

**Induction Charge for Deacon Margaret Birtles
& the people of St Stephens
March 11th 2013 – 7pm**

I am a lover of stories, all sorts of stories, and in my more senior years have re discovered the power of stories written for children – that speak to adults. As a child and I am sure this resonates with you, all good stories began with **“Once upon a time....”**

Good stories have leading characters that have adventures and go on challenging journeys, overcoming obstacles and learning and discovering about the world and themselves on the way...

So this evening let me tell you a story...

Once upon a time there was a deacon named Margaret Birtles and a community of people called St Stephen's, these are our two main participants. It is also worth noting on this historic occasion that Stephen a follower of Christ a man respected, wise and filled with the Holy Spirit was one of seven men appointed by the early church to serve as a deacon. [Acts 6 & 7]

I have had the privilege of reading through the 'profiles' prepared by the participants in our story...

Margaret brings to this story a wealth of life experiences and passions related to her faith, her church life and her community life, her skills in the field of nursing and health care, her belief in the importance of family, children, and self care and gospel hospitality. She brings her diaconate heart.

With Margaret's permission I quote...

“Methodism is in my blood, having been brought up in a home where faith was important and the way we lived. God is ever present in the life I lead, sharing with others by example, rather than a ‘preaching faith’. I have a passion for acknowledging the example of Jesus in the community, as recorded in the Bible. So I take the church out into the community in everything I do, rather than keeping my theology within the 4 walls of the church.”

People of St Stephens you spoke of yourselves as bearers of hope and good news in the community. You wrote in your profile of a deep desire to work to ensure that your worshipping community is a place where all feel welcomed, and that through your life as a congregation of both Tongan and English speaking members you would have the energy and commitment to connect with the wider community.

You referred to the words from Ephesians that Anne read to us.

Eugene Peterson's 'The Message' puts it like this...

“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly.

But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift.

He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.”

People of St Stephens you bring to this story, your life experiences, your individual and collective gifts, your wisdom and your faith and the intimate knowledge of this community and as history has shown an amazing resilience to survive, take risks and seek new ways of being a church in the market place here in this community of Brookfield/Otumoetai.

Together Margaret and St Stephens you have all known laughter and tears, struggles and successes.

Tonight marks the beginning of a new chapter in your stories as you embark on a new adventure ...

Time to add some colour to our story.... *[use satin ribbons]*

PURPLE...

Here we are in the middle of Lent symbolised by the colour PURPLE...

...a colour of pain, suffering, passion and royalty...

A favourite poem of mine called 'Lent is...' includes these words...

***Lent is a time to take time
to let the power of our faith story take hold of us,
a time to let the events
get up and walk around us,
a time to intensify
our living unto Christ,
Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God!***

This evening in this service we are celebrating and committing ourselves to a fresh new ministry...

GOLD...

...a colour of warmth, light, joy, celebration, uplifting worship...

ALL essential ingredients to the journey we engage in together ~ ***“lighting up the ordinary”*** as our opening prayer said ~ being a light in the darkness...

BLUE...

...healing, peace, safety, compassion...

...and I hark back to our opening prayer again *“when you next look with compassion on the world and need mission done in your way, Lord, send us”...*

GREEN...

...growth, new life, new beginnings, fresh shoots. reconciliation...

This evening is certainly about new beginnings, new possibilities as this new partnership between you Margaret and the Church and community here is affirmed.

RED...

...ordination, induction, sacrament, fire, the life of the Spirit...

I deliberately add red last for tonight it is significant, we have an ordained deacon being inducted into a Parish through the stationing process of our Connexional church, a first. This gives me an opportunity to reflect on the diaconate.

Margaret and fellow deacons present this evening there was so much I had to leave out, so I trust you will forgive me a mere Presbyter for my brief summary!

Thank you Deacon Edna for the notes you sent from the new diaconate leaflet. Also for those who would like to read more I commend a paper written by Deacon Shirley Joy Barrow and available on the Methodist website titled *‘Diakonia, the Revolution’*.

Deacons are called by God and the Connexional church to a ministry of service from the local church into the wider community. They hold before congregations the needs and concerns of the community in outreach, prayer, and compassion and can be an advocate for change in society.

Deacons are Holy Stirrers, dancing on the edge of the Church, facing outwards, building bridges, taking church to the community, to people who don't usually encounter it, and taking the community to the church, encouraging the baptized to carry out their ministry.

A deacon is an equipper and enabler of people. Deacons help people call forth their gifts through gentle and loving encouragement, and support them to use those gifts in their own workplaces and communities.

Deacons are sent – and return to tell stories of what they have heard and seen and experienced and so play a critical role in keeping the church connected to the world, its structures and its challenges. The spirituality of the compassionate heart is central in the experience of the deacon.

Margaret we find in the words of your induction which will officially happen shortly the use of the word covenant. Firstly in the charge to you, and secondly in your response – ***“I will seek the way of Christ as I work as a deacon covenanted to serve with the St Stephen’s congregations.”***

The theme of covenant threads its way through the Hebrew Scriptures, into the Christian Scriptures and our Methodist heritage. At the very heart of the personal nature of Methodist piety, are the demanding words we use annually in our Covenant Service first used by John Wesley at Spitalfields in August 1755... ***‘I am no longer my own but yours...’***

A service where we often read the passage from Jeremiah which Ralph read tonight – ***“I will be your God and you will be my people.”***

Today, our understanding of Covenant, and what it means to be in Covenant with God, leads us to a sense of responsibility to one another within our local congregation; and it also calls us to the widest form of ecumenism – relating lovingly and responsibly to all people in church and society, and to the whole order of creation.

Tonight we mark the beginning of a new ministry - parish and deacon entering into an agreement to be the people of God and together offering their combined gifts to work for the kingdom of God here in St Stephen’s Methodist Church and the Brookfield/Otumoetai community.

As a child when the story came to its conclusion the words used were often ***“and they lived happily ever after” ...***

Not so tonight, the story is not finished, it is about the journey...

In 1920 in a periodical called ***“The Christian Advocate”***. Theologian Lynn H. Hough commented...

“...that life is a journey and not a destination; that the heart must be set upon those matters of character which are eternal and not upon those matters of sensation which pass away.”

Margaret and St Stephens you are surrounded tonight by those who offer you encouragement and support for that journey.

Margaret I give thanks tonight for your gifts and ministry, my prayer is that the colours of life that you bring to this story, may intertwine with those of this church and this community that you have covenanted to serve.

“God works by using us all, and God lives in all of us.” [Ephesians 4:6b]

Thanks be to God. AMEN

Gloria J. Zanders 11.03.2013