

Church tragedy: nine injured as lightning strikes – again [South Africa]

By Lulamile Feni -

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Lightning struck a Tsomo community again last week as they were preparing for the funerals of its last victims only days before. While family of Thembisile Justice Dlabane were cooking in preparation for his funeral over the weekend, lightning struck the Dlabane homestead, injuring a further three family members and six villagers.

They are now living in terror.

Dlabane, a church steward in the United Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and three others who were killed when lightning crashed into the Luzuko Society church hall at KuNgceza village near Tsomo, were buried at the weekend. His family, still traumatised by the deaths, were deeply disturbed by the further injuries and devastation in Sobotini village near Tsomo on Monday of those preparing food for the funeral prayers.

On January 15 lightning struck the new church, killing Dlabane, 76, Nozuko Ntozini, 52, Noright Qhesha, 60, and Nophelo Mvikweni, 56, and injuring many others including the new Tsomo Circuit superintendent Reverend Zanoxolo Ngcephe and his wife Nomakula. Dlabane's daughter Philiswa Dlabane said: "At about 4pm on Monday the lightning struck our two houses. My brothers were in the eight-room house. There was a storm and they heard a big bang. A ball of fire hit the floor in the sitting room and bounced to the wall and roof before quickly exiting. Nobody was injured.

"In the rondavel there was a group of young women cooking. A few of them were slightly injured when the lightning struck the same time as the one that hit the house. Now we are living in fear."

Three of the four victims were buried at their homes on Saturday while Dlabane was buried yesterday. Dispatch was present at the Saturday funerals and witnessed about 20 church ministers, led by Tsomo circuit superintendent Reverend Zanoxolo Ngcephe, converging on the Dlabane homestead to conduct a cleansing ceremony with prayers and comfort for the frightened and bereaved family. Dlabane's widow Nowezile Dlabane told the Daily Dispatch lightning had struck their home before in past years but nobody was injured. SA Council of Churches's Intsika Yethu sub-district chairman Bishop Phindile Zulu blamed the strikes on God's mysterious ways.

"We can all agree that it [lightning] is the will of God, we cannot rule out elements of witchcraft. Also in church, Satan can be manipulative and disruptive and we have seen Christians fighting over church leadership positions," said the bishop. "But, let us believe only in God and not traditional healers and witchcraft," he added.

Intsika Yethu executive mayor Jongumzi Cengani was one of hundreds of mourners who attended the funeral of Ngubezulu Junior Secondary teacher Nozuko Ntozini at Emachibini village near Tsomo. The mayor assured the church and mourners that his municipality would build them a better and bigger church hall in memory of the four Christians who died shortly after covenant sermon for 2017 was delivered. Ntozini was described by speakers as "a dedicated, hard-working teacher, a loving mother and the glue that held her family together". — lulamilef@dispatch.co.za