

## NEWS RELEASE

### UP confers honorary doctorate on SA's first woman professor of theology



*Prof Landman delivering her graduation speech at the 2025 UP autumn graduations.*

PRETORIA - The University of Pretoria (UP) recently conferred an honorary doctorate on Professor Christina Landman – the first South African woman to become a professor of theology at a South African university – during its graduation ceremony for the [Faculty of Theology and Religion](#). On the day, 183 undergraduate and postgraduate students will receive their degrees.

“I felt overwhelmed when I heard I was receiving this honorary doctorate, as it is an acknowledgement of what women can achieve now in academia, the church and community work,” she says.

Prof Landman is one of the most open-minded leaders in the field of theology, readily participating in public debates and making a significant impact on Christian thinking and practice in South Africa.

"I did my BA (Hons) in Greek and Latin at UP in the 1970s, and although I was top of my class, I was not permitted to do theological studies in the Theological Faculty as a woman student at UP at the time," she explains.

She went on to obtain seven degrees cum laude at UP and the [University of South Africa](#) (UNISA), completing her theological studies at UNISA, where she remained as an academic for 42 years and became the first woman professor of theology in the country in 1991.

"In the early 1970s, it was also impossible for most women to become pastors in South Africa," Prof Landman says. "I was permitted a licence to be a pastor only when I was 50, and was ordained at 52 in what was previously called the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, now the [Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa](#) (URCSA)."

The first church where she served as a pastor was the predominantly Zulu-speaking, financially impoverished congregation in Sakhelwe, now Dullstroom-Emnotweni, in Mpumalanga. Prof Landman is currently a pastor in an equally financially challenged URCSA congregation in Rustenburg.

She has used her voice to advance feminist theology and speak out about the need for proactive gender equality and social justice in the church. She's also led the way for women to advance in the leadership of the church: Prof Landman and the late pastor and academic Prof Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel were elected as the only two women members of the URCSA Executive.

Prof Landman acknowledges the work of black women theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who is widely recognised as Africa's first and finest female theologians. According to Prof Landman, Oduyoye's theology can best be described as a theology of stories that have changed worldviews on gender, ecumenism and restorative historiography. She also gives credit to Oduyoye for working tirelessly to establish African women's theology as an academic discipline. Oduyoye founded the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and Prof Landman was one of only two white women theologians who were invited to join the circle from its inception.

In her dual role as a woman theologian and pastor, Prof Landman shares the message of gender equality: "God did not make men to rule over women or to beat or control women, this is not healthy. God created men and women in an equal partnership that is healthy for both."

She explains that while there is a strong human rights presence in the church today, in practice, many women do not feel safe to speak out or insist on safe sex with their partners. She adds that too many churches do not provide sufficient assistance in cases of rape or physical and emotional abuse.

"Our publication *Tell your Mother's Stories* shares women's voices and stories, and demonstrates how important it is to record oral histories in our country," says Prof Landman, who is an executive member of both the Oral History Association of South Africa and the International Oral History Association.

During her 30 years as a monthly columnist for *Beeld* newspaper, she told the stories of ordinary people, covering topics such as the abuse of women in the church, and the plight of gay people, prostitutes, those in correctional facilities, people with disabilities or HIV, and the legacies of those brutalised during apartheid.

"My special calling is to write down the stories of voiceless people and congregations who allow me to do so, and with all the ethical clearance that is required," Prof Landman says. "We call it 'the healing of memories', where we go down a path of healing by talking about people's memories, good and bad. Most people don't realise how powerful this is as part of the healing process; it has to be done by a trained counsellor, because it can be traumatising for people when they relive painful memories."

From 2001 to 2007, she worked as a voluntary counsellor at Kalafong Hospital in Atteridgeville, attending to more than 1 000 patients as part of her second doctorate, which she obtained in 2009, titled 'Doing narrative counselling in the context of township spiritualities'. The doctorate explores healing in a range of spiritualities, including healing through counselling, church healing and African traditional healing, so that people can explore what feels

right for them.

“In my congregation, there is no place for disabling, unhealthy, punishing theology, such as telling people they are hopeless sinners,” Prof Landman says. “I choose to lead the healthy way, to let my congregation know about God as empowerment (not as God as a patriarch), and how worthy and valuable they are in God’s eyes. They find this inspiring and empowering, and it’s wonderful to see people growing when they are energised by this. People are poor and vulnerable because they have had no chances in life. I’ve been invited into their lives to share a message of hope and love; this is the true Christian message, where Jesus lifted up the forgotten and downtrodden, and emphasised their dignity, grace and worthiness. As a result, the church is growing at a rapid rate.”

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>> Watch Prof Landman’s graduation speech [here](#).

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## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP’s Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)