

# Church leaders pay tribute to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela



Winnie Mandela Winnie Madikizela-Mandela at a reception to mark her 80th birthday in September 2016 (PHOTO: SA Government Communication and Information System).

Tributes have been paid to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the former wife of the late South African anti-apartheid leader and President Nelson Mandela, who died on Monday at the age of 81 reports the Anglican Communion News Service (ACNS).

The Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, Primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, is currently in London for a meeting of the Lambeth Conference 2020 Design Group. He told ACNS: "I send my condolences to the family. I am humbled to have known her. I admired and respected her. May she rest in peace and rise in glory."

He added: "She certainly played her part with great courage. Yes she made some mistakes – but let us forgive her and honour her for what she did. She served her country and her people. When she spoke at rallies, she was so articulate, so

articulate. She wasn't scared at all."

Abp Thabo got to know her over many years. In his book *Madiba. Faith and Courage: Praying with Mandela* he recalls an early occasion with the Release Mandela campaign when he travelled to see her in Bradfort in Free State where she had been banished by the apartheid government. He was taking food and clothes, including track suits to be passed on to Nelson Mandela in jail.

"She was living alone in this tiny council house with no electricity. She could have been attacked at any time. She was so courageous."



Residents and friends outside Madikizela-Mandela's home in Soweto. (PHOTO Mujahid Safodien/AFP/Getty Images via [The Guardian](#)).

The last time they met was on the day of Nelson Mandela's funeral. Archbishop Thabo first led a small service with relatives at the family home. Winnie Mandela was there – so too was the former president's second wife, Graca Machel. Archbishop Thabo remembers the two women sitting peacefully beside each other.

"It was as if they were accepting that they had both played a significant part in his life and they both belonged to him."

Abp Thabo has remained in contact while Winnie Mandela was in hospital, regularly sending her SMS messages. "She was grateful. She used to say every time she got an SMS from me, she got out of hospital."

The Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, also paid tribute, saying that "Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was for many years a defining symbol of the struggle against apartheid. She refused to be bowed by the imprisonment of her husband, the perpetual harassment of her family by security forces, detentions, bannings and banishment. Her courageous defiance was deeply inspirational to me, and to generations of activists."

Another former Primate of Southern Africa, Archbishop Emeritus Njongonkulu Ndungane, described her as one of South Africa's "most courageous anti-apartheid activists."

"A mother holds a special place in one's heart, and this is no less so for the woman who was affectionately known as 'the mother of the nation'", he said. "At the time of the imprisonment of much of the leadership of the anti-apartheid movements on Robben Island and in exile, she fearlessly took on the role of being the voice of the voiceless."

"Her feisty spirit was such that not even the cruelty of the apartheid government in banishing her to house arrest in Brandfort could break her resilience and opposition to the government of the day."

He continued: "Although Mama Madikizela-Mandela made some well-documented errors of judgment during her life, she remained committed to the vulnerable and was often the first at the scene of a tragedy to provide comfort and compassion to those impacted by it."

The Bishop of Johannesburg, Dr Steve Moreo, described Winnie Mandela's death as "a blow to South Africa as a nation", and said that she "was an influential figure through the many

years of struggle against apartheid when she showed herself time and again to be an inveterate struggler for the cause of justice. . .

“During her life, she kept close contact with all parts of the Church. A practising Methodist, she used her strong ecumenical links to reach out to other denominations, not least that of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa in general, and the Diocese of Johannesburg in particular.

“There were many occasions when her insight and background information assisted the Anglican Church in the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s to be part of a Christian witness in bringing about the demise of apartheid.”

In a message of condolence to the Mandela and Madikizela families and the ANC, the South African Council of Churches says: “Winnie Madikizela Mandela was a pillar of strength for the struggle for a just, democratic dispensation in South Africa. She was there as a young mother of Madiba’s girls when she was deprived of her normal family life by Madiba’s life imprisonment, and resolutely stood, giving the rest of her life to the cause of justice, equal rights and equality of opportunity for all South Africans.

“Amongst many who have served this nation with their all, she stands with the tallest! The power of her presence will tower on long after her departure!

“May her soul rest in peace!”

The Rhema Family of Churches have also paid tribute to Madikizela-Mandela, reports [Eyewitness News](#).

Pastor Ray McCauley\_says she was a courageous voice against the apartheid government when liberation movements were banned and political leaders were imprisoned or driven into exile.

“She would come to church quite often. And always available to

help in any time of need.

“And she was always a great encouragement to me personally. So she was really somebody that would inspire you and somebody that would be there for you.

“And she’s going to be sorely missed,” he said.

The Catholic Church extends sincere sympathies to the Madikizela and Mandela families on the passing of the matriarch, Nomzama Winnie Mandela, says the [SA Catholic Bishops Conference in a post on its website](#).

The SACBC says: “For over 50 years Winnie Mandela was a major figure in the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa. For her that struggle involved separation from her husband and children, banishment, continual surveillance while bearing the expectations of the oppressed millions. Her life was played out against the background of world attention.

“Winnie Mandela was a committed activist, she was a courageous leader. She was much more than just the wife of Nelson Mandela, she had many identities. In her resistance to oppression and in her hatred of injustice she inspired a whole country, galvanized the youth and inspired women. In the dark and oppressive years her resistance to apartheid was like a trumpet call to thousands not to fall but to arise and press on.

“She has a complex history. Mistakes were made arising from a suffering and impetuous heart. To witness the deep humiliations of one’s people every day, to observe as a social worker the blanket inequality of access to welfare, health, schools, land and basic rights were bound to cloud the mind. One is inclined to remember Debora and some of the other great women of the Old Testament.

“Winnie Mandela was a world figure and this enabled her to speak where millions of other women could not. Yet, her

courage, her thirst for justice for all, black and white, her inspired and persistent defiance towards an unjust system was historic and will inspire many in the future.

“On Good Friday two days before her death she spent 5 hours in Church, may she now meet and encounter her Lord face to face. May she rest in peace.”

A memorial service for Madikizela-Mandela will be held at Regina Mundi Catholic Church in Soweto, a church that was known for being a refuge for activists during the apartheid era.

The plans for the service on April 11 come as South Africa declared [10 days of national mourning](#) for Madikizela-Mandela.