

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NAPIER.

It started in 1857 with a visit of Rev. Dr Bruce who came from Auckland to ascertain whether there was a possibility of establishing a Presbyterian Church in the area. The population of Napier at the time, 1858, was about 280 "mostly whalers and missionaries". A meeting in Munns Royal Hotel, under the direction of Mr Donald MacLean, chaired by Mr Alexander Alexander on 9th January, 1858, agreed to establish a church and to get funds for building and maintaining a church. A site on the corner of Dalton and Tennyson streets was purchased for £10 and building began. Over the years, as the population grew so did the size of the building with a number of extensions. Sadly in 1929, fire destroyed the wooden building and a new Brick Church was erected on the site.

The Church was nearing completion and was due to be opened on 11th February, 1931, when the Hawkes Bay earthquake struck on 3rd February. Fire again destroyed the building, but not the brickwork which stood on the site until 1947. While construction took place, the congregation met with the Congregation Church members in Carlyle Street, the Ministers taking it in turns to conduct worship.

A temporary wooden building was erected on the site below the brick skeleton, and was opened for worship in June 1931. As plans were not approved till March, this was a great achievement. (The Church linen used for Communion Services bears the date "June 1931", and is still in use today.)

Over the years the "temporary" building was extended with the addition of classrooms at the western end. In 1958 the sanctuary was enlarged at the Western end and this became the front part of the Church. The classrooms were moved to the Tennyson Street side of the Eastern end. The organ and choir stalls remained where they were but are now at the rear.

The building was again altered in 1991 with the addition of a foyer, and then in 2012 with an upgrade of the kitchen and lounge and addition of three offices.

MINISTRIES.

Rev Peter Barclay MA 1859 – 1865 was the first Minister. A Manse was constructed (now 6 Simla Terrace and called "Marybank" after Mrs Barclay. Mr Barclay had the lofty ideal of gathering all the fragments in both North and South Islands into one grand United Presbyterian Church. This was not achieved till 1901, prolonged in part by Mr Barclay's action over music. It was known that on at least one occasion a British Regimental Band had led the praise at St Paul's, but when Mr Barclay suggested that a harmonium could add beauty to praise a dispute arose between Minister and some members of the congregation. The matter was raised at 1862 Assembly of the Northern Church. The Assembly didn't make a judgment ruling it be left to individual congregations. When he returned to Scotland, his wife having died while in Napier and is buried in the old cemetery, he was appointed an Immigration Officer for the NZ Government.

Second Ministry. Rev George Morice, 1866 – 1872.

It is unfortunate that there are only scanty records of this ministry. Because he was a bachelor it appears that "Marybank" was sold. He was a genial, cultured and most attractive man, toiling incessantly for St Paul's and further afield, as far as Wairoa where he took services when there were five Sundays in a month. A great lover of horses, with a friend he would ride out to Clive to take an afternoon service. They rode so fast that some parishioners reprimanded him for racing on the Lord's day.

Third Ministry, Rev Dr David Sidey, 1872 – 1883.

From his induction in 1872 till his death in 1914, Dr Sidey took a conspicuous part in the life of St Paul's, the wider church and community. His Church, His religion and education meant everything to him. When he resigned in 1883, because of ill health he became Senior Minister at St Paul's at £50 per year. He became Secretary-Treasurer of Napier High School Board, and Chairman of the Hawkes Bay Education Board for a number of years. His DD was an honorary degree from Edinburgh University. He appeared to live a life aloof from all sentiment. His granddaughter, Miss Mary Lambie, Director of Nursing in NZ Dept.

of Health recalled similar advice given her by Dr Sidey. “Remember the world will only give you credit for what you give yourself – never shrink from responsibility for the power to cope will be given you.”

Fourth Ministry, Rev James Gillies Paterson. 1884 – 1898.

Mr Paterson was a remarkable man in many ways. A small man often called “Wiggie” with a great store of illustrations and anecdotes as well as a remarkable memory. His successor, Rev Asher wrote of him “He was not only a very popular and most acceptable preacher, but also an indefatigable visitor, perhaps the most diligent pastor the Parish ever had.” Woe betide parishioners who absented themselves from Sunday Services, for Mr Paterson would be after them on Monday morning. The church was twice enlarged during his ministry.

Fifth Ministry, the Very Rev. John Alexander Asher, BA. 1899 – 1935.

In a ministry of 36 years, the longest at St Paul’s, there were many highlights, but in Mr Asher’s two stand out. The first was the destruction by fire in 1929 of the original wooden church, and the destruction of the almost completed new brick church by fire following the 1931 earthquake. A new temporary wooden building and hall were erected with funds supplied by friends throughout New Zealand. The church was completed in time for the June Communion, 1931, and forms part of the present church. He was a regular contributor to “The Outlook” the Church’s national publication, but was not known for his clear hand-writing. But he enjoyed the joke when his article entitled “No Cross, No Crown” appeared in print as “No Cows, No Cream”!

Sixth Ministry, Rev Donald Neil McDiarmid, MBE, BA 1935 – 1937.

From the longest to the shortest ministry. Mission work was a great attraction for Mr McDiarmid, having been with the Sudan United Mission, YMCA Secretary during WWI in Lybian Desert, Khartoun and Port Sudan. A call from the General Assembly to be First Director of Missions, cut short this Ministry. The Pipe organ presented by Mr and Mrs Stuart came in 1935.

Seventh Ministry, Rev Stuart Cyril Francis, BA, 1937 – 1943.

Under this inspiring leadership, the congregation went from strength to strength. Being young he appealed to the young in the parish. During the war he proved himself a great comfort to parents whose sons had been killed. His known qualities made him fitted for greater tasks awaiting him at St Paul’s in Christchurch, and he was reluctantly farewelled after too short a ministry in Napier.

Eighth Ministry, Rev Angus McKenzie, 1943-1949.

Mr McKenzie, an able Maori scholar was at times a University examiner for students of Maori Language. His sermons were marked by scholarship, careful preparation with a strong evangelical note. In spite of poor health he was a sympathetic and assiduous visitor. The lectern on the North side of the church given by Mrs Pacey in memory of her husband, Arthur, organist and choirmaster, was given at this time. The demolition of the brick church caused him and the congregation great regret. Two new Sunday Schoolrooms were built on the Western end of the church, and are now the Kitchen and Lounge.

Ninth Ministry, Very Rev James L Gray, BA, 1950-1956.

Both Mr and Mrs Gray threw themselves into every phase of Church life. It was at this time the Youth block and Asher Hall were erected at a cost of £14,600. A new hall in Marewa was erected under the New Life Movement which was so dear to Mr Gray’s heart. In 1953 he became Moderator of the General Assembly and in 1956 he was called to be Superintendent in the Forward Move Programme of the Punjab Synod, India.

Tenth Ministry, Rev William R McDonald Hay, BA 1957-1981.

Possibly St Paul’s has never had such a dedicated Pastor as Ron Hay. Yet it is mainly buildings that will be remembered of this period. In 1958 the Church Centennial was celebrated and to mark the occasion the church was enlarged, and the interior turned around. The Annual Golden Thank-offering was instituted and continues to the present (2016).

The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh attended morning worship on 10th February, 1963. In 1960 a section of the wooden Cathedral was purchased to establish a building for the new charge of St Peters, (later St Stephen's) in Onekawa. The Lincoln Road Manse was ready for modernization, having been purchased in 1872, but it was agreed in 1965 to rebuild on the site. The three building projects were erected debt free. At the conclusion of his ministry, the Mayor, Clyde Jeffery, Gordon Christie MP, joined two hundred to pay tribute to the work of this much loved minister in Parish and Community.

Eleventh Ministry, Rev Colin Lloyd English, BA Lth, 1982-2010.

Early in his ministry Colin encouraged St Paul's to support the struggling Knox Ahuriri Parish by gifting \$17000 over three years. "With One Voice" became our Hymn Book. In 1983 the Napier Family Centre was established – a joint church effort in social service work. In 1987 the four Inner-City churches, St John's, St Patrick's, Trinity and St Paul's signed a Covenant to work together where possible. The Foyer, added in 1991 has been a great asset. The Lincoln Road Manse was sold in 2000. The Art Deco Service, started in 2002 continues to be well supported as does the Art Deco Fete. In 2005 St Stephen's joined with St Paul's. In 2008 the 150th Anniversary was celebrated. While some groups amalgamated new ones were formed e.g. Philemon Fellowship, a social interest justice group, and the Friday Music and Movement group for pre-kindergarten children. Now called "Jitterbugs". Truly, this period has been a time of change and new directions.

Twelfth and present Ministry, Rev Sally Carter, 2011-

Further information is contained in "The First Century" – 1858-1958, and "The Hay - English Years" 1958-2008.