

Khoza Elliot Mvuyise Mgojo (1932 – 2012)

KHOZA Elliot Mvuyise Mgojo (known to his peers by his clan name Mbuyisa) was born into a Methodist family on 4 April 1932 at Mvubukazi Administrative Area in the district of uMzimkhulu in KwaZulu-Natal. The son of Samuel and Rebecca Mgojo, Khoza could trace his lineage to the Jokazis, famous for the important role that they played in the story of Methodism. He prided himself on the fact that the gospel was brought to his place of birth by the likes of Revd Robert Pamla. He venerated that generation of Methodist preachers who shared the gospel with a sense of passion and urgency. His greatest satisfaction was derived from being one of John Wesley's preachers.

Under the ministry of the Revd J. Wesley Hunt, warden at Indaleni Methodist Missionary Institution (near Richmond), Khoza Mgojo qualified as a teacher. He began his career in 1953 as a teacher at Gcilima Secondary School and later became the vice-principal of Malukazi Secondary School.



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He offered himself for the ministry under the superintendency of the Revd Enos Z. Sikhakhane in 1958. A year later he met and married Stella Makhosozana Makalima, a qualified nurse working at King Edward VIII Hospital. Enrolling as a theological student at Fort Hare from 1961 to 1963, Khoza pursued his BA (Theology) studies with

vigour. After Fort Hare he was stationed at the Marubeni Circuit (1964), and was based at the Cibeni Society. In the same year he was ordained into the ministry at Queenstown during the Presidency of the Revd Seth Mokitimi. Once at Marubeni, it did not take long for the novelty of being a university graduate to wear off, as Revd Mgojo's pre-occupation was never to parade his intellectual prowess at the expense of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The King of Western Pondoland was a circuit steward at the time, and Victor Poto is said to have devoted time to mentor him as he saw the immense leadership potential evident in the young Khoza. The Conference of 1965 stationed him as a chaplain at the Clarkebury Methodist Institution, Nelson Mandela's *alma mater*, to serve under Revd Frederick de Waal Mahlasela.

He was not to stay long at Clarkebury as he received a scholarship to study at the University of Chicago, returning with a Master of Theology degree (granted *cum laude*). He was then stationed at the Ncambedlana Lay Training Centre in Umtata (1967–1968). He was then sent to Colana Circuit (1969) where he again thrived in pastoral work and nurturing young students at the Methodist Student Boarding Hostel there. In 1970 the Conference appointed him a tutor at the John Wesley College in Alice, and a lecturer at the Federal Theological Seminary, joining the intellectually elite group which included Dr David Bandey, Dr Donald Cragg and Dr Simon Gqubule. Biblical languages and Biblical analysis became his forte, but those who were his students at the time also recall fondly his unwavering discipline and the high moral standards he attached to the vocation of the ordained ministry.

While others would have rested on their laurels it was, however, not Khoza's style as he proceeded to the Ivy League School of Divinity at Harvard University to read for his MA and subsequently his PhD, majoring in biblical languages, Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic and establishing himself as a New Testament student and scholar. On his return at the end of 1975 he resumed his position as lecturer at the Federal Theological Seminary, now based at Imbali near Pietermaritzburg, resolutely turning down invitations to take up professorial appointments in secular universities. His scholarship was widely recognised. In 1989, he served as a visiting professor at Iliff Theological Seminary in Denver, Colorado, in the United States, followed by a three-month appointment as a lecturer at the Swedish Theological Seminary in Jerusalem.

Life at the seminary was not to be simply intellectual wrestling with academic issues as he joined a band of Christian leaders who were not cowed by the apartheid machine. His relations with some of the key liberation struggle leaders in exile enabled him to play a significant role in helping to pave the way into exile for some of the young students who were leading the resistance struggle against Bantu Education in the seventies. Together with his colleagues, he fought an intense battle not only to keep the Federal Theological Seminary alive in the face of the onslaught of the apartheid forces, but also to keep the church in the frontline of the struggle.

In 1976, after the Soweto massacre, together with the Revds Ernest Baartman, Andrew Losaba, F de Waal Mahlasela and others, he formed the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC)

with the intention of helping locate the Methodist Church of Southern Africa at the heart of the liberation struggle. He served as the first general secretary of the BMC. At this time the church also began to entrust him with leadership responsibilities that yoked him with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Revd Dr Frank Chikane, Revd Dr Allan Boesak, Dr Brigalia Bam and others to pilot the responsibility of holding black people together through the church at the frontline of the struggle. In 1990 he was elected president of the South African Council of Churches, and served in this position until 1996.

During this time he led the National Church Ecumenical Leaders in a meeting with the apartheid government, urging them to change course. Together with other eminent church leaders such as Archbishop Denis Hurley, he helped found the Natal Church Leaders' Group, also serving as its first chairperson. He also served on the panel of the Religious Leaders for Electoral Justice. During the transition period he helped monitor the signing of the National Peace Accord between the government and political organisations. Internationally, he served as a member of the General Council of the World Council of Churches. In 1998 he was an Eminent Guest of the Vatican together with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reverend Dr Frank Chikane and Mrs Virginia Gcabashe. During the dark days of violence, Dr Mgojo was in the forefront of peace-making efforts, assisting those who fled their homes and supporting affected families who often sought refuge in churches. As part of the KwaZulu-Natal Church Leaders Group, he participated in efforts to promote peace and reconciliation among the political groups in conflict, working mainly with leaders of the

IFP and ANC. Dr Mgojo distinguished himself as chairman of the Natal-West District for 10 years and bishop of the same district for four years. From 1981 to 1982 he served as President of the Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for the first time, and in 1987 was re-elected for another term, a rare occurrence.

Perhaps one of his most outstanding attributes as a leader was his gift as a team player. The leadership he offered during the crisis of the breakup of the Methodist Church because of the Transkei schism and the reunification of the same in 1988 after General Holomisa lifted the ban on the MCSA, must go down as one of the most effective displays of wise and unselfish leadership styles experienced in the church. It was always fascinating to exchange notes with him on the historical schisms of the early church, reading from these theological positions the rationale that should inform the church in its conduct through this crisis.

Then followed the Durban Central Circuit (1993–1998) where he acquitted himself as superintendent and pastor *par excellence*. It was also at this time that a call came to him to serve as a Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner with Archbishop Desmond Tutu – a watershed moment for reconciliation in the new democracy of the Republic of South Africa.

On his retirement in 1999, he began a new chapter of active community involvement, mobilising the alumni of the Indaleni Missionary Institution for the establishment of an FET College there.

In his area of Gamalakhe (near Port Shepstone), he offered support to local leaders and mentored councillors in their effort to improve the lives of the people. Many local leaders recall

spending many hours in his home and in local community meetings receiving guidance from Dr Mgojo, who patiently spent time to share his vast experience with local elected representatives and provincial legislators. This resulted in several noticeable projects such as the introduction of street names and proper house addresses in Gamalakhe.

Dr Mgojo played a pivotal role in the incorporation and acceleration of service delivery in uMzikhulu into KwaZulu-Natal, an issue he spent many years campaigning for. He worked very closely with King Zwelithini ka Bhhekuzulu, whom he held in high esteem, and often engaged with the royal house in debating important matters affecting people in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Dr Mgojo worked very closely with the government of KwaZulu-Natal and the provincial legislature on matters relating to senior citizens. This interaction resulted in the creation of the unit on senior citizens in the Office of the Premier and the subsequent establishment of a non-racial Provincial Senior Citizens' Forum of which Dr Mgojo was elected the inaugural chairperson, a position he held till his last days. Dr Mgojo was instrumental in the creation of similar forums in all 11 districts and personally attended their inauguration. Dr Mgojo took pride in leading the Senior Citizens' Parliament and championing the cause of senior citizens, the poor and the vulnerable. In his principled, firm and friendly way he continued to interact with ministers and leaders in government at all levels to champion the cause of the underprivileged.

Dr Mgojo was greatly loved and commanded deep respect from many community leaders and public representatives who regarded him as their adviser and spiritual mentor whose teachings

and blessings were always sought in important functions of the state. He leaves behind a powerful legacy in the definition of what Christian ministry is about. At the heart of that legacy is an unflinching commitment to the cause of justice for ordinary citizens as a logical consequence of one's faith in Jesus Christ. He leaves a legacy of striving to relate meaningfully to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the challenges of being African and all the joys and pains that this constitutes. We should have no hesitation whatsoever in allowing him to join the illustrious company of the likes of Z.R. Mahabane, Canon James Calata, Revd Dr Langalibalele Dube and Enos Sikhakhane.

In his time Dr Mgojo received many awards in recognition of his contribution as a scholar and leader. Among these are honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Natal and the University of Zululand. He also was recognised and honoured in 2009 by the President of the Republic of South Africa with The Order of the Baobab (Bronze). In addition to these, Dr Mgojo's list of accolades includes: Honorary Rings by the Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, which he received with former President Nelson Mandela, Professor Ephraim Mokgong, Nkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Robert Sobukwe, Govan Mbeki and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He was further named as the Ugu District Best Achiever for 1994 and 2004. He served as the chairperson of Uvongo Development Centre and Chancellor of Mangosuthu University of Technology. His many roles distinguish him as one of the most dedicated community workers, who helped build bridges between the church and the communities it serves.

Obituaries

Dr Mgojo fell ill in late 2011. After two operations his health suddenly and rapidly took a turn for the worse. After a spell in various hospitals in Port Shepstone, Margate, Durban and Pietermaritzburg he succumbed peacefully on 2 September 2012 in his 81st year. He leaves behind his wife of 53 years, Stella MamBhele (née Makalima); two adult children, his son Mxolisi and his wife Thandeka; a daughter Nosipo and two grandchildren, Malwande and

Vuyokazi. He also leaves behind his siblings Nondumiso, Mbulelo and Nomlindelo.

Your loved ones, your colleagues, your friends, the nation and the Church of Christ salute you Khukhuva, Mbuyisa, Mvemnyama, Sondisa, Nziph'ezinde ngokuqhwayana, Omabele amade ngokuncelisa.

You have run the race, fought the fight and kept the faith!

MVUME DANDALA
