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UCT to host memorial service for Professor Martin West

The University of Cape Town will host a memorial service on Saturday, 25 July 2015, at 10h00, to honour Emeritus Professor Martin West, who died on 8 July 2015. This event is open to the public and all are welcome.

UCT Memorial Service for Emeritus Professor Martin West

Time: 10h00

Date: Saturday, 25 July 2015

Venue: Atrium, Kramer Law Building, Middle Campus

Please see below for the campus announcement sent on 8 July 2015 by Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Crain Soudien.



Dear colleagues and students

I am writing to inform you of the sad news that Emeritus Professor Martin West died in the early hours of this morning, 8 July 2015, just 10 days before his 69th birthday. He was at home and in the presence of his family.

On behalf of the University of Cape Town I extend heartfelt condolences to Professor West's wife Val; their children, Adam and Paula and their respective spouses; and their four young grandsons.

Professor West was well loved by many who knew and worked with him during his 38 years as a staff member at UCT. He was a professor for 31 years (1978 to 2008) and a Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 1991 until he retired in 2008. Upon his retirement the campus community honoured him with testimonies of his hard work, integrity, commitment to UCT, his sense of humour, his vast store of

institutional knowledge and his talent for relating anecdotes in the most entertaining manner. “No matter was too trivial for his attention,” said one student leader at the time. He was cited by other colleagues for shaping their thinking and approach to leadership. In this way, his influence remains at UCT today.

Martin and Val West remained close to the university after he retired. Val remains a member of the Works of Art Committee and their son Adam is a senior lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences.

In June 2011 UCT conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature. At that ceremony Professor Alison Lewis, who was the UCT Orator at the time, masterfully summed up Professor West’s career and personality with the following: “There is a South African saying: Umntu ngumntu ngabantu, which means: A person is a person through other people. It is about the essence of being human. It says: ‘I am what I am because of who we all are.’ This concept of Ubuntu is innate to Martin West’s way of being. He is well known for his leadership abilities, his acumen and his insight, but his way of being is Ubuntu – his ability to engage at all levels, his ability to truly relate and connect.”

Professor West trained as an anthropologist and began lecturing in the Social Anthropology department at UCT in 1971. He became professor and head of the department of Anthropology in 1978, at the young age of 32.

In 1991, he was appointed a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and spent the next 17 years in that position, serving with four very different Vice-Chancellors and managing a range of portfolios during challenging times. In the 1990s, when many universities were burning with student anger and struggling with transformation, Professor West was responsible for student affairs. His wisdom and skill enabled a smooth transition from the protest politics of the 1980s to a system of cooperative governance in the 1990s. As South Africa began to reintegrate into the international academic community after democracy, Professor West was the driving force behind the formation of the University Science Humanities & Engineering Partnerships in Africa (USHEPiA), a highly successful academic collaboration between universities on the continent.

After his retirement, Professor West remained active in academic life even as the effects of Parkinson’s Disease began to be felt. In 2013 he launched at UCT an exhibition of an evocative collection of photographs he had taken of members of the Africa Independent Churches in Soweto between 1969 and 1971, revealing a segment of society that has been hidden to most South Africans. The photographs, which form the content of Professor West’s book, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City*, captured baptisms, sacrificial slaughters, prayer meetings, healing services, and vignettes of everyday life in Soweto. They also reveal the high level of acceptance and trust these church members accorded to Professor West while he was still a young researcher.

I know the many members of the UCT community who knew and loved Professor West will want to pay tribute to him. We will announce the details of his memorial service when they are available. Meanwhile, messages of condolence can be emailed to [Jenny Boyes](mailto:Jenny.Boyes@uct.ac.za), who will forward them to the family.

Sincerely

Professor Crain Soudien
Acting Vice-Chancellor

ENDS

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