

Chapel Talk,
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Adapting to Change

Last year my family and I had the wonderful opportunity to spend our sabbatical year in Cape Town, South Africa. For those of you who know little about South Africa, it is a culturally diverse country in the southern part of Africa. The Rainbow Nation as named by the former Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, is about twice the size of the state of Texas and is home to almost 49 million inhabitants. Almost 80% of the citizens are black Africans; while just over 9% are white and a little less than 9% are colored. It is a vast and beautiful country with a plethora of natural resources (diamonds, gold, platinum and chromium), not to mention its enchanting national parks full of tourists in search of the Big Five. South Africa has also been chosen to host the 2010 Fifa World Cup, the first African nation to be so honored and trusted to host this global event.

Having visited South Africa probably ten times in my lifetime, I was eagerly excited to begin my sabbatical. Although I did not have a detailed plan as to how to actually take a sabbatical, I was confident that I would figure it out as I went along. How hard could it be? It was a sabbatical. Who was going to tell me what to do – besides my lovely wife of course? We were quite lucky to be living in the cosmopolitan city of Cape Town and our children were attending wonderful schools within a short driving distance of our house. From October to May, the weather in Cape Town is very comfortable – sunny and cool – not too hot or too cold. It would be a much-needed time to relax and enjoy the beauty of South Africa.

However, after a few weeks of getting acclimated to life in Cape Town, I realized that this experience was not what I had imagined it to be. I had inadvertently ventured outside my comfort zone and was having a difficult time adapting to this new lifestyle. One's comfort zone is a highly subjective topic. I have traveled for all of my life, so I never anticipated that I would encounter any difficulty adjusting to living away from home. In

fact, my good friend and former St. Andrew's colleague, Mr. Bobby Rue, has dubbed me "travel boy", because I do enjoy traveling, seeing new places, and doing it as often as I can.

For the first time in quite a while, I did not have the ability to jump in the car and drive somewhere. Due to the fact that South Africans drive on the left side of the road, the wheel is on the right side of the car, and we only had one car, I became a big wimp and was not confident enough to drive anywhere remotely far from our house. It was quite humbling, as Mrs. Hyde did 99% of the driving. In Cape Town, it is not advised to walk relatively long distances by yourself, so that limited my freedom to roam, as well. Basic television in South Africa consists of four channels, half of which are broadcast in one of South Africa's eleven national languages (three of which Mrs. Hyde can speak fluently). The news is broadcast every evening at various times in almost every language. There is no ABC, ESPN, Fox, or Must See TV in South Africa. Oprah Winfrey is so popular that her show is televised twice a day, as are numerous American soap operas. Needless to say, we watched plenty of DVDs. I can now sing every song from High School Musical and High School Musical 2, and that is not because they are my favorite movies.

I realized that I missed some of the "little things" of home. I missed the freedom to come and go, to use the Internet, the television, or cell phone whenever it was necessary. In South Africa we were sharing the house with my in-laws, so privacy was not a real option. With only one bathroom for seven people, we quickly learned how to efficiently get the most out of a visit to the washroom. Taking a shower tended to be a hit or miss venture, either going very smoothly, or very badly. Life at home in South Africa was much different than I had actually anticipated it to be.

Ironically when I arrived in South Africa, I volunteered my services at my daughter Bridgett's school, the American International School of Cape Town, and lucked into three consecutive days of substitute teaching. I taught seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders. I covered homeroom, recess, study hall, and the school magazine. While I should have been nervous to work at a school where I knew no one, I was giddy with

excitement. I felt quite comfortable, yet energized and excited, to teach any class and any grade. It did not matter. For someone who thought he needed a sabbatical, I found teaching to be a total adrenaline rush and obviously well within my comfort zone.

By taking that risk of leaving your comfort zone, you essentially force yourself to adapt to change. Change can come in many shapes and forms. If you are a new student at St. Andrew's School, boarding school is a big change that usually takes some time to get used to. As all of you probably can recall; breakfast sign-in, dress code, room clean up, or study hall were all changes that you had to adjust to. Not to mention, being away from home, sharing your personal space with your roommate, or being busy with work 24/7. However, to your credit, all of you at St. Andrew's are adapting, or have adjusted to, these changes (at your own pace) and are making the most of the opportunity to be at St. Andrew's. Whether you realize it or not, you have adapted to these changes in your lifestyle.

Having spent plenty of time with my parents this past year, I was surprised to observe them struggle at times with their new life of retirement. Since they are now both fully retired, I assumed it would be a wonderful moment in their life. However, it became obvious that retirement presented a new set of challenges for them, similar I think, to my sabbatical. These challenges, while certainly manageable, were new and unknown. My parents are gradually adapting to this change in lifestyle, but it has been an awkward transition for them. I had assumed that this time in their lives would be a great moment for them, but I learned that change, no matter how big or small, was not always easy to deal with, and could cause tension and uncertainty in your everyday life.

While our time in South Africa ended up being a positive and rewarding experience, I learned a lot about my comfort zone and myself. I was presented with some new and unknown challenges that I never saw coming. I have come to the conclusion that my comfort zone should always be expanding. I had forced myself to adjust to this new, South African lifestyle, and I learned to accept these changes and try to make the most of the situation. I encourage all of you to push yourself to expand your personal comfort

zone. Whether that “push” means going to summer camp for the first time, taking a trip abroad, trying a new sport, playing a new instrument, or even learning to drive a car on the other side of the road, give it a try. You may never know what you have been missing. While a part of me misses the uncertainty of everyday life in South Africa, another part of me is quite happy to be back in my comfort zone, living and working at St. Andrew’s.