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TO ALL IN THE UPCSA

REMEMBERING AND HONOURING THE SON OF THE SOIL - THE LATE REV PROF DR VUYANI S VELLEM: A TRUE PRESBYTERIAN, A MINISTER IN GOOD STANDING

The UPCSA remembers and honours the Rev Prof Dr Vuyani Vellem who was an outstanding Black Liberation Theologian of (BLT), who was approaching the zenith of his career when he died just before he turned 51 years old in December 2019. In his words, he was “a pastor, manager, ecclesiastical bureaucrat, researcher and teacher” (Vellem 2017:1).

Vuyani Vellem studied at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (FEDSEM) where he had his first encounter with Black Theology of Liberation under Dr Cecil Ngcokovane (Vellem 2012:268). He furthered studies at the University of Fort Hare, where he worked with Dr Gideon Khabela and obtained BTh (Hons). Vellem moved to the University of Cape Town where he completed the MSocSc degree. He obtained his PHD at the University of Pretoria, Department of Dogmatics and Ethics.

On completion of ministerial training, Vuyani Vellem served as a probationer at Donhill (then Transvaal Presbytery and now Limpopo Presbytery) where he was ordained and later served as a minister of word and sacraments (1992–1994). He took a break from the congregational ministry while studying at Fort Hare. Thereafter, he was transferred to the Presbytery of the Western Cape (RPCSA 1997:86) where he took the charge of GG Ndzotyana Congregation in Khayamandi, Stellenbosch from 1998 to 2002 (RPCSA 1999:12). His manse at this stage was a shack, which he was proud of and comfortable with. For Vellem, his *mkhukhu* enacted the internal logic (Vellem 2014b) of African history, the agency of black Africans, the originality and moral consciousness (Vellem 2014:3). It was a source of liberating resources for life and consciousness in an existential sense (Vellem 2014:5). He was content with the situation he found himself in at this time in his ministry (Vellem 201b:2–3, 2017:1), a dwelling place just like the homes of his members. He accepted the call from Newcastle Congregation in uThukela Presbytery (Vellem 2020:1) where he served between 2002 and 2004. His last appointment in a congregation was in Diepkloof, where he served for a short time before his untimely departure.

Vuyani became the Junior Clerk of the General Assembly of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (RPCSA) in his first year in the ministry (RPCSA 1999:1), taking over from the Rev JC Khonyane who had served in that position for a long time. He was, by far, the youngest member representing the RPCSA at the Special Commission on Union (RPCSA 1998:72), which brought the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) into being in 1999. He was also appointed the RPCSA facilitator for the sub-commission on Signs and Symbols whose work would culminate in the lengthy disputes in the formation of the joint associations following the union (RPCSA 1998:149).

While serving in the Western Cape, he had a short stint (2000 to 2002) as a chaplain in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) where he, instantly, rose to become the Director of Naval Chaplaincy. He also gave lectures in world ideologies.

He became the second General Secretary of the UPCSA from 2004 to 2008. This was followed by him taking up the post as the Deputy General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. In 2010, he was appointed as a senior lecturer at the University of Pretoria (UP), where he was later awarded Associate Professorship. He was also the Director of the UP Centre for Public Theology. He represented the UPCSA in many forums.

The world knew him as a Black Liberation Theologian. The Ecumenical world knew him as a sound ecumenical theologian. The Academia knew him as a Scholar. The UPCSA knew him as their General Secretary, a minister in good standing. Most people knew him as the Rev Prof Dr Vuyani Vellem and his family knew him as a father. The Ecumenical bodies celebrate him. The Academia celebrates and remembers him yearly. His brainchild VukaniBantu/TsogangBatho celebrates him.

The UPCSA Leadership and the Gender Desk decided to honour their own son, theologian, liberator, father, and minister, leader, former General Secretary. The ground is fertile for the UPCSA to celebrate his legacy, the heritage he left this denomination with and that he has become. The Gender Desk entreats the members of the UPCSA to join as THE UPCSA celebrates *A PASTOR, MANAGER, ECCLESIASTICAL BUREAUCRAT, RESEARCHER AND TEACHER, THE OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC AND TEACHER OF THE BLACK THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION. SOLI DEO GLORIA.*

May his soul rest in power.

FROM THE UPCSA GENDER DESK