



E. Z. Sikhakhane

(Photograph: Natal Witness)

Enos Zwelabantu Sikhakhane (1917–1993)

The history of the Methodist Church in Africa would be incomplete without a chapter on Reverend Enoz Zwelabantu Sikhakhane, who died on Sunday at a hospital in Empangeni after a long illness.

‘E.Z.’, was the founder of the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre in 1965.

In honour of the visionary ‘Christian gentleman’ — as he was described yesterday by the executive secretary of the Methodist Church in South Africa, Reverend Vivian Harris — the trustees of the lay centre have pledged to lay to rest his remains on the premises he founded.

The 76-year-old cleric died after what he used to describe as a ‘three-year grace of God’. His son Mboniswa, who is now director of the Lay Centre, said that in 1990 his father had summoned all his children to inform them he was due to depart to the world yonder.

‘He arranged his funeral service programme to the last bit, even choosing the speakers. When his ailment failed to swallow his soul, he then dubbed the preceding bonus period as the ‘grace of God’; he explained his willingness to go on the grounds that he had done everything he had wished for in this world.’

A legend in his lifetime, Sikhakhane became one of the most revered and loved ministers in the Methodist Church of South Africa. He was gifted with the talent of organising people around him and the ability to motivate community self-reliance.

In the 1950s he combined his church work with community-related tasks. He travelled around Natal motivating school pupils and churches to donate a penny towards the realisation of his dream — the building of a lay ecumenical centre. With collected funds he went abroad to appeal for support to provide a community centre. This became a reality by 1965.

When he retired from the centre in 1979 after being director since its inception, he founded an agricultural extension in Empangeni. He based himself there with his family and it was there that he died.

Before he answered the call of the cloth ‘E.Z.’ had been a farmer in the Matiwanoskop village, Ladysmith, after which he taught in the same area. Many of his pupils are today big names in the country.

He co-founded the Association of Lay Training Centres in Africa and became its chairman in 1972 up to 1973.

He suffered from chest trouble and on Sunday morning the disturbance complicated and he was rushed to hospital, where he passed away at about 2.30 p.m., according to his son, Mboniswa.

'E.Z.' leaves his widow maMsimang, four sons and three daughters as well as 15 grandchildren.

KHABA MKHIZE

(Courtesy of the Natal Witness)