

Reverend B.K. Dlodla.
Inanda Seminary Governing Council Chair, 1965-1981.
Interviewed in Durban, 20 March 2009.

To begin, I was wondering if you could give some background on your history and links with the UCC, and how you came to be involved with Inanda Seminary.

Well, I was a pastor at Inanda for six years, from 1958 until 1965, and then part of that time I spent as chaplain to the school, and when I went to Durban here [at the Beatrice Street Church, where he has been minister since 1965] I became a member of the Governing Council of the school and eventually I was appointed chairman of that school committee or school board, for a period of about fifteen years.

When was that exactly that you were chairman?

I can't remember precisely the date, but this was following after Dr. Edgar Brookes who was the previous chairman of the board, and then another man took over, I can't remember his name... Then of course while busy in the work of the church I was busy in the work of the UCCSA throughout South Africa. I became a member of the executive and also, eventually, I was elected as chairman or president of the denomination, in 1976. Then I visited the United States in 1977, from about August to December, I cannot remember precisely the dates... And fortunately this time when I came to the United States was almost exactly 25 years after I had been there before. I trained at Bangor Theological Seminary for two years, 1952 to 1954 [on an American Board bursary]. The Consulate General that was resident here in Durban, hearing about my visiting the United States and asking for a visa, said, 'How about becoming a government visitor during that period of time, for no less than twenty one days, during which time you would travel at the expense of the government. So I could travel anywhere I wanted to go and submit the bills to the government, which was a tremendous experience, really. And I visited a lot of places in the States in that year, it was, yeah, 1977. I visited churches and various other institutions, addressing people and communities about African affairs in general and particularly in South Africa... I had gone there representing my church, as the head of the church, representing my church to the United Church of Christ in the States. And when that period of my engagement with the church community was over, the government took over my visitations.

So how long were you on the Inanda Seminary Governing Council?

I remember I was chairman for fifteen years, but unfortunately I have not kept that in my memory, the precise date.

I'm mostly interested in your perspective as a member of the governing council for your insights into how Inanda Seminary managed to stay afloat financially and politically in the climate of apartheid South Africa. During that time we had a lady—I can't remember her name now—who was an American missionary, who was commissioned to solicit funds from various sources, one of which was Germany, where they had something they called Bread for the World. And she was enlisting

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substantial funds for Inanda Seminary, she raised quite a lot of money, I can't remember how much it was, but it helped very substantially.

And in terms of funding from KwaZulu? I know there were some efforts to get funding from the KwaZulu government.

Yes, yes, we had a minister one time visiting us, but not precisely at Inanda. We had a meeting with him in the Education Department office here in Durban... So, at that time, the KwaZulu government was under the IFP, and they also gave us a donation, although I can't recall how much they gave us.

You also came to the school to give sermons, right?

From time to time, yes, although that's no longer happening, maybe they are more interested in the younger ministers. I used to go there preaching from time to time, yes. And of course I was also involved in other ecumenical circles. We had the organization of churches around here in Durban, the Church Council, of which I was also chairman for quite awhile... I was also involved in the South African Council of Churches for a number of years, representing the UCCSA, the United Congregational Church.

Since you were involved with Inanda Seminary for such a long period of time, I'm curious to hear your opinions about the differences between the school under different principals, during different times, from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Some of the things that we tried to establish— because as you know, Inanda Seminary is a school for girls— during my time, I think I'm not mistaken here, we effected the change of principalship, rather than maintaining the feminine leadership we engaged male leadership. We had Mr. Lewis as principal, and Mr. Zondi, and Mr. Aylard— which was quite a big change, really, in the lifestyle of Inanda Seminary.

And do you think that was a positive change for the school?

I should think so—bringing in a new feature, really, and having to engage male services in a predominantly female environment.

How did the involvement of American missionaries and American staff members change over the years?

There wasn't very much change, really, because the United Church board continually subsidized the school financially... but as far as I could recall, there was no change really, although the United Church board was then more involved in the affairs of the school that I imagine it is these days, because we had a constant appointment of missionaries to Inanda Seminary at that time, which of course brought in some capital.

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I've heard some things about it being difficult for American missionaries to get their visas renewed, stuff like that, in the late 1970s. What do you remember about that?

I can't remember who it was for whom I had to intervene, and it still did not help to effect the extension of the visa of his tenure here. I can't remember who, but it was a male missionary...

Is there anything you remember about changes in the student body over the time you were involved with the school? Where they were coming from, what their interests were?

Well, one thing that I may tell you, I wasn't directly involved with the day to day activities of the student body... We were having students coming from Johannesburg, Eastern Cape, Swaziland, Lesotho, and sometimes we got students coming from South West Africa, which is now called Namibia. In fact at one time a student from that area became head prefect.

What contribution do you think Inanda Seminary made to women's education at that time?

As in all other times, Inanda Seminary has been producing students of unique leadership characteristics, and many of them became involved in political spheres, becoming leaders in all spheres of life and affecting the broader public... but unfortunately we haven't had the privilege—these products of Inanda Seminary should have expressed their appreciation for the education they received at Inanda by making substantial contributions to the school... These people have been earning substantial sums of money, and instead of looking back and making contributions to the institution that brought them up, they totally forget until they are invited to come and address the public. I don't know, I thought if I had an opportunity to speak at that gathering [the school's recent 140th anniversary event] you would want to show my appreciation of the contribution that you received from the school. And some of the previous missionaries, when they went back, the solicited funds from the churches to help the school life, and that is not a habit of our African people to do, to show their appreciation for the school that has provided a contribution to their upliftment. I don't know whether it's lack of encouragement or lack of intuition.

Were you involved in the late 1990s with old girls' efforts to revitalize the school?

My participation wasn't very vital at that time because I was just an ordinary member of the Governing Council. Mrs. Sangweni was the chairperson of the Governing Council.

Are there any other changes that you've seen over time in terms of changes in the relationship between Inanda Seminary and the surrounding community?

One thing that I've forgotten to mention is that Inanda Seminary at that time involved the student body in the community. Girls would go out visiting various areas in Inanda, teaching Sunday School, which is not happening I suppose these days. It was a wonderful thing to see Inanda girls going out into the surrounding areas... it reminds me of my schooling at Maphumulo, which was way back in the 1940s. I used to go out into the community, teaching and preaching

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and organizing Sunday School groups, which helped a great deal to improve the social relationships of people... And there was much less crime in those days really because of that influence, because of the educational institution being involved in the teaching of the community in the right ways of living, especially among the young people.

And when do you think that changed, when the involvement of Inanda Seminary in the community started to wane?

I wouldn't know really when it started to drop, because that also predominantly depends on the school leadership, or management. If the school is focusing its attention as well to not the educational side of things, but also the community way of living, that makes the school more prominent in its role as an institution.

And do you have any family members who attended Inanda Seminary?

Well, one of my younger sisters who is late attended Inanda, but not for long.

And did you go to Adams? Where did you go to school?

I trained for the ministry at Adams College in 1949 to 1952... There were nine of us in that class, and in 1951 we went to train in Johannesburg in social services, doing social work.

Oh, at the Jan Hofmeyr School?

Yes, at the Hofmeyr School, under the principalship of Dr. Phillips.

Dr. Phillips' wife, I believe she came to Inanda Seminary to give talks on sex education and such.

I believe that was so, but I'm not so clear on that side of it.

So you've been involved with a lot of these American Board institutions over the years.

Exactly.

And after Adams College passed over to government control, what impact do you think that had on the position of Inanda Seminary within all of these American Board institutions?

Well, I really wouldn't have any recollection on that, because although Adams College and Inanda Seminary were sister institutions, I didn't really see much influence of one institution upon the other, excepting that the missionaries oftentimes had missionary conferences where they deliberated over matters affecting their work here in South Africa... With the removal of missionary enterprise, that to a certain degree limited the relationship between the two institutions.

So Inanda became more involved with Ohlange?

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In a very limited manner, really. And I suppose you can appreciate because one school being girls and boys and the other only the girls. I suppose that you can see it doesn't pose a space for a close relationship.

Also, in terms of Bantu Education, what was the political climate like amongst staff at Inanda Seminary? Were people outspoken about apartheid?

As far as my memory serves me on that, a lot of people were ill at ease, really, to reflect their positions, because it wasn't a happy experience, really, especially to be landed in the hands of the Special Branch. So a lot of people were reserved, they wouldn't openly express their opinion or feeling about the situation as it was, excepting me, I was very vehement, I just didn't have any fears about anything, really. In fact it made me quite angry to note that people were imposing that separate development on people and suppressing others because they wanted to impose a way of life which was, truly speaking, inhuman. A lot of people were very conservative about the expression of their feelings on the situation then, as I've said, because of fear of consequences. It wasn't a nice time at all. And some of the people thought probably I had some relationship with the government that made me not to be victim of the system. The way they heard me speak openly against apartheid, and yet not finding me involved in the legal processes, they thought probably somehow in the government I must be having some relations with the government. And I said never, never, I would never betray my people for whatever.

So you spoke against apartheid in your sermons, or in—

Even in public addresses, I would speak quite openly, denouncing it, totally, without any fear of repercussion. And I used to tell them that you will die out and I will remain, because I know I'm standing for the truth. And where are they?...

Were you not involved with any formal political organizations?

Never. I've never been, and up to this present day I'm not involved in any political sphere. I just prefer to remain what I am and speak the truth as it should be spoken... And surprisingly, when I came back from the United States, I was invited by the army—the then-army of the Nationalist Party, which was all whites, because there were no black men involved in the military sphere, in the military service—

This was 1977, when you were invited?

Yes... And they asked me to address them. I wasn't prepared at all, because I had in my mind decided that whatever I'm saying, anywhere, something I shouldn't be frightened of, because it's a reality. And I told them, you people are here to defend the people of this country against any attack from anywhere, and I presume that your role is not to choose who you protect, but to protect the country and its inhabitants. And I knew that they called me having heard—because I

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knew that everywhere I went in the States, there was someone listening who was representing them and listening to what I was saying. And I said, whatever I said, I am not ashamed of, because in future it will come out predominantly—that this country belongs to all of us, and not to blacks, or to whites, it belongs to all South Africans. Why should we discriminate? We are all human beings... It's God's creation... The land belongs to all of us.

And what was the response to that?

Oh, they clapped their hands. They clapped their hands...

Did other people on the Governing Council, or other preachers at Inanda, share your views, or were there differences?

I wouldn't know, because I never bothered to find out. But I have heard very complimentary remarks from those who listened to me while they were still students at Inanda Seminary... One other thing that I've nearly forgotten, one thing I said to the Governing Council: 'You people are aware that these girls are learning to be participants in the community, or communities. Why don't you have time for girls to work in the gardens and learn to use the soil to grow something?'