

Multicultural Faith Leaders Celebrate Nelson Mandela's Life

Nelson Mandela died peacefully at his home on Thursday, eliciting the attention of the pope, the president and multicultural faith leaders around the world.

"Nelson Mandela's life embodied the idea of prophetic activism with an unquenchable thirst for justice," says Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. "His struggle for equality brought down one of the final strongholds of segregation and subsequently empowered an entire continent to overcome by doing justice and loving mercy. His life inspired us while his humble demeanor will continue to move us towards a more just and loving world."

Alveda King, niece of the late Martin Luther King Jr., says Mandela paid a heavy price to stand against apartheid while campaigning for human justice and human dignity. His message still resonates though his weary, battle-worn body has gone the way of those gone before him.

"Long may we remember his courage, his fortitude and his gentle smile, none of which were ever tarnished during the years of his battles, oppression, incarceration and the restorative years following his release," King says. "Ninety-five years of life is a fitting testimony to the strength of character of this legendary statesman."

King went on to say that Mandela now takes his place in history. She says the great world leader will be missed.

"A portrait hangs in my home. In the frame, poised between his fellow champions Martin and Malcolm, Mandela smiles while

Martin is solemn and Malcolm is stoic. To be able to radiate joy in times of conflict is a gift," King says. "To experience their three different expressions, the combined epitome of the human dream of freedom, is simply amazing."

Pope Francis also paid tribute to Mandela and his struggle to forge a just South Africa on Friday.

"I pray that the late president's example will inspire generations of South Africans to put justice and the common good at the forefront of their political aspirations," Francis said in a telegram to South African President Jacob Zuma, according to a Reuters report.

The wire service reported the Pope saying, "The steadfast commitment shown by Nelson Mandela in promoting the human dignity of all the nation's citizens and in forging a new South Africa built on the firm foundations of nonviolence, reconciliation and truth."

The Very Rev. Ian S. Markham, Ph.D., dean and president of Virginia Theological Seminary, wrote about the death of Mandela in his daily Dean's Commentary on Friday.

"When the word of his death reached us, I knew that the world had lost a giant like it has not often seen," Markham wrote. "He walked a 'stony road' for freedom. His was a life of sacrifice with 27 years in prison. His dignity and service led to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa.

"He was truly the world's moral compass. Compassionate resistance to colonial power was his way of being. Truly an elder statesman. He was embraced by the world—a man who struggled for us all. He was freed from prison once. Now he is freed from this earthly journey. A giant has left us."