



## **130 Years of Methodism in the Bay of Plenty.**

*As 2011 marks the 130<sup>th</sup> year of Methodism in the BOP, it was felt appropriate by the Leaders' Meeting to mark the occasion in some way. Accordingly a special service was held on Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> October to which all the Methodist congregations in the Tauranga area were invited. Pat Payne has written an account of that morning's service and that now follows:*

Clearly, the spirit of the Lord was with all the people who assembled in Wesley Church, Tauranga on October 16 to celebrate 130 years of Methodism in the Bay of Plenty. Rev Motekiai Fakatau led the service, and every voice was raised in spirited singing of the hymns, including "This, this is the God we adore" and "God gives us a future". The Tongan Choir sang an impromptu hymn at about two minutes' notice, which added colour and vigour to the proceedings. It was great to share the day with sister churches and other visitors.

One of the highlights of the morning was the presentation of the Church Banner, which had been four years in the making. It depicts most beautifully the activities and outreach of our people, centred on Jesus' message, with wine and bread and the vine as the focal point.

In 1881, when the Rev Edward Barber was appointed to the Tauranga circuit (which stretched at that time from Katikati to Opotiki), he was nearly as surprised as the half-dozen Methodists in Tauranga, who had been attending other churches. They gladly welcomed him and the church grew – as did the town population (from 1,200 to 110,000 to date).

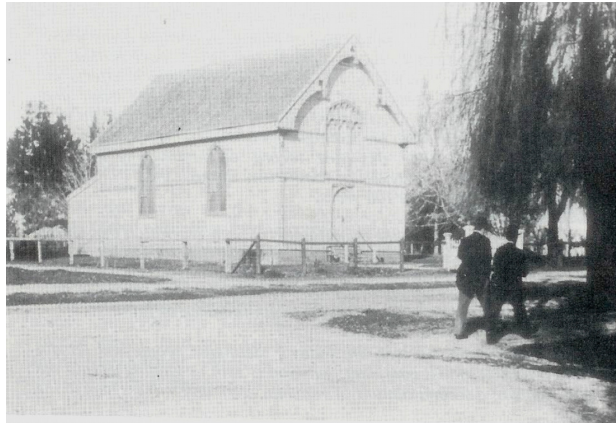
We learned of this small start, and many other aspects of the life and growth of the church through the eyes of seven members, who gave brief, absorbing and often amusing accounts of their experiences. The whole service was truly one of uplifted spirits and thanksgiving.

The rejoicing continued afterwards in the hall with fellowship and lively "networking". One important item was, of course, the cake. Gwen Ryan cut the cake, assisted by Monu'ia Fakatau. Gwen is 95 years old, and was born in Tauranga where her father was Methodist minister at the time. We are delighted to have her back here to share the rest of her interesting life with us. Monu'ia's future stretches away before her, she is six months old and the perfect foil to Gwen's more mature years!

Also in the hall was an impressive display of photos, press cuttings etc. - taking us from our Victorian forebears through all of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the many people and activities and opportunities for outreach encountered by our people in their search for ways to serve in the world.

Not the least of these records is of the fire which seriously damaged our church in October 1980. The building which rose like a phoenix was achieved by hundreds of volunteer hours

of loving labour. It resulted in a lovely place of worship, and drew the people together in the face of adversity. That spirit remains with us to this day. God be praised.



The original church in Devonport Rd, Tauranga

*The following accounts were presented during the service*

### ***Early Church History.....***

I thought I would start off our reminiscences by going back in history. After all, we present Methodists owe a lot to those early settlers and the thousands of Methodists who have worshipped in our churches over the past 130 years.

In February 1881 the Wesleyan Conference in Nelson appointed the Rev. Edward Barber to Tauranga to cover the District from Katikati to Opotiki. The appointment was a complete surprise to the few Methodists in Tauranga, who had been worshipping with other denominations in the town. The population at that time was about 1,200 persons whereas it is now over 110,000. However, it is recorded that they warmly welcomed the Barber family and provided them with a rental house, some furniture – and the loan of a cow!

The first Wesleyan service was held in March 1881 in the hall of the Good Templars Society, situated at the top of Wharf Street. This was their church home for eighteen months, until under Rev. Barber the first Methodist Church was built on the corner of First Avenue and Devonport Road (a new office building is being constructed there now). The land title was granted on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1881, hence the 130 year celebration. The church cost £620 to build with a £300 debt on it, this was cleared in 1896. Amongst the names mentioned as members of the building committee was one Major Warbrick, whose home was in the rural area of Morris St, later re-named 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and the site of our present church and Oaklands Rest Home.

I must share this event with you as recorded in the Centennial Book. On the anniversary day in 1914 the Tauranga congregation elected to raise a Sunday School building on the First Avenue site. It was erected in one day, and at dusk the assembled company sang the doxology. The hall cost £75, and one accident was recorded. Someone on a ladder dropped a hammer on Mr. Teasey's head!

My allotted two minutes are well and truly up, but please enjoy the show of photographs, albums, etc on display in the main hall. Thank God for the many dedicated Methodists over the past 130 years.

*Harry Payne*

### ***Sunday School Memories.....***

When I look back over my long association with this church, my earliest memories are of the Sunday School Anniversaries. We would practise our singing for weeks and, in the case of the girls, at least, hoping we had grown enough in the past year to justify a new outfit for the Big Day. I must admit that I was always a little envious of the friends who had pretty hair-ribbons to match their dresses, some not a million miles from here, even sporting *two* bows!

The weather always seemed to be sunny; however, I recall one particular time when there was a hail-storm, and, of course, great heaps of hail-stones required a close inspection. New shoes and socks were rather a sorry sight as we trooped back into the hall for the tea and prize-giving.

What stands out in my mind now is the memory of the love and care surrounding us. I grew up knowing the Church as a safe and loving environment, and I am still aware of the love and support of my church family today.

*Barbara Murphy*



After the fire

### ***I guess the highlight was the church fire.....***

I have been a member of Wersley for over 65 years and when asked to speak on some high-lights of these years I wondered where to start.

There were concerts – Julianne’s humerous recitals – I wish we could have a repeat some day. I was a choir member for over 40 years – singing brought such pleasure and companionship. Mr & Mrs Vosper had a cottage on the Lakeside in Rotorua and entertained choir members on occasions.

I guess the highlight of all was the church fire; a time of dismay at the disaster that turned out to be a blessing, in that it brought the whole congregation together in a new

wave of comradeship. The builders were the congregation, led by Gordon Decke, Alan Maseman, and Stan Couch. Laurie Hennessey made the sanctuary furniture and the chair arms and hymn book holders from the old pews. Norman Decke made the steel frames for the chairs while Doreen & Bruce Clark, and Syd & Mary Seely upholstered them. Many cleaned bricks so they could be re-used; the ladies provided food, and everyone who came along got a job. New communion cloths were crocheted by Irene Hearne.

Choir members held many a fund raiser for a new organ. On one occasion at a Maori Pa there was a box of baby clothes and when asked the price, I said, 'They are all sixpence'. "Right", said the Maori woman, "I'll have them. Here's sixpence". She picked up the whole box and disappeared!

Another choir story: One Sunday evening, a member came in reeking of a strong perfume. She must have had a mishap with the bottle. The anthem we sang that night was "Whence is this lovely fragrance".

I have been greatly blessed, and I pay tribute to the ministers who have helped in my life's journey.

*Leonore Decke*



Our ministers over the years

### ***The 1950's.....***

I was a teenager when I came to Tauranga in January 1950. My father had been appointed minister here. At that time, Tauranga was part of the Western BOP circuit. Although the 1<sup>st</sup> Ave church was the only Methodist church in Tauranga, he had the responsibility of overseeing Methodist activities in the BOP from Katikati in the north to Opotiki in the east. The 1<sup>st</sup> Ave church complex consisted of the church building, a detached hall at the rear along 1<sup>st</sup> Ave, and the parsonage alongside in Devonport Rd. There was a tennis court between the church and the house.

A feature of the 1950's was the Sunday mornings, when a Junior Choir led by Miss Gladys Spencer participated in the service before going to their Sunday School classes. Other leaders led the choir after Miss Spencer passed away. A senior choir sang at the evening services and the Annual Sunday School anniversaries were a highlight of each year.

By the mid-1950's there had been a substantial increase in the numbers attending the Youth Group. Our leaders, Frank & Mavis Olson, followed by Rex & Jean Herford were very enthusiastic – always busy organising Saturday social activities for us. These included regular games evenings in the hall, outings into the Kaimai and Mamaku Ranges, and sporting activities on the tennis court. Although Methodists were not allowed to have dances, we were always welcomed at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church to join in their dance evenings. On our out of town activities we usually travelled by truck, generously supplied by Mr Norman Anderson, who operated a trucking business in Tauranga. Incidentally, some of his descendants are still active members at Wesley. Over time it was not surprising that several relationships developed in the late 1950's; there were six weddings in the church, including my own. Five of these couples have gone on to celebrate their golden weddings.

To me, this illustrates the guidance and care that the Church gave us as we prepared for our adult lives.

*David Kent.*



St Stephens before the renovations in 2009

*St Stephens Church in Otumoetai is the other church in the Tauranga Parish and the history of that church was written by Colleen Dent. Her account of its opening in 1966 and its history up to the present day follows below:*

In 2001 Jean Conway wrote an article for the Link, entitled "A Memory of the Birth of St Stephens", from which I now quote.

*"St Stephen's Methodist Church was opened and dedicated by the President of Conference, the Rev. AR. Witheford on Sunday 12th March 1966 and the doors opened to the singing of the Wesley Church Choir.*

*This year 2001, marks the 35th anniversary of the opening, naming and dedicating of St Stephen's Methodist Church, Otumoetai. Otumoetai and Brookfield still had many citrus orchards and the building was erected in a large green paddock. Church Union was a very important issue of the 1960s and the joint churches planned the situation of their new buildings very carefully to cater for the promised "Union". Methodist at the top of the hill, Presbyterians at the bottom and the Anglicans at Bureta.*

*And so to serve the new community, houses and people to fill them, were built daily and an enthusiastic band of people worked to establish these buildings. St Stephen's Church was similar to early Christians - their numbers were added to weekly - mainly because of the work of the Women's Fellowship, who kept the Minister informed of new arrivals in their area and who held coffee mornings to make new friendships*

*And so it sat, this building among the grass, and a new Minister came. Sam Crawford from Ireland, who was first appointed second minister at St Columba, because it was thought perhaps Methodist and Presbyterians should join, but Sam saw it as a "takeover" not "union" (his words as spoken to the leaders of Stephen's).*

*Ron Udy and Bert Smith donated large sums to increase the buildings because the present one was too small. The "Op" shop was started, to help pay for these and by the time the Rev. Les Gilmore came, there was money to build the present church. Rev. Wesley Chambers added the paving of the car park and pews to sit in, and by the time Rev. Neil Keesing arrived, all was complete.*

*Chairman of the District  
Parish Superintendent  
Minister of St Stephens  
Church Trustees*

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Rev. Bob Allen  
Rev. Jim Conway  
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G.E. Decke, C.C. Gordon, F.P. Kirby, W.E.  
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Lay Preachers  
Sunday School Superintendent  
Bible Class Leader  
Women's Fellowship  
Organists*

*Mr W. Browne built the church and also crafted the pulpit, communion table, baptismal font and flower stands. The Women's Fellowship donated the organ, carpet, kitchen needs and Sunday School work.*

*The Women's Fellowship also sponsored the beginning of the Girls' Brigade.*

*Many wonderful people have been members of St Stephen's over these 35 years. Too many to name, but their witness is still felt among present members. There is much more*

*that could be said. Perhaps I have stirred your own memories, because a few of us still remain. Memories are precious. With our ups and downs, St Stephen's looks forward to the next 35 years. "*

Since 2001 further changes have occurred at St Stephen's. Church House became the base for a Community Centre and is currently used by Relationship Services. The Portacom, purchased with Op Shop funds, was located on the site to house a Council Project to encourage young people to upskill. Unfortunately Council funding was stopped and the Portacom has remained mainly empty.

We saw the demise of our church about five years ago and it was converted into offices for Relationship Services. The next three years or so were extremely stressful for the congregation, with services having to be held in a cold and draughty hall, with signs of builders and building going on.

We have to thank Mrs Jean Conway for the lounge. It was not on the original plans for the alterations, but she persuaded the hierarchy that we needed a space of our own for Fellowship and Church meetings, as our previous venue was at that stage the Community Centre.

In 2009 the complex was completed and we had a lovely Chapel in which to worship. It was opened by the President of the Methodist Church towards the end of that year. A number of our ex ministers attended.

Other aspects of life at St Stephen's, gleaned from a number of our members including Girls' Brigade which was formed shortly after the first church was opened. Our current Captain, Mrs Ann Booth, has been a leader for the last 30 years. She deserves a medal

Also in those early days the choirs, both adult and junior were formed. The adults - Fellowship members - were so popular they were invited to sing throughout the district, and the junior choir sang regularly at Church services. These thoughts came from Mrs Ethel Blackstock, who remembers worshipping in the Church at First Ave when she and her husband first moved to Tauranga

The Op Shop has played an important role, raising money to pay off mortgages and to provide the necessities of the Church and Parsonage.

The shop, as it is, and has been for many years, is about to change. From 1 May 2012 we are moving to St Stephen's, the new basement being the shop and the Portacom will be used for storage and sorting

For many years St Stephen's was the home to Growing through Grief but because of shortage of space they have had to move.

Through all the changes one thing has remained the same, there is a very special atmosphere at St Stephen's, commented on by all I have spoken to as I put this report together.

Long may St Stephen's continue to provide that special space in Otumoetai.

*Colleen Dent*

See picture below:



The entrance to the new St Stephen's Church