

DR ELLEN VUYISWA BLEKIE: AN INTRODUCTION



Dr Ellen Blekie was born on 1st of May 1932. She grew up in the Nigel/Heidelberg districts. At the age of 11 her parents sent her to the well-known Lovedale Education Centre in Alice in the Eastern Cape. She was a brilliant and hardworking pupil and after matriculation she got entry into the Fort Hare University, where she completed her BSc in 1953.

She was then allowed to study Medicine at Wits University, one of a small group of black women who were the very first to be allowed to study Medicine. After the completion of her studies, she worked as medical doctor in Durban, Benoni and the Baragwanath Hospital. From 1968 to 1971 she was invited to work in Swaziland, where she met several exiled members of the ANC and other banned organisations. She became part of the struggle for liberation from the

Apartheid regime.

When returning from Swaziland in 1971, she and her husband, Mr Layton Plata, a journalist, settled in Thaba 'Nchu. There she started a medical practice in which she worked for many years until she retired some time ago. All these years she has been a well-known and much loved doctor, dedicating herself tirelessly to her patients - all coming from the desperately poor communities of the area. She often treated persons for free or sacrificed much to serve the community.

Dr Blekie has always been a very active and loyal member of the Anglican Church, for many years as church warden of the Thaba 'Nchu congregation. Over a long time she has been involved in the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA). The YWCA is a global movement working for women's empowerment, -leadership as well as women's rights in more than 120 countries and over 20 000 local communities. By empowering women and girls from a Christian perspective, the YWCA contributes much to the transformation of societies. For many years Dr Blekie has been the national president of the South African movement. In this capacity she served on the National Executive Committee of the South African Council of Churches. Dr Blekie also served on the national board of the South African National Tuberculosis Association (SANTA), a non-profit, volunteer and community-based organisation involved in anti-TB initiatives. For some years she has been the deputy president of the national body of SANTA and she served as chairperson of the Free State branch. Since the HIV and Aids scourge became such an overwhelming challenge in the 1990's, she was deeply involved in the Free State's Anglican Church's Mosamaria organisation, doing wonderful work to support communities and families affected by Aids. Since its inception, she served as deputy chairperson (the Bishop is ex officio the chairperson) of this compassionate organization.

Dr Blekie, who has been a friend and colleague to many a struggle hero, like the Mandela's, the Kathrada's and Tambo's, is a very humble and lovable person, who's only goal in life has always been to serve others. This calling is based on her strong Christian convictions and loyalty to the church of which she has been a lifelong, active member. Even today, in her old age, she is still tirelessly involved in serving the kingdom of God, also as appreciated member of the Provincial Executive Committee of the SACC Free State. Currently she is the honorary president of the SACC Free State. She is indeed a dedicated stalwart in the struggle for justice, reconciliation and peace!

Dr Bekie has been a recipient of the Order of Simon of Cyrene - one of the highest awards bestowed by the Anglican Church. It is thus very appropriate that the first Letsema Award is presented to this remarkable and lovely woman, whose whole life has been - and still is - characterised by sacrificing herself and her manifold talents to the service of others, because she follows in the footsteps of her Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice for all. I am convinced that her being the first to receive this award, actually contributes much in raising the prestige value of the Letsema award itself.

Gideon van der Watt (11 February 2019)