

Methodists celebrate 100 years



The cutting of the centennial cake to celebrate 100 years of Methodist worship in Central Taranaki. With the knife is Agnes Lash, the longest serving parishioner, assisted by seven year old Deanne Minhinick. With them is the Reverend Doris Elphick, Stratford's first woman Methodist minister, who came to the parish in February from Ashhurst.

The Methodists of Central Taranaki and Taranaki East had a marvellous reunion last weekend to give thanks for their first hundred years.

Around 160 people had registered for the event and most of those gathered on Saturday afternoon, to be photographed, to greet old friends and to view the old photos and preaching plans displayed. The Centennial Cake was cut by Mrs Agnes Lash, assisted by young Deanne Minhinick. Mrs Lash was baptised by Rev. Reader in 1912 and has been active in the parish ever since. She was secretary/treasurer of the parish for many years. She is currently treasurer of the Fellowship groups.

Mrs Margaret Drake, chairman of the North Taranaki District of Synod, was to have launched the book 'Central Taranaki Methodists'. It was very disappointing that it had not yet been printed. However, Mrs Drake urged those present to order copies for the young people who in years to come would be anxious to find out more about their ancestors. Photos taken at the function can now be included in the book.

The dinner in the Midhurst Hall was very well attended. Circuit Steward Colin Mckinlay, welcomed the gathering and conveyed greetings from former ministers. Rev. Ken and Mrs Irene Cheater sent a video message from England and a tape was played from Rev. Graham and Margaret Hawkey. Greetings were read from Rev. Keith and Mrs Kath Rowe.

Registered to attend were: Rev. Bill and Mrs Norma Abbott, just back from their exchange year in England, Rev. Arch and Mrs Leslie Mackay, Rev. Charlie and Mrs Rae Bell, Mrs Elsie Moore and son Alan, Mrs Catherine Ward (daughter of Rev. Gordon Peterson), Rev. Brian Turner, Rev. and Mrs Jeff Sanders and fam-

ily, and Rev. Ashley and Mrs June Corlett.

It was sad that Birdie Rowe, an enthusiastic worker on the centennial committee had died the week before the celebrations. He was to have proposed the toast to absent friends.

The evening's entertainment was an excellent pageant master-minded by Mrs Eleanor MacDonald and composed by Mrs Ivy Hosking. Backdrops were painted by Mr Jim Taylor who doubled as stage hand. It presented a pot-pourri of life during the last hundred years, and began with an old time country church service, complete with harmonium and old wooden pews.

The congregation sang old Sankey hymns and put real pennies and half pennies in the collection plate. There was a sketch about the parson coming to dinner, followed by a parade of fashions in children's wear, bridal gowns and swim wear over the years. Gowns worn by four generations of one Methodist family were paraded. Vocal items were given by the Haywards and Faith Pauling.

Rev. Brian Turner, formerly of Douglas speaking at the Sunday service, said "Jesus can be 'the same yesterday, today and forever' and yet be relevant in every new situation." Rev. Jeff Sanders gave the children's talk. Holy Communion was served by Rev. Doris Elphick, assisted by Rev. Bill Abbott and Rev. Jeff Sanders. Mrs Megan Muter was organist. The present congregation catered for a light luncheon before visitors left for home.

Church history

Stratford was settled later than the rest of Taranaki and was all in forest in the 1840s when coastal areas had Methodist Churches.

Ministers travelled on horseback either on the Hawera Wesleyan circuit or from Waitara. In 1888 a Wesleyan Church

was built in Midhurst to commemorate the first local preacher, Alex Earle. As a youth of 18 he was teaching slum children in London before coming to New Zealand. He preached in Wanganui for 27 years before coming to Taranaki.

The Reverend James Clover rode down from New Plymouth in 1889 to preach in Central Taranaki and started the Stratford/Eltham Primitive Methodist Mission at an era which is now the Farmers carpark.

A great many Cornish people were early Methodists and a small church was built in 1891 on that site. Another small church was built in Cardiff the same year.

In 1894 the Wesleyans built a church in Regan Street, which is now the People's Activity Centre.

In 1899 the Primitive Methodist Co-op site built a large church, which was later shifted down Regan Street by bulldozers and is now the Church hall.

In 1913 the Methodist Union was formed between the primitives and the Wesleyans.

There were then two Ministers in Stratford, and one in Midhurst who covered the Eastern Taranaki area on horseback or bicycle.

The present St Stephen's Church in Regan Street was built in 1962.



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