

# Dignitaries bid farewell to Botman

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INLSA Professor Russel Botman. Photo:

Cindy waxa

Cape Town - Stellenbosch University said goodbye to its first black rector and vice-chancellor on Saturday, as about 1 000 mourners, including former presidents FW de Klerk and Thabo Mbeki, attended the funeral service of Professor Russel Botman.

Botman died in his sleep early last Saturday at his Stellenbosch home. He was 60.

Paying tribute to his father, Botman's son Hayman described him as "role model, inspiration and anchor". "He was not just our father, he was a father to many," said Hayman, speaking with his sisters Lizelle, Ilse and Roxanne at his side at a service in the DF Malan memorial centre.

Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, former minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel and Western Cape Premier Helen Zille were among those present, together with Botman's extended family, friends, university staff and Stellenbosch residents.

"He was not just a brother to his siblings, he was a brother to all," said Hayman. "He was a spiritual leader, a man of God.

"He always picked us up when we were down, always went out of his way when we were in need.

"He never complained no matter how hard life became.

"He was an amazing father, husband and grandfather."

Botman was first appointed Stellenbosch University's (SU) rector and vice-chancellor in 2007, then re-appointed to another five-year term in 2012. He was also the senior vice-president of the Association of African Universities.

A theologian with a doctorate from the University of the Western Cape, Botman served as president of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) from 2003 to 2007.

Current SACC president Bishop Ziphozihle Siwa delivered a tribute on behalf of the church community.

Many religious leaders were present, including Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba and Archbishops Emeritus Desmond Tutu and Njongonkulu Ndungane.

Siwa, the presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, started his address with a quote from American poet Maya Angelou: “Just as hope rings through laughter, it can also shine through tears.”

Like others paying tribute, Bishop Siwa praised Botman for being a leader in both the religious and academic fields. He said Botman preached a message of hope, inclusivity and respect in both religious and academic settings.

He called him “a gentle fighter and resolute leader” who fought doggedly for transformation and inclusion.

“(He) suffered no amnesia and never forgot where he came from,” said Siwa.

“From the days of campaigning for the truth in the ’80s to the last hour of his life, he never took away his eye from the agenda of transformation, of making the world a better place of inclusion.”

Siwa said the best tribute those present could pay to Botman was, like him, to be bridge builders.

In 2010 Botman launched SU’s HOPE Project, an initiative that uses science and research to improve the lives of South Africans and Africans.

SU chancellor Dr Johann Rupert said Botman touched the future through his devotion to education.

He described Botman as someone who always took note of all opinions. “He truly cared for all people, including people like me – white Afrikaners,” said Rupert. “He left the world a better place”.

Dianne Parker, acting deputy director-general in the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, said Botman had lead SU on a new path of inclusivity.

After the memorial service Botman was buried at the Onderpapegaaiberg Cemetery, where his brother Reverend Deon Botman spoke.

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**Weekend Argus**

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