

‘Servant Leader’: South African Megachurch Founding Pastor Ray McCauley Dies at 75

Pastor Ray McCauley, internationally known anti-apartheid leader and founder of Rhema Bible Church in Johannesburg, South Africa, died Oct. 8 at age 75. A leading Pentecostal and former co-chairman of the National Interfaith Council of South Africa, he died at home surrounded by friends and relatives only days after celebrating his birthday.

Pastor Joshua McCauley, his son and the current senior pastor of Rhema, announced the news in a statement released by the church:

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South African President Cyril Ramaphosa also honored McCauley's impact, saying, "Pastor Ray's passing leaves our deeply spiritual nation bereft of a remarkable leader whose impressive legacy lives on in the faith of hundreds of thousands of believers within and beyond the Rhema community."

McCauley, born in Johannesburg, was an award-winning professional bodybuilder in his youth and later worked as a nightclub bouncer. But after converting to Christ, he attended Pastor Kenneth Hagin Sr.'s Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, an experience he regarded as a turning point in his life.

Following his time at RBTC, he returned to Johannesburg, where he established Rhema Bible Church in 1979. Here, he defied

proponents of apartheid by holding nonsegregated church services; in 1990, Rhema was one of 97 churches to sign the anti-apartheid Rustenburg Declaration.

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The church has now grown to a membership of more than 45,000, with now more than 10,000 graduates of its Rhema Bible College and more than 500 churches planted globally. Rhema became a societal pillar with many high-profile attendees, including former President Jacob Zuma, members of Parliament and sports figures. In 2022, McCauley turned over leadership of the church to his son, Joshua, and daughter-in-law, Tara, but he remained active in a supporting role.

Rhema held a comfort service Oct. 10 and will host an honoring service Oct. 17 with a funeral Oct. 19. McCauley is survived by his second wife, Zelda, his son and daughter-in-law and their three children.

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