

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION AT TIME OF RETIREMENT, CONFERENCE 2012.

- *Doris Elphick*

I am a product of the Methodist Church, past, present and future.

As a child growing up in a Methodist parsonage during the '40's I have known and experienced the Church of the past.

- I saw my father taking three services on a Sunday and then taking off in his Model A Ford for places unknown to me, across the hills to take home churches, baptisms and bible studies in isolated places within the circuit.
- I have lived in substandard parsonages where the wind whistled through every window, there was no back door, only a gate and the toilet was down the garden path.
- I saw my father retire from ministry as a young man because he couldn't afford to buy uniforms and text books for his daughters to attend secondary school as Home missionaries were paid far less than ordained ministers.
- I have been part of a church that had wonderful leadership in Sunday schools, bible Class, Easter camps, Girls and Boys Life Brigades, beach missions, choir and harvest festivals. These committed Christian folk gave young people a good grounding in the faith that has stood by many of them for the rest of their lives.
- I have seen good people, including my grandparents in the 1950's, and people of more recent times, leave the Methodist Church because they didn't agree with the direction the Church was going as she strove for justice and stood with people who had been unjustly treated and alienated.
- I am glad to belong to a church who has worked hard so that people know they are valued and restored to life and community in this life as being as important, if not more so, than saving a soul for the afterlife.
- I am glad to be part of the Methodist church of the present that is struggling to embrace change. A church that continues to speak out and act for a just world for all people and all of creation. A church that is relevant for the present and the future.
- I am glad the Church had the vision to open doors that men and women, like me, could train as Presbyters and Deacons within the Home Setting programme. What a wonderful opportunity the Methodist church has given me to struggle with issues of faith and Spirit and on-going education and sharing faith journeys with people I care about.
- I am glad that the Methodist Church has led the way for Women ministers to be accepted into Parish ministry.

- When I was appointed to Stratford, as the first woman presbyter there was some reservation from the local congregation, however, within a week of my appointment a well-known and loved leader of the Church and community died suddenly. His was probably one of the largest funerals the district had for quite some time. Afterwards people came up to me saying, we have never seen a woman take a funeral before! It wasn't long before the funeral director was ringing me, saying that Mrs So and so has died and her family would like the lady minister from the Methodist Church to take the funeral. Then other leaders in the community would ring and say, we have a special occasion coming up, would you come and lead the service, or offer prayers. Yes, to be a trail-blazer for women who would follow was a rewarding and a humbling experience.
- I am glad to be part of a Church that has evolved from the Methodist Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to an evolving Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- I celebrate wonderful people who write hymns and prayers with a unique New Zealand flavour, which speaks of God's love for creation, justice and inclusiveness.
- I celebrate the changing face of Methodism with her many cultures, diversities and races as she continues on her journey into the future.
- For the future, I have two passions I would share today. One is that we continue to celebrate and affirm our faithful elderly people in our congregations. They are concerned where the Church is going, many don't like change, and they have seen so much of it. They grieve the loss of youth among their numbers and a church that will never be as it was in the 60's. These are people of wisdom, people who pray, people who had a vision and who have held positions of leadership over many years. Yes, I acknowledge that many of them are door keepers, but they know which key opens which door, both literally and figuratively. Continue to love and celebrate these people who will continue to pray, act and love their church family in return.
- My other passion is for rural ministry. For those of you seeking appointments, look very seriously at going into the heartland, a rural parish, these people are faithful, diverse, deeply spiritual, salt of the earth people. You may have to dig deep to find it but when you do they will nurture you, share their lives with you, mentor and encourage. Rural ministry is rewarding as most congregations are made up of an amalgamation of denominations, no denominations or co-operating and Union parish, they too have much to give, but also a thirst to grow in faith that is rooted deep in the community many of them have belonged to for generations. If these Churches and congregations cease to exist then the whole community will suffer
- I am glad my faith has grown and been nurtured within the Methodist and co-operating Church family and my prayer is that the church will continue to be a force for justice, for hope, for love and to be obedient to the Spirit of God active in the world on into the next century to come and beyond, Thank you.