be true. We have experienced profound, beautiful times in our family and marriage and have also (sometimes at the same time) experienced frustrating times even melt downs in our family.

We have seen in our communities the most beautiful care actions among Neighbours. We have through Facebook contacts seen over R 150 000 being sent to various individuals and families to support people during lockdown. CAN groups have been feeding the hungry, friends have started soup kitchens and are using their homes as food distribution points.

This is truly what it means to be a good neighbor. Sadly, we have also seen people ignoring rules of the lockdown and a huge spate of theft and robberies in our neighborhood.

At a national level we have all been proud of our president at times and his incredible speeches and prompt action, but then we have also seen some horrific human rights abuses and the rearing of fascism’s ugly face. It is indeed the best of times and the worst of times.

The most frequent prayer I (Nigel) have been praying during this time is “Lord, how can I be helpful today?”

In a world with so much changing it just seems that discerning what is right to do each day is the key question to ask. We can then become the answer to our prayers by responding with love, solidarity and support actions to our neighbours.

I am also reminded to keep leaning into the pain around us as I think of this quote “Vox victimarum, vox dei” (the voice of the victims is the voice of God). What are the voices in pain saying to us?

As we ask how we can be helpful, we also need to be leaning into places of pain. As we listen to the voice of victims, we hear the invitation of God as to how we can be helpful in our families, neighbourhoods and nations.

Where is the world hurting around us right now? What pain is crying out the loudest? How can I be helpful in these spaces of pain?

I encourage you to ask these questions too at this time as we seek to love our neighbours.

“IF I PROFESS WITH THE LOUDEST VOICE AND CLEAREST EXPOSITION EVERY PORTION OF THE TRUTH OF GOD EXCEPT THAT LITTLE POINT WHICH THE WORLD AND THE DEVIL ARE AT THAT MOMENT ATTACKING, I AM NOT CONFESSING CHRIST, HOWEVER BOLDLY I MAY BE PROFESSING CHRIST. WHERE THE BATTLE RAGES, THERE THE LOYALTY OF THE SOLDIER IS PROVED, AND TO BE STEADY ON ALL THE BATTLEFIELD BESIDES, IS MERE FLIGHT AND DISGRACE IF HE FLINCHES AT THAT POINT.”

ATTRIBUTED TO MARTIN LUTHER

THE PAIN OF



In the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, we need to ask how we as neighbours respond?

I have found it quite significant, in the context of where the Covid 19 pandemic has fit into the Christian calendar in South Africa.

We first started to hear of the virus in the build up to Easter (during the Passover). I remember reading about the plagues of Egypt at the time and thinking about how the plagues were at a time of the cry of Exodus “**Let my people go**”. A whole country in slavery to a foreign power. I remember asking at the time in my prayer journal if this could be an invitation for us to an Exodus from neo-liberal capitalist racist exploitation. I think many of us long for this moment in history to be a turning point in history. We are longing for a different world to emerge post-Covid.

Our government (and incidentally the US government too) has responded with many economic packages aimed at mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic. Sadly it seems that most of this has gone to the top 1%. It seems our imagination for transformation still places trust in those with economic power to trickle down the good, despite how often this has been disproved.

And now we come to the beginning of Level 3 Lockdown in South Africa just after Sunday 31 May, the day in 2020 that we celebrate as Pentecost in the Christian calendar. Again in my reflection, I have been reflecting on how in Acts the day of Pentecost was a day of empowering of the church as they were persecuted and scattered to go and be the church in new ways. The South African Government says they have acceded to pressure from the church to open up again. In spite of this, I think the church never really closed. To quote a Facebook friend Stephanie van Wyk

“The church has not closed- only congregants are not congregating. The church is hard at work counseling, teaching, caring for the poor- feeding the poor- reaching out to the suffering, giving in abundance and praying. The church does not exist only when it meets together on a Sunday. At this time the church is just doing things differently and with much innovation. I'm so impressed with 'the church' I belong to ... the church is every individual that belongs to Jesus Christ. It will never close! It can never close. Its work will not stop. Even when it's threatened - like in communist countries- it has never closed or stopped its work.”

At Neighbours, we feel at this time that meeting together is not honouring of Christ and so have taken a new pledge not to meet, found at:

www.waittocelebrate.org

A CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT THAT HONORS THE IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY INSTEAD OF RUSHING TO GATHER.

I WORSHIP THE GOD OF ABUNDANT LIFE

I will work to reduce the spread of COVID19

I will serve the hungry and the sick

I will pray for God to bless our nation

- I commit to not attend my church for large gatherings until after the infection rate has peaked and significantly reduced.
- I commit to instead support my church community when we use our buildings and resources to serve the sick and vulnerable in our community.
- I commit to growing the worship of God in my home and through my community service.

**I choose love over my freedom in order
to bless others**



To read and sign the commitment, visit
waittocelebrate.org

[#waittocelebrate](https://www.instagram.com/waittocelebrate)

THE PAIN OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

Even in this time of Covid19, the struggle against systemic racism continues. We have all been shocked and outraged at the images in news media of George Floyd's brutal murder and the subsequent lack of an appropriate response from the US government.

In South Africa, similarly, we have 73 000 troops on the streets, we have had 12 deaths at the hands of police during lockdown, 244 000 arrests. The USA similarly has seen more police brutality against black bodies. The Black Lives Matter protests are a cry for humanity to be valued.

In the light of this, I think we need to be asking some key questions:



- **How do we support the families of those left behind?**
- **How do we amplify the demands of the families for justice?**
- **What actions do we need to be taking to put an end to the ongoing systemic racism and police brutality?**

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Here are three key actions you can do to help at this time:

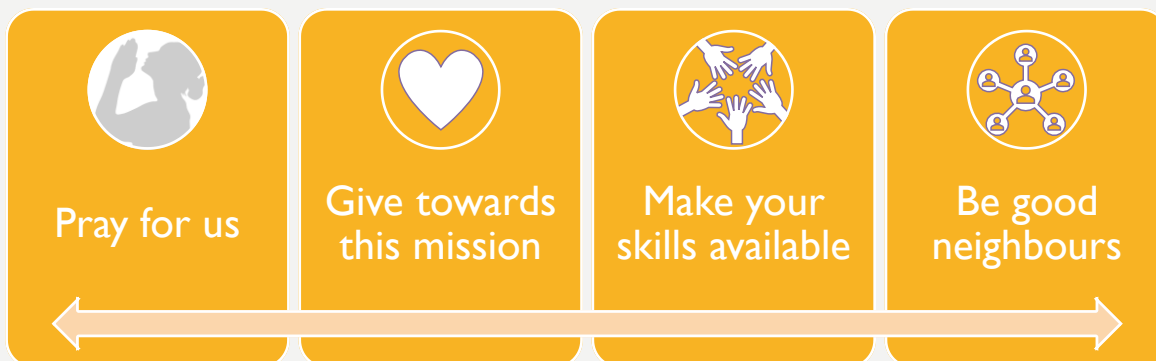
Are you a good neighbour?
If you would like to help out, there are some easy things you could do...

Be a Good Neighbour

-  Say Hello
-  Don't forget to ask
-  Have they got their medicine?
-  Are they able to get essentials?

1. Please keep asking yourself how you can be a good neighbour? Consider checking in on your friends who may be lonely. Check if you can assist vulnerable people with shopping/ groceries/ help they may need. We need to keep fighting for one another
2. Consider how you can join the fight against systemic racism. Remember silence is compliance.
3. Please let us know if you are able to support people or families during Covid19. We are looking for financial support for a number of families who have lost jobs and income during the lockdown. We will put you directly in touch with these folk so you can help them directly.

Here are ways you can practically partner with us...



Pray for us

Give towards this mission

Make your skills available

Be good neighbours

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Thank you for reading this news and vision update and for considering partnering with us!

