

Mr. Timo Peter Dladla (1938-2009)

After Father Xolile Keteyi S.J. was appointed Rector of St. Peter's Seminary in Garsfontein, Father Mike Lewis S.J. came to St. Martin's but, since he was also the superior of all the South African Jesuits, he had to divide his time between two jobs. The solution was to appoint a layman as a parish worker. Mr. Peter Dladla, a long-serving parishioner, was chosen from among the lay ministers for this role. He ran the parish office during the day and gave a report to Fr. Mike every afternoon. At that time, I was teaching Grade 8 at Sacred Heart College and Sandile, the youngest Dladla son, was in my class. I came to know Mr. and Mrs. Dladla through the parents' evenings. They were gentle people with high expectations and an enormous love for their family.

Baba Dladla loved his job at St. Martin's and was very good at it. He remained in his role even after full-time priests were appointed, serving four of us between 1991 and 2009. He was present all during the extension of the church and the renovations to the hall. He typed the newsletters, filled out parish registers, acted as a maintenance man, and drove the parish bakkie to fetch pensioners, load shopping, and take Holy Communion to the sick.

Looking back at my years at St. Martin's, I see now that I was learning more than teaching. Living and working in Orlando West was an education in what it meant to be a South African priest. In all this, Baba Dladla was my father, my teacher and my companion. He was very kind to me, yet he was also the only one who felt he could correct me. If my hair was untidy or my vestments wrinkled, he would say softly: "This is not my priest". How good it would be if all priests had someone like that!

Mr. Dladla died after an accident at work. I will never forget that terrible day, or how Sandile and I stood beside his hospital bed as he slipped away into the next life. Baba Dladla, how we miss you! Thank you for everything you did for the people of St. Martin's. Pray for us that we will one day join you in God's kingdom.

Thomas Plastow, S.J.
May 2021