

John Gardener receives the highest award from the Anglican Church.

The Archbishop of Cape Town awarded the Order of Simon of Cyrene to Mr Gardener.

14 Jun 2024

Written by [Paul Murray](#)



His Grace Archbishop Thabo Makgoba with John Brett Gardener (1948G) at the Church of St Cyprian.

Last night (13 June 2024) the Anglican Church of Southern Africa at its 67th Session of the Diocesan Synod, presented the Order of Simon of Cyrene on John Brett Gardener the 11th Principal of Bishops.

The mere fact that the award was made at Synod, by the Archbishop himself, demonstrates the magnitude of this occasion and event.

The award was made for Mr Gardener's contribution and service to Education in South Africa over many years, as well as being the writer and compiler of scores of hymns sung widely in the Anglican Church today, that also carried it through the dark years of apartheid. The audience and congregation showed their appreciation for John's work, with huge applause.

The Order of Simon of Cyrene is the highest award given by the church to a lay person for outstanding service to the wider church.

What made the event and service very special was when the Archbishop requested the congregation to sing one of his hymns which was sung in full voice by the congregation. This preceded the opening Eucharist at Synod.

The words of the hymn are transcribed here:

“Who will save our land and people”

by John Gardner (1983) [in Hymns and Psalms #898]

Who will save our land and people?
Who can rescue us from wrong?
We are lost—faint, false, and foolish—
We have slighted God too long.
Save the people, Lord our Saviour,
Guide us home from country far;
Holy Fire, consume our rancours:
Thy Kingdom come—in Africa.

Make our land as clean and wholesome
As the white of sea-washed sands;
Stretch our vision vast and boundless
As our brown-spread, dusty lands.
Make our people strong and steadfast
As the hills that claw our sky;
Hear our prayer for land and people:
“God bless Africa”, we cry.

We believe God is our Saviour;
Christ enough to heal our land.
He will use the Church, His servants:
We on earth His stretched-out hand.
May His Church in loving service,
Shown to all whose path is rough,
Give a clear, united witness,
And proclaim: “Christ is enough!”

Christ enough to break all barriers;
Christ enough in peace, is strife;
Christ enough to build our nation;
Christ enough for death, for life.

Christ enough for old and lonely;
Christ enough for those who fall;
Christ enough to save the sin-sick;
Christ enough for one—for all!

At the event, John was accompanied by his wife Sue Rees, herself having made a significant contribution to Education in SA. ODs in attendance were Alan and Tia Ramsay, and the ODA Paul Murray who was appointed to the Staff at Bishops in 1990, by Mr Gardener. Other recipients include Judge Ian Farlam (present in the photograph, bottom right), former Judge of Appeal in the Supreme Court of Appeal.

The citation that was read by Archbishop Thabo reads:

JOHN GARDENER

John was born in Cape Town 28 August 1930 and educated at Diocesan College (Bishops) where he was Head Boy, subsequently at UCT and then as a Rhodes Scholar, at Oxford (Magdalen College). The academic qualifications he achieved are a B.A, B.Ed, and an M.A in English and Latin.

He entered the world of teaching at Wynberg Boys' High School and this was followed by several years as a teacher of Latin and English at Bishops. In 1970 John was appointed as the Principal at Kingswood College in Grahamstown where he served for five years until the tragic death of Richard, one of his sons, led him to return to Bishops where he spent the rest of his stellar career as an educator, finally ending up as Principal of Bishops until he retired in 1993.

Apart from his teaching career John has made many other huge contributions to education and society. These include:

*School Quality Assurance: Working with his second wife, Sue Rees, John played an important role in the development of the Independent Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA) where he wrote most of the handbook, *School in a Mirror*, and worked as a Mentor in schools.*

*Writing: Journalism; dictionary contributions; rugby columnist; and editorial work of several books and, most particularly, *BISHOPS 150*, a history of the Diocesan College, Rondebosch.*

Outside of education John is very well known as a writer of Hymns, many of which are published in hymn books compiled by churches.

From the 1960's up 2023 he has written upwards of 60 hymns first as a member of the Methodist Church and subsequently as an Anglican. Some of these have been for specific schools or occasions and many for important moments in the church calendar.

The ODU and Bishops extend their heartiest congratulations to one of the school's great sons!



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