

# *Obituaries*

## *Steve de Gruchy (1961–2010)*

Steve de Gruchy was born on 16 November 1961 in Durban, South Africa, later moving with his family to Cape Town and matriculating from the South African College High School (SACS) in 1979. He continued his studies at the University of Cape Town, obtaining an MA in Religious Studies, an STM from Union Theological Seminary, New York, and a DTh at the University of the Western Cape in 1992. His doctoral thesis focused on the themes of justice and liberation in the work of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.

As a young man, Steve's commitment to issues of justice and liberation were evident in his involvement in the Students' Union for Christian Action, as a youth pastor at the Rondebosch Congregational Church, as a religious conscientious objector refusing to serve in the South African Defence Force during the 1980s, and finally as an ordained minister in the United



*Steve de Gruchy*

Congregational Church of Southern Africa in Athlone, Cape Town. Committed to both faith and social action, Steve became Director of the Kuruman Moffat Mission Trust in 1994. During this time he was engaged in establishing a number of projects to alleviate poverty, curb illiteracy, and promote theological education, becoming fluent in speaking Tswana.

In 2000 Steve was appointed as the Director of the Theology and Development Programme at the School of Theology at the then University of Natal. At the time, this fledgling programme was small and little known and Steve has built this programme to be recognised throughout the African continent as a relevant and contextual centre of post-graduate study. With a strong commitment to the Ecumenical movement, he has participated in a number of consultations and commissions of the World Council of Churches, World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Council for World Mission.

Appointed Associate Professor in 2005 and later full Professor in 2008, Steve's stature as a scholar grew enormously over the past decade with numerous publications in the field of theology and development, more recently in the area of public health and issues of water and climate change. He was passionate about the way in which communities need to regain their dignity and focus on their assets in order to become more fully human. He has supervised numerous students who knew and loved him as a committed and critical scholar, pastor and friend. In 2008, Steve became

Head of the School of Religion and Theology at the merged University of KwaZulu-Natal. Colleagues have thrived under his decisive and brave leadership. He was always full of new ideas, ready to relieve tension with a joke, and determined that the School of Religion and Theology would be a centre of excellence within the University.

Those who were close to Steve also know that scholarly and activist pursuits were not his only love. He was a gifted musician, loved walking in the Drakensberg, and always enjoyed socialising with friends. Married to Marian, and with their three children, Thea (18), David (16), and Kate (12), the family loved outdoor adventures. It was on one such adventure that the life of Steve de Gruchy was taken by the very waters (*pula*) he spoke so passionately about. South Africa has lost a son of the soil. The South African church has lost a key theologian. The Ecumenical Movement has lost a prophet. And the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and particularly the School of Religion and Theology, has lost an astute administrator, dedicated academic, an agent of transformation, and a caring friend. We mourn his loss.

BEVERLEY HADDAD

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