



Obituary of the late Bishop Professor Johannes Malebogo Ramashapa (1947-2012)

*But by the Grace of God I am what I am: and His Grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain;
But I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the Grace of God which was with me
(1 Corinthians 15:10)*

The late Bishop Ramashapa was born on the 23 March 1947 at Uitkyk No. 3. He was the first child of the late Isaac Ngoako and the late Maropeng Salminah Ramashapa. He attended several primary and secondary schools and passed Joint Matriculation Board Examination in 1967. In 1968 he worked at Modderfontein Dynamite Factory as a laboratory assistant.

In 1969 he went to the Lutheran Theological College, at Umphumulo, in the KwaZulu-Natal province for theological education and training and completed this programme in 1974. He was ordained in 1975 for holy ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). He held several positions in this church including heading the then Marang Lutheran Seminary as a vice principal as well as an acting principal.

He completed the following academic qualifications: Joint Board in Theology (Lutheran Theological College, Umphumulo), BA in Biblical Studies, BA Hons in Biblical Studies (UNISA), MA in New Testament Studies (UNIN) and BA Hons in Development Studies (UNIN). He was appointed as lecturer in the Department of Biblical Studies at the then University of the North in January 1983. He was then promoted to a position of a senior lecturer in 1990 and since 1991 he was the acting head of the then Department of Biblical Studies. He was also the Deputy Dean of the then Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies since 1993. He attended and participated at several academic and church conferences inside and outside the country including Germany, United Kingdom and Hungary.

He published a variety of peer-reviewed articles and related publications which include some of the following:

- * *Homeland and Nation Building*, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva
- * *What is Christian Stewardship and why is it important in the life of the Church?*, Theologia Viatorum.
- * *Voluntary sterilisation as a strategy for food for all in the year*, Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif.
- * *Commentary on Romans 8:31-30*, Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif.

He was a member of the following professional and academic associations: the New Testament Society of South Africa, the Biblical Society of South Africa, the South African Academy of Religion and the American Academy of Religion. He also acted as external examiner for the Diploma in Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary

(Umphumulo), Southern African Joint Board for Diploma in Theology and Biblical Studies (SPTD) in the then Northern Province.

In 1998 he successfully completed a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (D Phil) at the then University of the North with the research title: *The significance of Jesus Christ's mediation function in the Letter to the Hebrews 1:1-4, A hermeneutical study in dialogue with African initiated faith-healing churches among the Northern Basotho*. The study succeeded in highlighting what is unique to the concepts of Jesus Christ's mediation function and the protective rites and rituals among local African communities whose purpose are to immunize potential victims against witchcraft, evil spirits, and danger. Whereas the Letter to the Hebrews argues that Jesus Christ is the only sacrifice and therefore the final mediator who brings humanity and God together, thus bringing about healing and harmony in a disrupted human existence. He (Ramashapa) proposed a hermeneutic key which is able to bridge the difference between two religious world-views. He called this hermeneutic key a dialogical approach which has potential of offering mutual negotiation and cultural critique between different religious systems.

He was later promoted as Associate Professor at the then University of the North, now the University of Limpopo. As a researcher and research-guardian he was able to promote several Honours, Masters, and Doctoral students.

Some of the congregations that he served include the following: Turfloop Parish and congregations around the Mamabolo area. While teaching at the university he was responsible for the youth ministry in the ELCSA-Northern Diocese.

He then relocated to the Gauteng province and settled at Kempton Park - Birchleigh. He was assigned to the Sebokeng parish while doing work for the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA). His work at LUCSA started in 2002. At LUCSA he was responsible for the development of the HIV & AIDS programming and facilitation structures.

In 2005 he was elected as the third bishop of the Botswana Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). In 2006 he was elected the ELCSA Presiding Bishop at the General Assembly meeting. During his tenure as the Presiding Bishop of ELCSA the late Bishop Ramashapa was very vocal in his criticism of the social ills in the sub-region and governments that have failed to embrace spirit of compassion.

On 1 September 2009 the late Bishop Ramashapa was appointed Executive Director of LUCSA. During his tenure he worked as a linkage between LUCSA member churches, LWF, and international partners. Through his role he acted as a prophetic voice for churches throughout Southern Africa on issues of justice, peace-building & regional integration, human rights (namely the rights of women, children, and people with disability), sexuality rights (prostitutes, gays, lesbians, bi-sexual & transgender persons), climate change, poverty alleviation, vulnerable persons, and youth empowerment. He became a pioneer in developing diaconal ministry throughout the region.

In addition to his work at LUCSA the late Bishop Ramashapa served as a parish pastor for the Delmas Parish in the Eastern Circuit of the ELCSA-Central Diocese.

The late Bishop Ramashapa served on various local and international bodies including the following:

- Churches United Against HIV & AIDS (CUAHA) : Steering Committee Co-Chairperson
- LUNODIA (Lutheran Nordic Diakonia) : Executive Committee Member & a Member of the Steering Committee
- ACT Alliance : Member
- LUDIBO (Lutheran Diakonia in Botswana) : Board Member
- Churches & Business Against HIV & AIDS (CHABAHIVA) : African Regional Co-Chairperson
- South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) : Member
- Religious Leader and Coordinator within the Delmas Municipality Board

He entered into the holy matrimony with Maggie Nikeziwe nee Mkhize on the 25 August 1972 and their marriage was blessed with three children: Thapelo (daughter), Musa (son) and Sammy (son). He is survived by his wife Maggie Nikeziwe, three children (Thapelo, Musa and Sammy), two grand children (Moloko and Malebogo), and seven siblings.

VHA LALE NGA MULALO VHAVHENDA!!!