



WEIDENHOF HOUSE

For students from partner churches arriving in Stellenbosch for further theological training, it can be an intimidating experience. Everything is so overwhelmingly different – the country, the town, the people, the language; the faculty, the work, the other students. Where is Admin? How do you get a student card and how do you activate it? Registration, emails, finances ... And then they arrive at Weidenhof House, and find that they are home again.

“As an individual I benefitted from this house,” says Dr Enos Chomutiri, moderator of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. Enos spent 26 months living in Weidenhof House during the years that he worked on his doctorate degree.

Weidenhof House consists of two semidetached houses near Stellenbosch station and the campus, offering short and long term accommodation for African students. Newcomers are quickly shown the ropes of being a Matie, from buying groceries to computer skills. Students from Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and many others become “family” with a shared spiritual home in Weidenhof House.

Residents of Weidenhof House find a communal experience as they share their practical experience, faith and international perspectives. They have devotions every night, where cross-pollination of ideas and opinions greatly enriches their personal lives and theological studies. The rotational evening devotions encourage and empower them, also enhancing their ability to speak in front of an international audience.

Enos, a married father of five children (one of his sons died while he was in Stellenbosch in 2008), says Weidenhof provided everything he needed, from cooking utensils to computers.

“I started my stay at Weidenhof House in 2002 coming twice every year and each time I stayed in Weidenhof House for a month. When I was working on the final stages of my doctoral thesis, I stayed here for eight months and then again for four months.

“The students I met mostly came from Africa, from countries like Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and even from my country, Zimbabwe. Once we stayed with a family from Nigeria. Most of the people I stayed with were ministers of religion, although some are from other disciplines.

“Apart from being a place where one interacts with various cultures, it also serves as a home for spiritual nourishment as members have a chance every evening of sharing the word of God. We sing spiritual hymns together and spend some time praying for our families, countries and other important issues,” says Enos.

“I benefitted from other students when we cooked together and shared life experiences. We also interacted about our studies, sharing our knowledge. When students feel they are not coping with their studies, other

members of the house encourage them to press on with the studies and not to give up. I personally was encouraged by the success of others and I looked forward to my day.”

Most of these students study at the Faculty of Theology through NetACT, the Network for African Congregational Theology. This network of eleven reformed presbyterian theological institutions focuses on leadership development in the church and continent. The Faculty of Theology is a member of NetACT and also houses its offices. “We are also privileged to provide affordable accommodation for numerous NetACT students at Weidenhof House,” explains Prof Jurgens Hendriks, director of NetACT.

The houses were donated to Stellenbosch University by the Hartgerink Trust and the Dutch Reformed Church family’s Commission for Witness and accommodate 14 students. The university plans urgent renovations to the property, also extending it to accommodate more students, including women, small families and disabled students.

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