

**On embassy to Ulundi:  
The Natal Church Leaders Group's mediation attempts  
in war-torn Natal (1987-1990)**

*Michael Mbona*

School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

*Abstract*

The paper examines how church leaders from various mainline churches tried to respond between 1987 and 1990 to the crisis resulting from political violence in the former province of Natal. Supporters of Inkatha were opposed to members of the United Democratic Front, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and later the African National Congress. An ecumenical endeavour to convince warring parties to end the hostilities was met with resistance from Ulundi. The paper argues that the church leaders' understanding of the need to be prophetic was at conflict with their role as mediation facilitators. Relations between Ulundi and some of the leading ecclesiastical personages coupled with internal dynamics within the church leaders' group overshadowed the achievements of this remarkable initiative. The attempts by church leaders to resolve the political crisis sowed seed for political tolerance and laid a foundation for democracy in KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa.

**Introduction**

This essay seeks to analyse initiatives undertaken by churches in the former province of Natal, South Africa, in response to political violence between 1987 and 1990. Church leaders from several mainline churches in this province resolved to respond ecumenically to the crisis by creating a forum to share ideas and coordinate action. The churches included the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA),<sup>1</sup> the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Presbyterian Church (PC), and the United Congregational Church of South Africa (UCCSA).<sup>2</sup> An

---

<sup>1</sup> Recently renamed Anglican Church of South Africa (ACSA).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Nuttall, interview conducted by author on 10 October 2007 in Pietermaritzburg. See also Natal Diocesan Archives (DN), DN/DR/B/17.15.1.82, The Natal Crisis, Memorandum

informal ecumenical body, the Natal Church Leaders Group (NCLG) was formed in May 1988 with a mandate to address the challenges arising from the political crisis.<sup>3</sup> Founding members included Khoza Mgojo, Stanley Mogoba, and John Borman from the MCSA, Archbishop Denis Hurley of the RCC and Bishop Michael Nuttall of the CPSA. Leaders of other ecumenical agencies were incorporated into the group, such as Lizo Jaftha of the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches, Athol Jennings of the Vuleka Trust, Peter Kerchhoff of the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), and Paddy Kearney of Diakonia Council of Churches.<sup>4</sup> The NCLG sought to engage with government, opposition parties, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the local and international community.

The NCLG's initiatives were driven by the conviction that the major cause of the conflict lay in a "battle for political turf", or in real terms for the political soul of the people of this province.<sup>5</sup> The ecumenical group was also convinced there was state complicity. For example, elements within the national security forces were accused of either instigating, or allowing violence and loss of life to occur.<sup>6</sup> In addition to meeting with the leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the United Democratic Front (UDF), the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the NCLG drew the attention of national government to the political violence. Two separate meetings were held in January and April 1990 each with the then Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, and the State President, Frederik W. de Klerk respectively.

The NCLG hoped to achieve a number of results from this engagement. First, that the meetings would at least promote dialogue between the warring parties and encourage them to understand one another in order to achieve peace. The NCLG also thought that by pursuing the truth about the violence and its causes, as well as publicising those findings, it could fulfil a prophetic function. Finally, engagement and dialogue would also provide pastoral and relief assistance to victims, irrespective of their political loyalties.<sup>7</sup> Despite the limited availability of resources such as money, clothing and shelter, providing pastoral support to victims of the political violence was not as challenging as the other two roles. However, for practical reasons, the pastoral role will not be treated in this essay. The prophetic function with a

<sup>3</sup> presented by John Aitchison to minister of Law and Order, 29 January 1990. See also DN/DR/B/17.15.1.167 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 17 September 1990.

<sup>4</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.2 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 7 May 1988.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> M. Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu: a memoir* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 55.

<sup>7</sup> J. Pieterse, Secretary General of the SACBC in *The Bishops speak 5*, (1988-1990), (vi).

<sup>7</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.9 P. Kearney's contribution to "What is the role of the church in situation of conflict?", 3 November 1988.

focus on identifying causes of the conflict – coupled with the NCLG's efforts in mediation, were held in tension and often presented a complexity.<sup>8</sup> This essay proceeds by way of a brief outline of the political context; thereafter, it will discuss the mediation and prophetic roles and finally conclude.

### **Political context**

Clashes between supporters of the UDF, COSATU and the ANC on the one hand, and the IFP on the other hand<sup>9</sup> from 1987 to 1990 cost the province of Natal over 4 000 lives.<sup>10</sup> During this period, individuals, families, and communities lost lives and property, while essential services were disrupted.<sup>11</sup> The UDF was an umbrella body formed in 1983 by youth, township civics, educational, student, and women's cultural and sporting organisations to oppose apartheid. In the eyes of the state, it was seen as the internal arm of the banned ANC.<sup>12</sup> COSATU, a national federation of trade unions went beyond its mandate of worker welfare and took up broader political issues, often teaming up with the UDF.<sup>13</sup> Formed in 1975, the IFP initially existed as the Inkatha National Cultural Movement (Inkatha) of the Zulu people,<sup>14</sup> but was later transformed into a political party. In principle, all four organisations were united in their opposition to apartheid, yet because their approaches differed, they frequently clashed along the lines of COSATU and UDF versus IFP.

Although this essay's intention is not to give detailed analysis of the political violence in Natal, it is important to note that this period was critical for at least two reasons in the history of political violence within the province. First, from 1987 onwards, there was a marked increase in the number of politically motivated deaths and related violence.<sup>15</sup> John Aitchison, the director of the Centre for Adult Education at the University of Natal, closely monitored the violence in the Natal Midlands, providing

<sup>8</sup> Paddy Kearney, interview conducted by author on 21 August 2008 in Pietermaritzburg.

<sup>9</sup> A.J. Jeffrey, *The Natal story: sixteen years of conflict* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> W. Gutteridge and J.E. Spence, Introduction: "Violence in Southern Africa", in W. Gutteridge, and J.E. Spence, (eds) *Violence in Southern Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 9.

<sup>11</sup> J. Aitchison, "Numbering the dead: the course and pattern of violence in the Natal Midlands: 1987-1989" (Unpublished MA diss., University of Natal, 1993), 106-107.

<sup>12</sup> M. Kentridge, *An unofficial war: inside the conflict in Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1990), 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> T. Waetjen and G. Maré, "Shaka's aeroplane: the take-off and landing of Inkatha, Modern Zulu Nationalism and Royal Politics", in B. Carton, J. Laband, and J. Sithole (eds) *Zulu identities: being Zulu, past and present* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 353.

<sup>15</sup> Dorcas Mkhize, interview conducted by author on 13 October 2008 in Pietermaritzburg.

important statistics on the numbers of deaths. He noted the following trend in deaths for Pietermaritzburg: 12 in 1985, 13 in 1986, 413 in 1987, 691 in 1988, 696 in 1989 and 488 by end of April 1990. The figures for Durban indicate that from 1987 to March 1990 a total of 1,150 people were killed, 550 in 1989 alone.<sup>16</sup> A second critical feature of this period of time between 1987 and 1990 is that 1990 witnessed the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, who had been in prison for twenty-seven years. At the same time, the unbanning of political parties paved the way for democratic reform of the political landscape in South Africa.

Ironically, this period of political reform also showed an increase in tension between opposition parties as they battled for political turf in the province of Natal and the KwaZulu homeland resulting in further deaths. Concerns that the conflict in Natal constituted a barrier to negotiations between the white government and the ANC apparently presented another urgent reason to pursue peace talks. The regional conflict also posed a threat to the infant culture of democracy. “The conflict”, a commentator observed, “undermines the prospect of creating a democratic culture in which the freedoms of assembly, speech, debate and political affiliation will be tolerated. Instead it is tolerating a culture of violence and death”.<sup>17</sup> The NCLG was faced with the difficult and unenviable task of revealing the truth about the conflict while simultaneously promoting dialogue between the warring parties.<sup>18</sup>

### **Mediation**

Kenneth Kressel defined mediation as “a process in which disputants attempt to resolve their differences with the assistance of an acceptable third party, and the mediator’s task is to help the parties search for a mutually acceptable solution to their conflict”.<sup>19</sup> Kressel’s definition implies that unresolved conflict creates a basis for inviting someone else to break an impasse. It can apply to the workplace, home, or any other social context. We need to appreciate, however, that a deepening political rift constituted the context under discussion. In relation to conflict that escalates to the point of physical confrontation, John Burton observed: “Conflicts are struggles between

<sup>16</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.152 J. Aitchison, “Interpreting violence: the struggle to understand the Natal conflict”, Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, (July 1990), 1.

<sup>17</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, “Natal conflict ‘undermines the prospect of a democratic culture’”, *The Natal Witness*, 11 September 1990, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Nuttal, same interview. See also Paddy Kearney , same interview, See also John Aitchison, interview conducted by author on 18 August 2008 in Pietermaritzburg.

<sup>19</sup> K. Kressel, “Mediation revisited”, in M. Deutsch, P.T. Coleman and E.C. Marcus (eds.), *The handbook of conflict resolution: theory and practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons Inc, 2006), 726.

opposing forces, implying that the issues are more serious than those relating to disputes, possibly stimulating physical confrontation.”<sup>20</sup> Burton’s statement applied to the state of affairs in Natal and KwaZulu, where conflict escalated to bloodshed. The relationship between COSATU, UDF, ANC and the IFP deteriorated into full-blown violence. Political conflict was identified as the root cause, as noted by Lawrence Schlemmer who pointed out that political violence was basically about “a power struggle for authority over that province … The violence has become entrenched and has taken the form of a feud. Many of the massacres that one reads about are revenge attacks”<sup>21</sup>. Likewise, Neville Richardson asserted that an example of such conflict was in KwaZulu-Natal, between the Inkatha movement led by Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi and supporters of the African National Congress.<sup>22</sup> Studies done on political violence in this region of South Africa, confirmed that black Africans carried out many of the killings on fellow black Africans. Mediation by the NCLG was therefore an attempt to broker peace between the the COSATU-UDF-ANC alliance and Inkatha, later the IFP.

A basic requirement to any mediation process is that conflicting parties identify and agree on someone who is impartial, fair, principled and committed to the legitimate needs of all.<sup>23</sup> These essential qualities suggest that mediation requires people of extremely high integrity. A mediator’s task is to act as a facilitator of communication; one who does not render a decision but merely guides the parties to their own voluntary settlement.<sup>24</sup> Communication among disputing parties can take the form of letters, telephonic conversations, consultations and face-to-face meetings. Accordingly, the process of mediation aims to reframe the context of the conflict, to move parties away from positions of incompatibility and opposition towards a dialogue that focuses on shared interests, similarities and goals.<sup>25</sup> Mediation also requires patience, as it takes time for each party

<sup>20</sup> J.W. Burton, *Conflict resolution: its language and process* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>21</sup> L. Schlemmer, “Political violence in South Africa: can it be resolved?” in A. Minnar and M. Hough (eds.) *Conflict, violence and conflict resolution: where is South Africa heading?* (Pretoria: HSRC, 1997), 7. See also M. Nuttall, “Peter Kerchhoff and the KwaZulu-Natal Church Leaders’ Group”, in Levine, L (ed), *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999* (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 2002), 188.

<sup>22</sup> R.N. Richardson, “Nonviolence at apartheid’s end: a theological retrospect”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 116, (July 2003), 86.

<sup>23</sup> R.S. Kraybill, R.A. Evans and A.F. Evans, *Peace skills: a manual for community mediators* (San Francisco: A Wiley Company, 2001), 20.

<sup>24</sup> J.W. Zeigler, *The mediation kit: tools to solve disputes* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 1997), 7.

<sup>25</sup> K.F. Brand-Jacobsen, and C.G. Jacobsen, “Beyond mediation: towards more holistic approaches to peace-building and peace actor empowerment”, in J. Galtung, C G. Jacobsen and K.F. Brand-Jacobsen (eds) *Searching for peace: the road to Transcend* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 52.

to state and negotiate its position, particularly given the fact that no one is prepared to lose. The bottom line is that conflicting parties have to agree on the ideal person or persons to facilitate the conflict and ensuing discussions. For some time, church leaders attempted to bring COSATU-the UDF-ANC alliance and Inkatha together. Kraybill rightly observed that those who successfully brought the conflicting parties to this point were tempted to see themselves as the best persons to play the mediator role.<sup>26</sup> In a number of instances as will be highlighted later, members of the NCLG were inclined to see themselves as possible mediators.

To mediate well, James Zeigler suggests six stages to be observed by the mediator: (1) mediator orientation; (2) statements of the parties; (3) questions from the mediator; (4) private and separate sessions with each side; (5) negotiations; and (6) joint wrap-up for agreement, resetting or termination.<sup>27</sup> In summary, what these stages emphasise is that the mediator should have full detailed information regarding the conflict, seek the perspective of each side, and then hold joint meetings to resolve the crises. Gregory Tillett noted that there is no simple formula that makes conflict go away, but rather, there are approaches which can minimise the destructive effects of conflict, and thereby maximise the possibilities of resolution.<sup>28</sup> We shall keep these six points at the back of our minds as we examine how the NCLG approached political mediation, and attempt to establish whether or not they had the patience and requisite skills required for effective mediation. We shall then conduct an analysis of mediation efforts between 1987 and 1990.

### **Early moves**

The first formal meeting of the NCLG on 8 May, 1988 gave the impression this was not the first attempt to broker peace between the UDF and the COSATU, one on one side, and Inkatha, on the other side. Apparently other peace initiatives had occurred prior to this. At that meeting it was noted that Khoza Mgojo gave a brief report on progress relating to peace making with various groups in the Pietermaritzburg area. He stated that the meeting scheduled for 23 February 1988 had to be called off because of the detention of some of the UDF leadership and restrictions imposed on others.<sup>29</sup> Another source noted: "In November 1987, the churches held a peace rally at Edendale Ecumenical Centre outside Pietermaritzburg. Later that week, church leaders met Chief Minister Buthelezi, Archie Gumede, the president

---

<sup>26</sup> Kraybill, *Peace skills*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Zigler, *The mediation kit*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> G. Tillett, *Resolving conflict: a practical approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>29</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.2 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 7 May 1988.

of the UDF and others.”<sup>30</sup> Political analyst, Matthew Kentridge, who wrote on the violence of 1987 to 1990, mentioned an example of additional peace efforts, “... speakers made it clear that both parties faced a common enemy, namely apartheid, and should not be fighting each other. After the ecumenical service there was a smaller meeting between church leaders and some community leaders which Inkatha did not attend”.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that church leaders and politicians had come together to share common concerns was a sign of goodwill by both groups. However, it was likely that Inkatha took exception to the church delegation once it became aware of the NCLG’s extra-meetings with the likes of COSATU and the UDF, yet noting that neither had Inkatha been invited nor informed of these meetings. Evidence of communication between the UDF leadership and the president of Inkatha, Chief Buthelezi, however, testify to earlier church initiatives at a political level. This was noted from a letter written by Archie Gumede to Chief Buthelezi in November 1987.<sup>32</sup>

The Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce enlisted the services of John Radford and Phil Glaser as mediators between the UDF/COSATU and Inkatha. It seems both parties were comfortable with the choice of the two mediators. There was optimism that the NCLG’s peace initiative would be acceptable to Inkatha and the Minister of Law and Order, provided Radford and Glaser were mediators.<sup>33</sup> This arrangement indicated the extent to which the NCLG was aware of the need for professional competence and acceptability of possible mediators between the warring parties. Radford and Glaser were local mediation experts of long-standing experience in community-based conflict in South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

### Towards a peace conference

In strategising on mediation, the NCLG tasked the Church Facilitators Group (CFG) – a NCLG sub-committee consisting of Vuyi Nxasana, Paul Graham, Douglas Muller, Ben Nsimbi, Alfred Mkhize and Athol Jennings – with coordinating a peace conference.<sup>35</sup> Later, the CFG fell under a committee of convenors nominated as: Archbishop Hurley, Bishop Nuttall, Bishop Mogoba,

<sup>30</sup> The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), *Signposts to Peace: An independent Survey of the Violence in Natal, South Africa*, (December 1990), 21.

<sup>31</sup> Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Reply to letter written on 18 August 1987. A copy of the ten pages letter with Appendix I and II, filed at the Natal Diocesan Archive, DN/DR/B/17.15.1.1, Mr. A. Gumede, President of UDF to Dr. M.G. Buthelezi, President of Inkatha, 19 November 1987.

<sup>33</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.2 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 7 May 1988.

<sup>34</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.16 “The Psychology of Mediation”, paper presented by J. Radford and P. Glaser NCLG Workshop, 20 January 1989.

<sup>35</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.2 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 7 May 1988.

Athol Jennings and Paddy Kearney.<sup>36</sup> Conflict of interest between the committee convenors and the CFG over the mediation role was evident though subtle. Aitchison, a consultant of the NCLG, felt that Jennings, as director of the Vuleka Trust and coordinator of the CFG, was well placed to move ahead with providing training skills in crisis intervention and mediation based on his wide experience.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Jennings felt that mediation was ultimately under the charge of his group. He recalled that "The Church Facilitators Group was the result of an attempt to co-ordinate the wide range of skills involved in attempts to mediate in conflicts from leadership to grassroots level."<sup>38</sup> Whether this strategy would deliver the expected outcome remained to be seen.

As part of its support for peace, the CFG sought to convene a peace conference aimed at bringing COSATU/UDF and Inkatha together. Unfortunately, Hurley's invitation to a planning meeting with Inkatha was met with mixed feelings especially regarding the venue. Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha insisted that the peace meeting should be held in Ulundi, the capital of KwaZulu, while COSATU/UDF suggested Durban as a more neutral meeting place.<sup>39</sup> We may speculate that the reluctance of COSATU and of the UDF to travel to Ulundi was based on the grounds that they held Inkatha under suspicion. COSATU/UDF was keen in pursuing the committee of convenors' meeting in preparation for a suggested peace conference possibly on 14 May 1989. Inkatha delayed the decision to participate and eventually backed out.

In his reply of 28 March 1989, Chief Buthelezi suspected that the proposal had been worked out by COSATU and the UDF and presented to him as a *fait accompli*, as he had no time to consult with the KwaZulu Legislature or to suggest additional convenors. He was only invited to suggest two or three names, almost as an after thought.<sup>40</sup> Buthelezi's concerns seem valid if we consider that this plan had likely been carved out by COSATU and UDF.<sup>41</sup> As a critical component to the proposed peace conference, Buthelezi deserved a fairer deal, perhaps by being afforded prior chance to give input instead of having to follow what COSATU and the UDF proposed. The NCLG mediators bore the brunt of failure by being prescriptive to Inkatha. A mediator is supposed to avoid imposing opinions or decisions, and rather, is there to help opposing parties find mutually accepta-

---

<sup>36</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.21 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 21 April 1989.

<sup>37</sup> John Aitchison, same interview.

<sup>38</sup> A. Jennings, information given to author on 15 October 2008.

<sup>39</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.21 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 21 April 1989. See also Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> P. Kearney, "Civil War", in P. Kearney, *Guardian of the light: Archbishop Denis Hurley, a life against apartheid*, Forthcoming, 24.

<sup>41</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.11 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 3 November 1988.

ble solutions.<sup>42</sup> The NCLG should have consulted with Inkatha. Although Archbishop Hurley and members of the CFG acting on behalf of the NCLG had not yet been declared the mediators in the ongoing conflict, chances were that they were likely to be seen in that light by both sides involved in the conflict. We would not be surprised if the church leaders shared the same perception.

**If the NCLG was to gain any respectability they needed to win the confidence of both Inkatha and the UDF-COSATU alliance, and avoid blaming any one political group. Kearney made this observation in a meeting when he explained:**

The problem is how the Church can reveal the truth about a conflict and at the same time promote dialogue between the conflicting parties. As soon as revealing the truth means making known the atrocities committed by one or other of the parties, the “accused” party will see the Church as biased and will therefore refuse the good faith of the Church – a fundamental requisite for successfully promoting talks.<sup>43</sup>

Kearney expressed misgivings regarding NCLG’s revealing of “the truth” about the conflict, a function that had a detrimental effect on the negotiation process. Jennings observed that the Church was publicly accused of desiring a quick-fix solution by means of large meetings attended by well-known authorities, and hoping for instant results. He added: “Many are calling upon the Church as the impartial body left in order to diminish the killings and violence, whereas others scoff at the Church as ever being able to fulfil an impartial role.”<sup>44</sup> The credibility of the NCLG as a mediator was at stake. Naiveté led NCLG members to ignore Jennings’ prior concern. They erred by calling for a public meeting to resolve the political conflict without first holding private meetings with all opposing political parties. The proposed peace conference was one example of their misstep, and of course, Inkatha was then not keen to participate.

We need to further explore the reasons why Chief Buthelezi was reluctant to accept the proposal of a peace conference. Hurley and Buthelezi had a long established friendship up to the last five years of Hurley’s archbishopric, 1987 to 1992. Both of them agreed that apartheid was evil, yet Buthelezi was suspicious of Hurley because of his involvement with Diakonia and the UDF. Inkatha perceived both as enemy organisations.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Kraybill, *Peace skills*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.9 Kearney, “What is the role of the Church?”

<sup>44</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.9 A. Jennings’ contribution on “The role of the Church in the conflict situation in Natal”, 3 November 1988.

<sup>45</sup> Kearney, “Civil War”, 17.

Briefly, COSATU and the UDF had adopted a strategy of mobilising masses of people against apartheid mainly through marches. They supported the armed struggle and sanctions while Inkatha felt that sanctions and violence were detrimental to the lives of ordinary people. Buthelezi's attitude towards Hurley and other white church leaders was largely negative as noted: "I told Archbishop Hurley, and I have repeated it since, that black brother now needs to meet black brother, and that we do not need white midwives – or any midwives – not involved in the violence that is taking place."<sup>46</sup> The white midwives that Chief Buthelezi referenced were probably members of the NCLG including Denis Hurley, Michael Nuttall, Paddy Kearney, Athol Jennings and Peter Kerchhoff. The negative relationship between Buthelezi and some black church leaders was also at stake, notably Khoza Mgojo and Desmond Tutu.

Asked whether this inner discord was not to a source of discouragement for the mediation process, Bishop Nuttall gave an optimistic response. He argued that their concern was for peace, and whether the midwives were black or white was insignificant. "The key thing was would it bring that peace that we were looking for. And sometimes if he [Buthelezi] looks back now, he realises that midwives, black or white, were needed in that situation."<sup>47</sup> Nuttall's views reflect the optimism with which the NCLG faced the crisis. No matter the challenges, peace was desirable regardless of the cost. Accordingly, peace would not have come without the intervention of others, including church leaders.

Geographically, most of the violence was localised in townships and rural areas, places mainly occupied by blacks. These predominantly black communities were either on the offensive or the defensive depending on one's political allegiance. Generally, whites were not directly, or at least as badly affected by political violence, save for those who for one reason or another were caught up in the crossfire. Joan Kerchhoff, formerly from PACSA and widow of Peter Kerchhoff, observed that many of the white congregations were rather indifferent about the situation of political violence.<sup>48</sup> The Church was in a conspicuous position because its clergy and laity were both white and black. Most black clergy were assigned to work in black townships, while their white counterparts were stationed in urban parishes. Black Africans often found it challenging to be accommodated in so-called white parishes. In most cases the top church leadership was still predominantly white.

The likelihood of a peace conference grew weaker and weaker as no reply was received from Buthelezi until April 21, 1989. Inkatha's delay did

<sup>46</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 65.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Nuttall, same interview.

<sup>48</sup> Joan Kerchhoff, interview conducted by author on 22 August 2008 in Pietermaritzburg.

not come as a surprise to the other parties because it was known for dragging its heels in making responses, especially regarding mediation matters.<sup>49</sup> During a NCLG meeting in April 1989, several options were explored in order to establish a way forward. A plan was agreed upon to draw in Johannesburg church leaders as well as the SACC. The willingness of its secretary general, Frank Chikane, to assist wherever necessary, and to communicate with the UDF leadership was appreciated. "It was felt that Rev Chikane could facilitate intra-group communications."<sup>50</sup> The call for the SACC's support was either due to resistance by Inkatha or because Chikane's presence as a national church leader would give the mediation process clout. There was no guarantee that Chikane would earn the immediate respect of Inkatha. Buthelezi and the SACC were at odds with each other on various issues. For instance, financial support for Inkatha had declined since Tutu's days at the SACC.<sup>51</sup> Keith Zondi, one of the leaders of the IFP and a pastor in the Lutheran Church, pointed out that the SACC accused Buthelezi of being an apartheid stooge by exercising leadership in the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly. He alleged: "The SACC did not only discriminate against the IFP politically but also made sure that the IFP never received any material or moral assistance from the SACC or from any of its worldwide ecumenical partners."<sup>52</sup> Inkatha felt undermined and was therefore hesitant and unwilling to accept SACC involvement in the mediation process.

That the IFP focused on old resentments was perceived to be a sign of their lack of political will to improve on the situation of political violence. Given the high level of mistrust and long-standing hostility, the situation seemed hopeless as uncertainty increased among the church leaders. At this stage it should be noted that matters had been difficult for the NCLG, who had tried to play both a facilitative and mediation role.<sup>53</sup> The risk of giving up mediation efforts by the NCLG reigned quite high at this time, but some of its members felt it was the least appropriate move to be taken under the prevailing circumstances.

### **Five-a-side peace talks**

<sup>49</sup> Paddy Kearney, same interview.

<sup>50</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.21 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 21 April 1989.

<sup>51</sup> B. Temkin, *Buthelezi: a biography* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 250-1.

<sup>52</sup> K.M. Zondi, "The relationship between the South African Council of Churches and the Inkatha Freedom Party", in G. Besier (ed), *The churches, South Africa and the political context* (Atlanta: Minerva Press, 1999), 164.

<sup>53</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.2.33 NCLG Memorandum to Provincial Administrator, Re: The Natal conflict and reconstruction, 28 August 1991.

An attempt to revive the peace talks was undertaken by a delegation of Anglican bishops of the CPSA after a synod in June 1989 held in Durban. Sigisbert Ndwandwe, Zambuhle Dlamini, Michael Nuttall and Alfred Mkhize (from the diocese of Natal) were sent on a mission to meet with Chief Buthelezi at Ulundi.<sup>54</sup> The special visit to Ulundi came after Chief Buthelezi sent greetings to the synod of Anglican bishops, who in turn used this greeting as a suitable opportunity to engage Buthelezi in dialogue. Mkhize and Ndwandwe were both Zulu speaking and Ndwandwe had connections with the Zulu royal family. Dlamini and Buthelezi had grown up together as small boys and attended the same school. Dlamini's presence was perceived as useful in persuading Buthelezi to accept peace talks.

The meeting was less formal, which made it easier for the delegation to express their case. Nuttall felt that the informal nature of the meeting made the Ulundi mission a success.<sup>55</sup> The outcome of the meeting was considered a positive step towards peace at a time when all hope was lost. Nuttall noted:

Buthelezi agreed, with the support of his cabinet, to ask one or two of his colleagues to meet at any agreed venue with the UDF and COSATU for an initial exploratory meeting. Added to this, he indicated his readiness for meetings thereafter to be at alternate venues, such as Ulundi and the COSATU headquarters.<sup>56</sup>

After the Ulundi visit, a scheduled meeting between Natal leaders of Inkatha and UDF and COSATU was hosted by the NCLG in the Anglican diocesan office, with Bishop Nuttall in the chair.<sup>57</sup> Viewed from a different angle, the Anglican Church was part of the bigger mediation picture due to its close and long-standing association with the Zulu monarchy. For instance, Chief Buthelezi was an Anglican and Alphaeus Zulu, a retired Anglican bishop, was a close friend of Buthelezi's, later becoming Speaker of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly.<sup>58</sup> The picture that seemed to emerge was that Anglican bishops were aware of the fact that the Zulu monarchy needed to take centre stage if the political crisis was to be resolved. In addition, a relationship of mutual trust, respect and support for Zulu culture by the Anglican Church dating from the days of Bishop Colenso was a force not to be ignored.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 62. See also ICJ (The), *Signposts of peace*, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Nuttall, same interview.

<sup>56</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Information supplied to author by Jonathan Draper on 5 November 2009. See also Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Information supplied to the author by Jonathan Draper on 5 November 2009.

Anglican churchmen were commended for being instrumental in setting up five-a-side peace talks between Inkatha and COSATU/ UDF.

With the encouragement of the NCLG, the outcome of the five-sided peace talks was a peace plan officially accepted and endorsed by the UDF, COSATU and Inkatha at their respective national conferences. It was agreed that the peace process would start with a meeting of the four presidents, including the ANC in exile. This initial meeting was to be followed by a peace conference, a peace rally, the establishment of Joint Peace Monitoring Committees, rehabilitation of victims and co-existence.<sup>60</sup> However, despite having formally agreed on ten delegates each from the ANC, COSATU, UDF and Inkatha, the Inkatha Central Committee made unexpected new demands. Included in their list of new demands were that Inkatha be allowed twenty representatives, that the number of opposition representative be restricted to twenty in total, that a letter of invitation to the meeting be issued from the president of the ANC and that the presidents' meeting venue be changed to London.<sup>61</sup>

Under the original terms of agreement, the COSATU-UDF-ANC alliance side would have a combined total of thirty representatives, while Inkatha was restricted to ten. Inkatha's point of view was valid because it was somewhat disadvantaged numerically. As a solution, Inkatha insisted that if COSATU and the UDF were to be treated as separate organisations from the ANC, then its affiliate trade union, the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), and an exiled Natal Pan African Congress should also be represented on the same basis as the others.<sup>62</sup> The other parties to the peace talks disagreed with Inkatha. The risk and fear of 'being dominated' was something Inkatha was not ready to accept and Buthelezi never trusted anyone.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, an impasse between the parties ensued and the church leaders could not easily break it up. This incident served to demonstrate the extent to which members of the NCLG were unaware of how warring parties focused attention on minor details within a mediation process.

Any further progress in peace talks suffered a setback due to Inkatha's Central Committee's declaration of moratorium at its September 1989 meeting.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, relations between the exiled ANC and Inkatha were further strained by a virulent document allegedly associated with UDF, COSATU and the ANC attacking Buthelezi and Inkatha.<sup>65</sup> In brief, the

---

<sup>60</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.156. Report for consideration by Presidents of ANC, COSATU, UDF and IFP Meeting, 4 August 1989.

<sup>61</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.24 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 4 July [September] 1989.

<sup>62</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 66.

<sup>63</sup> John Aitchison, same interview.

<sup>64</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Bessie Head Library, The Editor "Even the Soviets support such moves: guidelines for comrades", *Ilanga*, September 28-30, 1989, Ikhasi 5.

document revealed an alleged plan by UDF/COSATU to remove Inkatha from the political scene. This removal was to be accomplished through peaceful membership recruitment, as well as by force against Inkatha supporters. Buthelezi was unsurprisingly apprehensive about this alleged plot.<sup>66</sup> The NCLG's effort to convene further mediation meetings between the two parties suffered and subsequently failed. Inkatha was unwilling to assume proportional blame for the ongoing political violence and the slow pace of the peace talks. Its response to the proposed peace plan was delayed and somewhat confusing because earlier on it had given an initial nod. Goal posts were shifted when consultation had to be made with the Central Committee. Despite Inkatha's shortcomings, perhaps the church leaders could have dealt with the "thorny issue" of numbers. Earlier on, Jennings had hinted that if the Church is to mediate, it must hear from the two opposing sides of the conflict, but again his message was somehow not clearly understood and therefore disregarded.

Another factor that might have angered Buthelezi was the participation by some church leaders such as Archbishop Hurley and Bishop Nuttall in a defiance campaign march organised by the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) on Friday 22 September 1989. The MDM demanded: "We call for an end to violence in the townships, the arrest of warlords and vigilantes who terrorise our people."<sup>67</sup> In Pietermaritzburg, a similar march occurred led by clerics dressed in cassocks. Khoza Mgojo, convener of the NCLG at the time, addressed the masses that were singing freedom and church songs at the Anglican cathedral and at the police station.<sup>68</sup> Indirectly, the protest messages were attacking Inkatha. It was unfortunate not only for COSATU and the UDF but also for the NCLG because the defiance campaign marches, in which several clergy participated, portrayed the NCLG as pro-COSATU/UDF/ANC. Contributing and complicating matters was the long history of mistrust between Inkatha and prominent church figures such as Mgojo, which dated back to the mid-1980s. Philippe Denis observed that Inkatha, like the South African police, believed that weapons were kept at Fedsem. The police subsequently invaded and searched Mgojo's house.<sup>69</sup> Inkatha was reportedly unhappy that the marches were taking place whilst peace talks were occurring.<sup>70</sup> Inkatha felt demonised by the marching public,

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.38 Q. Patel, "Archbishop Hurley to lead 'freedom march'".

<sup>68</sup> Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (APC) 98 APB 4, Michael Worsnip, interview conducted by Ruth Lundie on 26 February 1998 in Pretoria.

<sup>69</sup> P. Denis, "'Men of the Cloth': the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa, Inkatha and the struggle against apartheid" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, 2, (June 2008), 322.

<sup>70</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.56 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 14 November 1989.

and further agitating their sense of perception was the NCLG's loss of neutrality due to several of its members participating in the campaign.

### **Two-a-side peace talks**

With the NCLG's blessing, Anglican bishops Nuttall and Mkhize made another reconciliatory attempt with Inkatha by visiting Chief Buthelezi at Ulundi. Asked why Anglican bishops continued trying to persuade Chief Buthelezi to come to the negotiating table, Nuttall remarked that Chief Buthelezi was a licensed lay minister in the Anglican Church, therefore he was expected to listen to his bishops.<sup>71</sup> Buthelezi's Anglican identity was something that he was never prepared to hide and some trust had been bestowed upon him by the CPSA. As an Anglican lay minister, he had served on the Council of St Peter's College from 1961 to 1963.<sup>72</sup> Temkin elucidated on the deterioration of Buthelezi's relationship with the CPSA in Desmond Tutu's time.<sup>73</sup> Tutu, an outspoken church critic of apartheid, responded with a sense of relief and excitement to the proposed political reforms announced by President de Klerk at the official opening of Parliament in Cape Town in February 1990. Tutu called himself an interim political leader whose political role would change after the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners.<sup>74</sup> Tutu's prediction was short-lived as he and others faced fresh challenges related to increased political violence in Natal. Though he held Buthelezi's leadership in high esteem, Tutu had misgivings about "his involvement in homeland politics that prevented him from being seen by most black South Africans as an authentic leader".<sup>75</sup> In spite of the current scenario, however, Buthelezi still looked up to the Anglican Church for guidance and support and it pained him when he found himself at odds with its leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu.<sup>76</sup>

The NCLG was convinced their mission to Ulundi had not been in vain as Nuttall wrote: "Yet all was not lost. We managed to persuade the Chief Minister to allow two-a-side talks to take place in order to ensure continuing contact between the parties concerned."<sup>77</sup> On board from Inkatha were Oscar Dhlomo and Frank Mdlalose, and from COSATU and the UDF were Alec Erwin and Diliza Mji respectively. The Inkatha delegation also agreed to the possibility of utilising church leaders as mediators. Both Nuttall

---

<sup>71</sup> Michael Nuttall, same interview.

<sup>72</sup> Denis, "Men of the Cloth", 309.

<sup>73</sup> Temkin, *Buthelezi: a biography*, 251.

<sup>74</sup> Daily News Correspondent, "My political role changes now: Tutu", *Daily News*, 5 February 1990, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 63

<sup>76</sup> Temkin, *Buthelezi: a biography*, 252.

<sup>77</sup> Nuttall, *Number two to Tutu*, 67.

and Mkhize offered themselves as mediators and it seems that each political side was willing to accept this offer.<sup>78</sup> Whether members of the NCLG were the best mediators or not was another matter. Apart from ongoing Christian ecumenical initiatives, support for peace was also drawn from members of other faiths including Jewish, Islam and Hindu believers.<sup>79</sup> For instance, an inter-faith service was held in the Emmanuel Cathedral in September 1989 with a call to love one another. Certainly, adherents of different faiths reckoned that political violence threatened all people regardless of religious affiliation.

Frank Chikane gave input at a meeting of the NCLG at the end of 1989. He remarked that local regional councils had been overwhelmed by the problem of political violence. Archbishop Hurley noted the complexities of bringing the opposing groups together and that it was here that the NCLG had failed. He asked whether a more effective peace process could be initiated through the SACC.<sup>80</sup> Even though there was validity in this observation, given another chance, the NCLG had the potential to influence the future course of events, despite its own internal differences. Some NCLG members believed in diplomacy while others advocated for a more confrontational approach. An example of the latter was Jennings' insistence that the Church and the NCLG should consider challenging the situation by speaking out publicly against Chief Buthelezi.<sup>81</sup> This, of course, contradicted Aitchison's prior portrayal of Jennings as a diplomat.<sup>82</sup> Jennings's current opinion was in line with the Church's call to speak the truth by naming the evil, yet it was detrimental to mediation. Chikane reiterated the importance of confidentiality and only going public if nothing positive transpired.<sup>83</sup>

If the NCLG were to continue as mediators, it was necessary to earn the trust of all parties, especially Inkatha. Anglican bishops Nuttall and Mkhize were invited by both sides to attend two-a-side talks on 25 January 1990, a sign of trust and acceptance by both sides. While both bishops accepted and attended the talks, members of the CFG – a subcommittee of the NCLG – preferred a collective participation of the NCLG to individual representation.<sup>84</sup> The question of who should take a lead in mediation seems to have remained unresolved, and we should note that this conflict of interest was a regular feature during the peace discussions. If we consider that Jennings' long-standing experience in resolving conflict was critical for the task of mediation, then the CFG that he led was well placed to facilitate peace

---

<sup>78</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.56 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 14 November 1989.

<sup>79</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.43 Inter-Faith Service at Emmanuel Cathedral, 22 September 1989.

<sup>80</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.60 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 11 December 1989.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> John Aitchison, same interview.

<sup>83</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.60 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 11 December 1989.

<sup>84</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.90 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 13 February 1990.

talks between the two conflicting parties. However, perhaps the rest of the NCLG membership was keen to use Anglican bishops since they had been acceptable not only to COSATU/UDF but also Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha.

### **Prophetic voice**

Earlier on we mentioned that the NCLG sought the attention of government as a key strategy to obtain support for their initiatives. There was a perception that the majority of police officers in Natal favoured Inkatha. In Pietermaritzburg, for example, the police were regarded as a “third force”, implying that it was an important shadow participant in the violence.<sup>85</sup> While the police denied this, several incidents seemed to corroborate this perception. David Robbins once confided: “There’s a lot of evidence of police assisting Inkatha, but we can’t report it. I mean it gets ridiculous: last year the mayor went to see Vlok and said, ‘Look, can’t you stop this?’ and Vlok said to him, ‘You mean to tell me that you don’t want Inkatha to win?’”<sup>86</sup> If the mayor received no respect from the police, neither would church leaders. A letter to Vlok from the NCLG calling for the release of detained UDF leaders in order for peace talks to resume did not receive timely attention. During a meeting of the NCLG in May 1988, it was reported that though the letter had been acknowledged, no action had been taken.<sup>87</sup> In many of the NCLG’s discussions, alleged police partiality in Pietermaritzburg received no clear answers from Vlok.<sup>88</sup> Several failed attempts were made to hold meetings with Vlok in Pietermaritzburg. The intention was to seek his support and reduce incidents of police brutality and alleged partiality. The next move was to contact the President directly as noted: “It was agreed that a request by fax be sent to the State President asking for an urgent meeting with him to discuss the Natal violence.”<sup>89</sup> He referred the matter to Mr. Vlok, who called for a meeting for all groups involved in the Natal peace talks in Durban on 25 January 1990, but the NCLG declined to attend.<sup>90</sup> The group felt that the planned meeting was an inappropriate forum for presenting their case.

A separate meeting was arranged with Vlok in Cape Town on 29 January 1990.<sup>91</sup> By the government’s acceptance of NCLG’s proposed meeting, there was, perhaps, a realisation of the significance of the NCLG by state. A memorandum highlighting major trends of political violence in the

---

<sup>85</sup> Kengridge, *An unofficial war*, 198.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>87</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.2 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 7 May 1988.

<sup>88</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.11 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 3 November 1988.

<sup>89</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.60 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 11 December 1989.

<sup>90</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.72 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 22 January 1990.

<sup>91</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.81 Minutes of NCLG Special Meeting, 26 January 1990.

Pietermaritzburg Natal Midlands region was prepared and presented. Aitchison categorically pointed out how the state, the judicial system and the business sector all appeared paralysed to stem the violence. He also reiterated Inkatha's aggressive membership drive, and more importantly, he cited incidents of alleged partisanship by the police.<sup>92</sup> The NCLG capitalised on Aitchison's extensive research on the violence and that informed them of facts on the ground regarding trends of political violence.<sup>93</sup>

The NCLG in seeking to expose the truth about who was responsible for perpetration of violence insisted on a judicial commission of inquiry, but Vlok was reluctant. One commentator suggested that there was a strong reason for his negative response by noting: "The police were naturally reluctant to accede to such a request, in the knowledge that any formal enquiry would be bound to reveal police improprieties."<sup>94</sup> The NCLG's purpose for requesting a judicial commission of enquiry was to fulfil its prophetic role by seeking to name and expose violent perpetrators. Although exposing the culprit was a positive move, there was no immediate guarantee that hostilities would cease. As a law enforcement agency, the police were in a dilemma. If violence and its perpetrators were confirmed by an enquiry, their credibility would be at stake. The NCLG persisted with this call for an enquiry to which attention was given later in 1990. The release of political prisoners including Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of all political parties in February 1990 created fresh hopes and challenges for the Natal peace talks.<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, national campaigns were organised by the Standing for the Truth Campaign, a movement of Christian activists, and supported by the NCLG denounced the apartheid government for its repressive policies. On 29 February 1988, the first interfaith protest march against the banning of civic organisations (including the UDF, and the restriction of the activities of COSATU in 1985) was organised.<sup>96</sup> The march started at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town. However, in Natal the march served a unique purpose in that it served as a platform for the public to denounce all forms of injustice, including alleged brutality by KwaZulu police, as well as lack of political toleration by Inkatha.<sup>97</sup> In 1988 two campaigns occurred in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Church leaders Archbishop Hurley, Bishop Nuttall and others were at the forefront. The involvement of NCLG members

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> John Aitchison, same interview. See also Michael Nuttall, same interview.

<sup>94</sup> Kentrige, *An unofficial war*, 128.

<sup>95</sup> A.V. Minnaar, *Conflict and violence in Natal/KwaZulu: historical perspectives* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1990), 50.

<sup>96</sup> *Standing for the truth*, March 1991, 3. This booklet explains the history and activities of the Standing for the Truth Campaign for three years since it was founded in 1988. The foreword was written by the Reverend Frank Chikane.

<sup>97</sup> NDA, Letterhead of the Standing for the Truth campaign.

and other clergy was meant to show solidarity with the victims of the ongoing violence. One of the campaigns supported by Standing for the Truth lasted a week. The campaign was guided by a Christian ethos and began with biblical devotions that focused on "Liberation and the Struggle for Justice and Freedom" as a theme.<sup>98</sup> The campaign was designed in such a way that every single step was guided and explained. How people of other faiths were to be accommodated was not clear. The major focus was on Christian communities to whom Bible readings, devotional reflections and prayers made sense. This initiative by some sections of the Church was one way of invoking God's name in the repressive and volatile situation that they found themselves in with the hope of receiving God's favourable intervention.

Many church leaders naïvely thought that by participating in the marches they would proclaim a prophetic message. They were unaware of the negative impact of their action in terms of its potential to undermine their claim to mediation neutrality. Urban areas offered the most conducive environment for such marches because of the large numbers that supported the ANC. Inkatha and Chief Buthelezi were often publicly vilified during the marches, and this compromised the neutrality claim of the NCLG because the media would display pictures of Hurley, Mgojo, Nuttall and other clergy at the forefront of the marches. In response, Nuttall explained that organisers of such marches were tactful, in that they often approached church leaders to join in and be at the front of the marches so as to give respectability.<sup>99</sup> It was possible that many of the marchers were not Christians and the presence of church leaders was to create a face. However, some of them were keen to play this role as part of the fight against apartheid's repressive laws and the call for freedom and justice for all. It also attracted both local and international publicity, thereby boosting the image of the church leadership involved in the peace initiative.

It is not easy to assess the effectiveness of the marches organised by the Standing for the Truth Campaign as a prophetic strategy at the church or parish level, but the use of pre-planned liturgies that focused on peace was meant to draw congregations to social-contextual challenges. The history of such liturgies was traceable from the days when the first Standing for the Truth campaigns was launched in 1988. Members of the NCLG were probably convinced that citizens, given correct orientation, could positively influence the situation by calling for an end to political violence. Church services were encouraged to focus on peace, love and justice.<sup>100</sup> Consciously or unconsciously the NCLG's actions were in line with tenets of prophetic

---

<sup>98</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.145 Standing for the truth campaign, June 1990.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Nuttall, same interview.

<sup>100</sup> Krentz, *An unofficial war*, 129.

theology as outlined in *The Kairos Document: the challenge to the church*.<sup>101</sup> The 1985 document was developed and published by the Institute of Contextual Theology and served to call the Church to engage critically with the forces of apartheid in the South African context. The public was kept informed about the NCLG's calls for an end to political violence in Natal through press statements in the local newspapers and the NCLG issued strict publication instructions. For instance, the editors of *Ilanga*, *Natal Mercury*, *The Natal Witness*, *Sunday Tribune*, and the *Daily News* were approached and given specific instructions for a pastoral letter dated 17 July 1989, to be published on the 6 of August 1989.<sup>102</sup> Part of the letter read:

As Church leaders we commit ourselves to be agents, wherever possible in this process of healing and restoration. We take our stand on the deep reconciliation which Jesus has accomplished through his blood shed on the cross ... We ask for daily prayers for the peace talks, both publicly and privately, within the life of our churches. In this way we shall be united with God's heart of love, peace and truth, and new hope will be released into the lives of our people.<sup>103</sup>

In this and other similar attempts, the NCLG made use of the media to inform and positively influence public opinion. One particular press statement read: "Enough blood has been shed in the political struggle in South Africa. As a Christian nation we must begin to act like Christians and love our neighbours – not kill them! We must work together for the future of our children."<sup>104</sup>

Although the NCLG sought to be a prophetic voice in the context of political violence, within the wider Church, the reality on the ground was different.<sup>105</sup> An analysis of reactions to such letters by members from within the church leaders group, however, showed mixed reactions. For instance, Bishop Paul Mngoma of the Catholic Diocese of Mariannhill in a letter to Nuttall indicated that priests in parishes under his diocese were only comfortable to read pastoral letters published by the South African Catholic

<sup>101</sup> The Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), *The Kairos Document: the challenge to the church*, Revised Second Edition, (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1986). 18. See also DN/DR/B/17.15.1.92 NCLG Pastoral Letter, 1 March 1990.

<sup>102</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.32 Bishop Michael Nuttall to Editors of *Ilanga*, *Natal Mercury*, *Natal Witness*, *Sunday Tribune*, *Daily News*, Re: NCLG Pastoral Letter, 28 July 1989.

<sup>103</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.23 Minutes of NCLG Meeting, 3 July 1989. See also DN/DR/B/17.15.1.31 NCLG Pastoral Letters on the Natal Peace Talks, 6 August 1989. See also DN/DR/B/17.15.1.66 NCLG Pastoral Letter on the Natal Violence and the Peace Talks, 19 November 1989.

<sup>104</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.92 Press Statement by NCLG, 13 February 1990.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Bishops' Conference (SACBC).<sup>106</sup> What is striking is the fact that Bishop Mngoma's name appeared under signatories to the letter. Probably the question of how much respect was given to the NCLG by local clergy was at stake. We may not be surprised by this response because records of minutes did not indicate Mngoma's attendance at meetings for the period under review. Another similar but different response was noted from Rev. James Elias of the North Durban Presbyterian Church also member of the NCLG. Referring to the pastoral letter of November 1989, he not only discouraged its use but also further argued that the name of Jesus was missing. He also accused church leaders of not excommunicating believers known to be involved in the violence.<sup>107</sup> In the two cases cited above it was likely that copies of the pastoral letter were not widely acclaimed. On the contrary, Stanley Mogoba who was the presiding bishop of the MCSA expressed appreciation upon receiving the pastoral letter. He noted: "The practice of a common pastoral letter on common community and public issues is a very good one and I hope it can be repeated many times."<sup>108</sup> From these cases, we appreciate some of the dynamics inside the NCLG and how they impacted on initiatives toward peace in the province.

### Conclusion

It may be unfair to judge the NCLG's work as either failure or success. I have also attempted to show some of the challenges encountered by the church leaders, especially in dealing with Inkatha and the South African government. It has emerged from the discussion that the church leaders were partly to blame for the slow progress in mediation, a fact which some of them openly acknowledged. Inkatha was often vilified because church leaders had their biases towards the COSATU-UDF-ANC alliance, and this was a limitation.<sup>109</sup> What probably limited the NCLG's achievements were the vested interests of the individual politicians and respective political parties they dealt with. Telling the truth, aka, being prophetic meant naming the evil. Church leaders seemed to have clearly understood this as part of their calling and vocation. The extent to which the NCLG balanced the mediation and

<sup>106</sup> See DN/DR/B/17.15.1.26 Bishop Paul T. Mngoma to the Rt. Revd Michael Nuttall, 8 July 1989.

<sup>107</sup> See copy of letter attached to DN/DR/B/17.15.1.58 Revd James Elias, Moderator of the Presbytery of Durban to The Rt. Revd Michael Nuttall, 8 November 1989.

<sup>108</sup> DN/DR/B/17.15.1.29 Revd Stanley Mogoba, Presiding Bishop of the MCSA to Bishop Michael Nuttall, 28 July 1989.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Nuttall, same interview. See also Paddy Kearney, same interview. See also John Aitchison, same interview.

prophetic roles was perhaps the most challenging part of the political engagement.<sup>110</sup> This has to be understood from an observation that they were only responding to a crisis for which they might have been least prepared or equipped to handle.

In concluding, we note that while the mediation process was long and in some ways a failure, the NCLG had some limited achievements. The NCLG was able to bring politicians to a joint negotiating table to discuss the subject of violence in KwaZulu-Natal. Church leaders were able to access and engage politicians from the opposing sides, and therefore able to some extent to deposit in the minds of the respective opposition an alternative view of the political violence. The NCLG deserve public recognition for having drawn the attention of South Africa and the world to political violence in the Natal province and the KwaZulu homeland. These were ordinary church leaders engaged in full-time work in their respective parishes and organisations. That they found time to talk about political violence and pursue peaceful solutions was not only or always because it affected their congregants or parishioners, but because of a desire for peace, justice and freedom. Though peace did not come immediately, members of the NCLG deserve public recognition for their endeavours under challenging circumstances. The NCLG's mission to Ulundi had been marked by a number of setbacks but the several contacts made with both the IFP and its rivals should be considered as seed for peace in Natal in the near or distant future. Perhaps the overall work of the NCLG should be evaluated in the context of building towards South Africa's democracy. It could be of further interest to investigate and analyse the activities of this group beyond 1990.

---

<sup>110</sup> Paddy Kearney, same interview.

