



De Gruchy remembered

On 3 March friends of the late head of the School of Religion and Theology at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Prof Steve de Gruchy gathered in the Denis Hurley hall for a memorial service organised by Diakonia Council of Churches.

Speaker after speaker described Steve as a leader of note, an academic, an anti-apartheid activist, a man who practised what he preached and above all as a man who had passion for water.

Baphiwe Nxumalo, Eco-justice Coordinator at Diakonia who worked with Steve both in the United Congregational Church and on environmental issues described Steve as a voice of the voiceless and as a man who had a passion for water.

Nxumalo said, “The very same water Steve had a passion for, is the very same water that took him to the promised land. Steve practised what he preached and this was seen at his funeral when his body was in an eco-coffin”.

She added that Steve believed strongly that environmental issues are profoundly religious. “Steve always urged the church to take environmental issues seriously and he believed that our relationship with God’s creation is at the heart of Theology, and as such serious Christians need to be active in addressing issues such as climate change, energy saving, the protection and replanting of forests”, Nxumalo said.

Revd Joel Naika of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCSSA) said Steve was a highly esteemed and accredited minister of the UCCSA and an anti-apartheid hero.

Revd Naika spoke of Steve’s relentless and uncompromising resistance to apartheid. He said, “Steve is respectfully counted among those white South Africans who unashamedly and unconditionally identified with the liberation struggle in South Africa, and for being one of the conscientious objectors who refused to subscribe to compulsory military conscription”.

Revd Sue Britton of the Anglican Church who worked with Steve as part of a team that produced *The Oikos Journey*, a publication of Diakonia, said it is a tragedy that such a fine person should be snatched away at such an early age.

Revd Brittion described Steve as a champion of economic justice whose enthusiasm was infectious and the clarity of his thinking impressive. She said, “Steve proved to be a theological inspiration to those struggling for economic justice, looking for ways of helping the church to see the stark realities of the rules of God’s household – the *oikos-nomos*, the economy of God – as against the mess humanity collectively has made of running God’s world and raping the earth for its riches.”

Revd Dr Andrew Warmback, a past student of Steve’s, speaking about his professional and academic life, described his former mentor as a remarkable human being, a gifted leader and a scholar of international repute. He chronicled a number of leadership positions he held, which included, student leader at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Director of the Moffat Mission Trust in Kuruman and Director of the Theology and Development Programme of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Revd Warmback said Steve was an academic of note who has published widely and edited a number of internationally recognised journals, which include *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa*, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* and the Australian based *Journal for Anglican Studies*.

Delivering a sermon at the service Revd Ian Booth, Deputy Vice Chairperson of Diakonia, described Steve as a larger than life personality and said the service was part of a collective outpouring of grief, shock and disbelief at Steve’s death, and is an indication of the breadth of the impact his life made at so many different levels and to so many different people.

Instead of mourning Steve’s death, Revd Booth urged the gathering to celebrate a life in which so much was given so willingly to so many. He said, “Steve lived the life he was given to the full, both in his chosen professional field and at home with his family. And as we celebrate his life, let us draw what we can from Steve’s contribution to our lives, and go forth and live the lives we have been given, following our calling, honouring God in all that we do, as Steve did”.

Prof Steve de Gruchy died on 21 February while tubing in Mooi River. He was 48.