

# UNZONDELELO

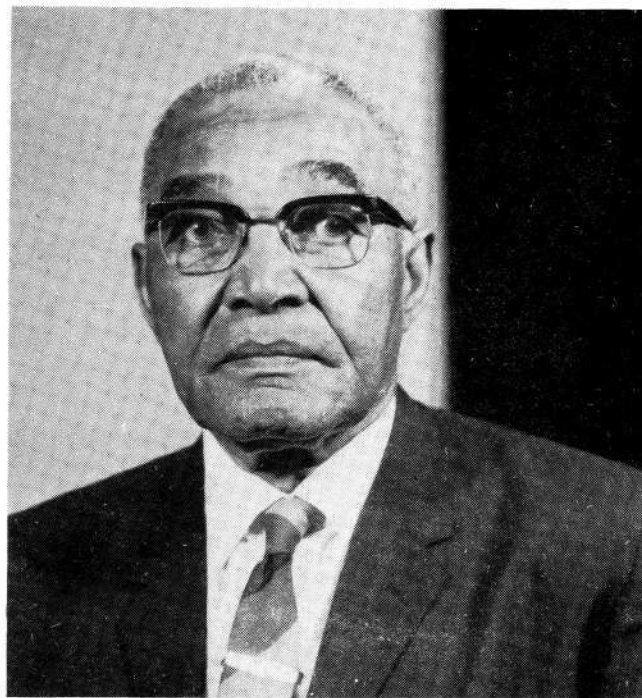
by Selby Msimang

Nzondelelo is the name of a society or should we call it the evangelical society founded and organised by the first African christian community under the Methodist Church in Natal.

It would be appropriate at this stage to give a brief history of events which led to the formation of Nzondelelo.

In about 1834 the King of Swaziland, King Mswazi, sent emissaries comprising ten men to find missionaries and invite them to come to Swaziland with a big Book (He called it Umqulu). These men found the Rev. James Allison on the Caledon River at a place called Mparane (somewhere between Bethlehem and Ficksburg—perhaps where the town Foursburg now is). Allison took with him ten evangelists, namely: Job Kambule, Johannes Kumalo, Jacob Shabalala, Jonathan Xaba, Samson Mthembu, Thomas Molefe, Abraham Malgas, Abraham Twala, Barnabas Mtembu, Reuben Caluza, Adam Molefe and Daniel Msimang. They formed an enthusiastic and fiery team. Unfortunately their work in Swaziland was interrupted by the outbreak of civil war which compelled Allison to withdraw and migrate with no fewer than one hundred Swazi converts with whom he settled at Indaleni until he resigned from the Methodist Church. Leaving Indaleni, he came to Pietermaritzburg where he negotiated and purchased the farm Welverdiend in extent 6,000 acres on which he established the present Edendale Settlement, in 1861. He remained in Edendale for a period approximately ten years during which he was engaged in adjusting the affairs of the Edendale syndicate up to the stage when every purchaser in the community obtained his deed of transfer of the land he had purchased. During the whole of this period the community of Edendale was not allied to any denomination until after the departure of Allison who went to establish a new mission under the Presbyterian Church at Empolweni on the way to New Hanover. Then it joined the Methodist Church. The syndicate had provided land for mission work generally and had it registered in the name of trustees. There was a time when the Conference of the Methodist Church adopted a resolution authorising the sale of one of the properties set aside for mission work without the consent of the Edendale owners or their descendants. Two of the descendants approached a firm of lawyers in Pietermaritzburg to interdict the Church from selling the property and succeeded.

The name "NZONDELELO" means or bears a meaning more profound than what the Missionaries attempted to say when they gave it to mean "Natal Wesleyan Native Mission". It is derived from a translation by the Rev. Davies of the Gospel according to St. John 2:17 reading "The zeal of thine house has eaten me up". The Rev. Davies was a master of the Xhosa language—and founders of Nzondelelo felt consumed by the zeal to spread the gospel among their people.



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The movement started miraculously, bursting out simultaneously at a number of centres. In the Ladysmith District a group of African Methodists had gone to Jononoskop on a mission. While there they felt time was ripe for the appointment of fulltime evangelists and there and then a resolution was taken to the effect. To the surprise of everyone, the same decision was, almost at the same time, taken at Edendale, Verulam and Indaleni near Richmond. Each centre sent out communication thereof, whereupon a meeting was convened at Edendale. This was in 1874. The Chairman of the District Committee of the Methodist Church was then the Rev. J. Cameron. The moving spirits of the movement were Daniel Msimang, Nathaniel Mathebula, Stephanus Mini, Cornelius Matiwane and others. The organisers of the movement decided as a first step to apprise the chairman of the district of the Methodist Church of the proposed formation of an evangelical society and of the fact that meetings were being convened for the purpose. Daniel Msimang and Nathaniel Mathebula were sent as a deputation. The most important reason advanced in support of this gigantic step was the marked lethargy of the missionaries to go out in the country to preach the gospel. Missionaries became greatly uneasy and unhappy about this project. They began to think of a counter movement as they feared that what the Africans had in mind would lead to secession.

The first Nzondelelo meeting was held at Edendale in August 1875 when a sum of £100 was raised, and in order to assure the Missionaries that there was no thought of secession, the chairman of the District, the Rev. J. Cameron, was made treasurer of the fund. At this meeting the Synod had sent representatives to acquaint themselves of what was developing. The Rev. Cameron died just at this period when there was tension and suspicion particularly among the missionaries.

The second conference was held in Verulam on the 8th August, 1877, at which another sum of £100 was collected. The Synod was represented. It was to the later conference held at Indaleni that the Synod sent a delegation of three missionaries, viz: Rev. O. Watkins, D. Eva and S. H. Scott. The deputation from Synod had come with a proposal of an establishment of a high school in Natal. Nzondelelo did not discourage the idea of establishing a school but maintained that **their** society was formed for a very special purpose, namely: to spread the Gospel of Christ by all means possible; but that if the Church could build a school they would make their children available at all times. Eventually it agreed that the matter should go to Synod which would lay down conditions governing the operation of the Society.

There was a time when Synod almost decided to reject the society, arising from the fact that Nzondelelo had, without the knowledge or authority of Synod appointed an evangelist at Jononoskop. This was averted by Nzondelelo pleading it had not made the appointment but had sent a young man to look after the station in the meantime pending the appointment by Synod of an accredited evangelist.

The Synod held in January 1878 approved and laid down certain rules under which Nzondelelo would operate and Nzondelelo was given permission to raise funds at all Mission Stations.

The first effort of Nzondelelo was in 1880.

In that year it recommended to Synod that Daniel Msimang be sent to Swaziland to revive the work which was interrupted by the outbreak of civil war in 1834 or thereabout. About 1890 Daniel Msimang who had then been ordained a full minister of the Church under the Transvaal Synod called for an assistant minister owing to the magnitude of the work covering the whole of Swaziland whose boundaries at that time extended to Amersfoort and Ermelo and in the East included a very wide area into Zululand. His son Joel Msimang was sent about that time after having received his ordination.

One of the important achievements of Nzondelelo was the inculcation among converts of the idea of land purchase for the purpose of the establishment of mission stations. Quite a good portion of African owned land in the Northern Districts of Natal which has been declared black spots was acquired by syndicates organised by Nzondelelo evangelists.

On the question of education, Nzondelelo was foremost in support of any promotion of educational projects. There was a time when the standard of education in Natal was considered inferior, Nzondelelo members sent their boys and girls to the Cape for education. That prompted missionaries to think seriously about providing training institutions in Natal.

The people of Edendale could not wait much longer. They got together and began making bricks for the building

which became the Nuttall Institution. In the course of building Synod deputed the Rev. Nuttall to examine the work which was already in progress. He discovered that the workmanship was not up to standard and feared the building would tumble down. He then took over. Broke down what had been erected and started building from the foundation. Nzondelelo had raised the sum of £600. Unfortunately money would not permit the erection of a girls section of the institution which had to be abandoned. About 1908 the Government supported by farmers protested against the education of black people, insisting that they should be taught artisan-ship—and yet would not provide schools for such training. The agitation had become so formidable that the government had to withdraw all grants which led to the closing of the Nuttall College.

By this time Nzondelelo had established no fewer than 92 mission stations in Natal. When the Rev. Robert Mashaba was imprisoned in Mozambique and exiled to some Island, Nzondelelo provided a substitute at the expense of the society.

In 1880 Nzondelelo was visited by the Rev. Kilner with a fund raising scheme for promotion of evangelism in South Africa, proposing that if each member of Nzondelelo would subscribe £1 the Church would add £1. Nzondelelo at once contributed £500. The Rev. Kilner established the school near Pretoria named after him, i.e. Kilnerton. He returned with another appeal to help the mission in Swaziland and offered £500 and Nzondelelo contributed another £500.

In 1891 Nzondelelo offered to the Synod an amount of £293. 13.4 to subsidise 17 mission stations and in 1897 contributed an amount of £338 as a subsidy for 18 mission stations and in addition supported the Nuttall Institution at the rate of £50 a year and further lent the College £600. When Fort Hare started Nzondelelo in 1923 made a contribution of £50. In 1954 Nzondelelo authorised the investment of £5000 to the Methodist Connexional Office so that interest could be used for other developments.

Only recently Nzondelelo supported a project proposed by the Rev. E.Z. Sikakane for the establishment of the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre. Land was required for this project and Nzondelelo bought ten acres of land at Edendale and supported the Rev. Sikakane by an annual grant of R1000. Since then Nzondelelo has been granted a piece of land in extent ten acres by Mr. M. E. Kambule of Jobstown, New Castle in memory of his parents—founders of Nzondelelo among others. A committee representative of all sections of the population of Madadeni and other areas in the District of Newcastle has been constituted to form the Administration Board of the Simeon Kambule Memorial Social Centre. The gift has been enthusiastically received by the community and it is hoped the whole district will derive nothing but good from it. □