

Celebrating 35 Years of Anglican/Methodist Cooperation in Putaruru

On Sunday 24 June 2012, the Anglican/Methodist Cooperating Church of St Paul in Putaruru held a special service to celebrate 35 years of cooperation and also to reflect on the work of early Methodist Home Missioners in the Waikato. Invitations had been sent to previous members of both congregations and some 200 people gathered for the 10 am morning service.

The memoirs of an early resident, Mrs Ida Edmeades, were used to recall some original events, especially her visits to three local Maori Pa, mentioning deaconesses Sister Nicholls and Sister Rita Snowden, the adventures of riding a bicycle on rough metal roads for up to 20 miles to take Sunday services, crossing a river on a log bridge. Especially importantly she had quoted the words of an elderly Maori, Chief Kauia: "Before [you came] all was darkness, and now all is light!".

On a lighter note, in a simple drama we learnt of the problems involved when riding a horse to Sunday School in your best dress, and there was much laughter. The memory of picnics when a "lolly man" had sweets stuck to his coat gave our children much fun too; our own "lolly man" now in 2012 is a great-grandfather and he required a good head start to the race!

Reverend Susan Thompson, Superintendent of the Waikato-Waiariki District, preached a most thoughtful sermon, reminding us that while drawing on our bicultural past is good, we must not let it weigh us down, but rather help us look to the future with greater strength and wisdom. Reverend Fred Baker and Reverend Joan Wedding, both of whom have ministered in Putaruru in the past, read the Bible readings. Then we shared Holy Communion in both traditions, offering the Sacrament both as wine in the Chalice, as well as the alternative of grape juice in glasses.

After the service, a buffet style hot meal was shared by all; guests could move around to sit and share memories with old friends, as well as looking at all sorts of memorabilia on display, including photos and parish record books. We had a special cake which was jointly cut by a previous Vicar, Reverend Faull, and a previous Methodist Circuit Steward, Mr Bern Burnett.

The original St John's Methodist Church, still in use as a church today by the Assembly of God, was open to us in the afternoon, and many walked across the road to visit it. This building was built in just one day by men from several denominations! It was the very first Protestant Church in Putaruru, and many worshipped in it.

In the afternoon, Archbishop David Moxon was able to join us and meet everyone. Then, robed in his regalia, he blessed St Paul's Church for today and the future, moving slowly from blessing the Baptismal fonts by the door, blessing the pews, the piano and organ, and the altar. Then he blessed the office and its equipment, the kitchen and lounge, and even the bathrooms. The group moved around with him as he prayed using carefully chosen words for the blessing of each station, acknowledging the services for Christ that will be performed in each area. It was a wonderfully thought provoking liturgy.

Then it was home time for most; many people had come from as far afield as Northland or the South Island and were staying with friends or family in Hamilton and around the district. We had spent a wonderful day full of good memories.