

# College chaplain glad to be back

PRETORIA  
NEWS

**AFTER** working with starving Ethiopians and panga-wielding Kenyans, the well-scrubbed boys at St Albans College in Lynnwood should be a pushover for the school's new chaplain.

But the Reverend John Burrell (40), who joined St Albans at the beginning of the year, is suitably modest about his work in Haille Selassie's Ethiopia, Kenya, war-torn Rhodesia and South Africa.

"It was quite an education," says the soft-spoken Englishman from Sussex, who speaks "n bietjie" Afrikaans — learnt from his Pretoria-bred wife, Suzan.

In Kenya — where he spent three months in 1981 doing voluntary Christian work — Mr Burrell discovered that "it's dangerous" to label people.

This lesson was learned one night when six men — dressed in black and waving pangas — smashed their way into the Burrell's Nairobi home, chopped open the skull of the night watchman, left him for dead and proceeded to hold the Burrells at pangapoint.

After the pangamen left with cash, watches and car keys — but leaving the Burrells intact — Mr Burrell remembers feeling anger and hatred for all Kenyans.

This perception changed when the injured watchman, fractured skull and all, crawled off to fetch his own panga to come to the Burrells' assistance.

"That taught me not think in terms of groups, to take people as they come, and that there is good and bad in every group," Mr Burrell says.

His "education" — he also has an honours degree in geography and geology — included 18 months in Ethiopia as a full-time voluntary worker for the Christian organisation, Moral Rearmament.

"It was an interesting time. Towards the end of the 'immortal' Haille Selassie's reign, the people were discontented, and the great famine started the year after I left," he says.

Mr Burrell spent a year in South Africa in 1974, working mostly on university campuses, then lived in Zimbabwe for the next six years, where he "tried to help Christians live out their faith" during that country's civil war.

South Africa — for the second time round — was his next destination, and it was in Pretoria that he met and married Suzan, who obtained her nursing degree from Tuks.

England beckoned the Burrells in 1984 and Mr Burrell was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1987.

The family — sons George and Andrew, and daughter Marguerite — uprooted themselves yet again when Mr Burrell was offered the post of chaplain at St Albans College.

"It was always in the back of our minds to return to South Africa and the idea just seemed to ring a huge bell," Mr Burrell says.

"It's a fascinating time to be in South Africa. People are talking to each other and there are great changes happening. But we would still have come back, even if things were not going so well for the country."