

Presbyterian Parishes And The Parish of the Hutt City Uniting Congregations

A Story for the 150th Anniversary of Wellington Presbytery

First Ships

In 1840 the New Zealand Company began bringing settlers to a new country. Two shiploads of Scots arrived at the infant settlement of Wellington. About 120 sailed on the "*Bengal Merchant*", arriving in Port Nicholson in February 1840. The first party had not long disembarked when Rev. John Macfarlane held New Zealand's first Presbyterian service on the Petone foreshore. An Iona cross, dedicated on 23 February 1940, marks the site.



The memorial cross on Petone foreshore

St Stephens

Knox Church started a Sunday School at the south end of the parish in 1912 and in 1916 an "anonymous donor" gifted a section, 56 Woburn Road, in the new subdivision of the Woburn estate on which the first church was built. Later 58 Woburn Road, the site of the present church building was gifted by the Riddiford family. Mr Riddiford, a good Catholic, was a generous benefactor to what is now Hutt City. St Stephens became an independent parish in 1926 with Rev. J.E.Lopdell as minister. As the area was further subdivided the congregation grew and parented St Aidans on the Hill, Moera, (now Te Kakano O Te Aroha) and St Lukes, now part of Waiwhetu Uniting and originally a "home mission station" in 1944. As a result of Rev. Bibby's discussions with the Hon Robert Semple, the Hutt Valley Church Extension Commission was established.

A feature of the history of St Stephens in *Legacy of Faith* is the continuing interest that St Stephens has had in inter-faith relationships which is summed up by one grateful parishioner whose daughter was married with both the minister and local Catholic priest officiating at the wedding. Over the years St Stephens has had a number of able and distinguished Ministers, one of whom, the Very Rev. Neil Churcher, was given the task of working towards the unification of the congregations of Laings Road Methodist and St Stephens Presbyterian, both of whom had long standing community facing service.

St Stephens present church was built in 1955 with accommodation for over 200. The Parish supported St Aidans on the Hill until the formation of The Hutt City Uniting Congregations. Laings Road Methodist and St Stephens congregations combined in August 1997. Later this new congregation moved permanently to Woburn Road where they became known as St Marks. The historic Laings Road Methodist Church, the centre of the Methodist Parish since the early 1840's was sold.

St Aidans on the Hill

The history of this church began in 1919 when Mr J.F.Buck a local resident began a Sunday school in the old Normandale School. Later this was incorporated into the Parish of St Stephens, Woburn Road and monthly church services were begun by The Rev. J Lopdell [with a break during the decade around WWII].

In 1958 the land on which the church now stands was purchased and initially services were held in a small cottage on the property. In 1964 the building of the church commenced, with much of the work being done by volunteer labour and was known as the Normandale Church Centre. Many of these volunteers were at the same time building their own homes.

Although basically Presbyterian, it was an ecumenical congregation with people from several denominations worshipping together and this is still the case today.

In 1967 a joint use agreement was entered into by the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The congregation shared Presbyterian Ministry with St Stephens and the other denominations took regular services. The Anglicans continued to hold regular Services until 2001, even after the formation of the Hutt City Uniting Congregations in 1995.

In 1980 parishioners considering a new name for their church sought advice from Rev. George Dallard, an authority on the lives of Saints, he suggested St Aidans on the Hill which was greeted with enthusiasm by the congregation.

A small caring congregation it has many links within the community.

In the mid 1990's Normandale Playcentre was destroyed by fire. The church premises were made available for Playcentre to use until they could rebuild. Every year since, a Christmas service and morning tea has been held for the little ones and their caregivers. The Open Door programme for the Elderly is the only community project on the hill for the older generation. Recently started is a mainly music programme for the under 5's and each Thursday the building shakes with the dancing of young and old.

Stokes Valley

Bible Classes began in Stokes Valley when in 1921 the Minister at Knox Lower Hutt decided to commence a group. There were also occasional services. In 1928 a section was bought but building of a Church had to wait until after the Second World War. The Kirk was opened in 1946.



The stained glass windows at the Kirk

The idea for the stained glass windows in the Kirk originated in a lesson the Junior Bible Class were doing on church buildings. After a presentation by Audrey MacDonald, and with the support of Session and Managers, one of the parents, Barry Harlen, skilled in the craft of glass work, undertook to teach and direct the students in the project. Marilyn Roberts' brother, Vicar of a Wainuiomata church who had made stained glass windows for his church gave additional

advice. The students raised funds and worked weekly on the project. All cut their initials in the bottom layer of lead which is now sealed in the frame. The result is two windows, one a mirror image of the other and they represent Stokes Valley's hills & streams with the sun as the Light of God above all. Peter Betteridge worked with Barry to organise installation. The original windows were put back to strengthen and protect. A plaque was made/obtained by Peter van Vliet and the windows were dedicated by Rev. Ron Bichan.

The Presbyterian Church in Stokes Valley raised money by holding a barbeque at the home of the Lithgow family where now stands the Stokeswood Rest Home. Thanks to their generosity, it became a big annual event for 13 years from 1955, and was a real family affair. There was a wide variety of entertainment which, over the years, included Godfrey Bowron giving a sheep shearing exhibition, Ray Trimmer, sister of Sir John, showing how to do "the twist", a fashion show and a magician. Hugely popular was Milton and Poppy Watts with their clever version of "Annie Get Your Gun". For all this, entry per family was 2/6 (25 cents) With food and all the fun of the fair, between £1,000 and £1,500 was raised each year. The church family working together for the event, created a good atmosphere, with time and effort given gladly. Later, the dream of a new church hall was realized. Built by the church family and opening in 1962, it has been used by the whole community as well as serving as a church.

Waiwhetu

The Parish first known as Waiwhetu Presbyterian Church, and then as St Luke's, began in 1944, when it was separated from St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Lower Hutt. The foundation Communicant Roll of St Luke's parish started with 76 members, many more transferring in the following months. Community service was recognised with the establishment of Girls' Brigade, which ran successfully for 40 years, and Boys' Brigade which was the largest Company in the Wellington region in their initial stages of growth.

A wealth of church and community related activities occurred each year, the annual culmination of these often resulted in one of the special services most remembered at St Luke's, the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. Decorated poles with red and white flowers, ivy, and candles, illuminated the church interior. Entering the church was breathtaking, and the service always drew a full church.

In 1990 St Luke's produced a Mission Statement committing anew their faith and community work:

St Luke's Waiwhetu Congregation exists to be a community of those who, because of Jesus the Christ, explore, promote, share and celebrate together the worth of God, and the worth of all people.

St Luke's church, in 1994, celebrated their fifty years commemoration, with a jubilee. This included both past and present members in a weekend of fellowship and worship.

On the 22nd June, 1997, the members of St Luke's congregation, and the Waiwhetu Methodist Church, combined to form the Waiwhetu Uniting Church. Together all said:

We will stand in these great traditions. In Christ we are One. In Christ everything is made new. Thanks be to God.

Taita

After the Second World War the Government developed a State Housing area in the north of the Hutt Valley. Known locally as the "shingle pit" because of the amount of gravel and rocks on each section, Taita presented a challenge to its new residents. As part of this development they allocated two sections facing Molesworth Street to the Methodist Church on which a temporary hall was placed. In 1947 a meeting of Methodist Presbyterian and Congregational Churches decided to form a Union Parish. While Raglan had formed a Union Parish already it had never been recognised. However, when the Taita group approached the hierarchy the mood had changed and approval was given for Taita Union to become the first officially recognised Union

Parish. A multi-purpose Church Hall was then built on the Presbyterian site in Macky Street. The name St John's Union Parish was adopted in 1952 at the suggestion of Rev. Ian Dixon. From 1976 the Parish came under the Ministerial oversight of the Lower Hutt - Petone Methodist Parish. With declining rolls it was decided to close and sell the Church and in 1994 Taita Union joined Avalon Methodist Church. In recognition of this joining they changed their name to St John's Avalon.

Wainuiomata

The Coast Road Church in Wainuiomata was built in 1863. It was a part of the Petone Methodist circuit from 1909 and from 1949 to 1953 Revs. Payne and Dawson (Petone Methodist) and Rev Shaw (Eastbourne Presbyterian) maintained weekly services. A committee of Guidance was formed in 1949 to oversee the joint congregation.

This move consolidated many years of co-operative work and greatly assisted the expansion of the Wainuiomata Union Parish. The Union was officially Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist, but there were also Baptist and Salvation Army members. The Wainuiomata Union Parish was formally inaugurated on 21st June 1953.

That this new venture was established in a 90 year-old Methodist Church gave a depth and tradition to the Union Parish of Wainuiomata that was of great value in the activities and expansion of the Union Parish in the valley until the mid 1970s.

In anticipation of Church expansion, sections had been acquired by the Presbyterian Church in various parts of the Valley, as the sub-divisional pattern of development progressed. The current St Stephen's building was eventually erected in 1957-58 after 4 years of planning and scheming. It was dedicated on 9th February 1958. It is interesting to note that just as timber from the Prouse Mill was used to build the Coast Road Church in 1863, so timber from the property of another early settler (Eric Burdan) was used to build St Stephen's Church in 1958. Other buildings erected for Church purposes, were a hall in Devon St (1955-56) and a larger complex – St Peter's Church and hall, Wise St dedicated in 1963. The St Peter's hall was financed with a grant from the Anglican Church which was repaid when the buildings were disposed of in the late 1990s when the Anglican Church withdrew from involvement in the co-operating venture.

The Coast Road Church was no longer used as a place for worship after the building of the other two complexes and was used only by the Wainuiomata Art Society. After restoration of the original pews, it has been used for worship over the past 5 or so years for a few services each year when the St Stephen's complex has been hired by a Samoan Congregational Church. The care and responsibility for the building and graveyard are currently under negotiation between the Methodist Church Trustees and Trustees of the Wainuiomata Pioneer Families Trust. From 1953 to 1969 the organization and management of the Parish was largely along Presbyterian lines with the Session attending to the Spiritual side and the Board of Managers attending to the temporal side of parish matters. At a parish AGM in 1969, a Parish Council was formed by amalgamating these functions. This continued until it became a Congregational Church Council after joining HCUC.

Wainuiomata Union Parish was originally an associate member of the HCUC, having been represented throughout the formation of the HCUC Parish. It became a member and fell under the umbrella of the HCUC Parish in 1998 when it became Wainuiomata Union Church – St Stephen's. Since that time, the Church building has had extensive extension and renovations using the capital derived from the sale of St Peter's. The congregations of the two worship spaces had come together as one over an extended period of time prior to the sale of St Peter's. The spiritual needs of the congregation have been met by full time ministry up to the late 1990s and by part- time ministry since joining HCUC. A number of lay preachers have always been involved in the taking of worship and this has continued and been expanded within the HCUC Worship plan.

The Formation of HCUC



From the beginning the Hutt City Uniting Congregations has sought to work out the mission of the Gospel in new ways. In seeking new models HCUC has not always fitted into what the national Churches have required. Indeed it has been said that much of what has been done is unique in New Zealand. One aspect that has shaped the HCUC has been the multicultural learning we gain from the mix of Tongan, Samoan and European, as well as other groups within the Parish. HCUC does not just share buildings but truly share the life of Christ together. The Presbyterian Maori Synod Church, Te Kakano O Te Aroha, being an Associate of the HCUC, has enriched the commitment to the bicultural journey. In finding new ways the Parish has not always got it right but the people of the HCUC have journeyed together seeing God at work in their midst.

In the early '90s St Columba, Naenae, urged Presbytery to look at the ministry and mission of the Churches in the Hutt Valley as a whole. A Commission was set up in 1993 with representatives of all the Presbyterian Parishes of the Valley and observers from the Methodist and Anglican Churches. A report was submitted to Presbytery, which set out goals for a greater working together. A Co-ordinating Group, known as COG, met throughout the following year.

Alongside this Waiwhetu Methodist and St Luke's Presbyterian began talks as to how they might work closer together. This led the Lower Hutt - Petone Methodist Parish to meet with Rev. Norman Brookes, Superintendent of the Development Division to discuss the mission and future of Methodism in the Valley. From these talks a model was developed whereby Parishes could come together under the umbrella of a new venture. The model gave a degree of independence to congregations while giving the opportunity of sharing resources and ministry. This was well received by a meeting with the Presbyterian Parishes in early 1995 and was then shared with relevant congregations over coming months.

After formal votes were taken, a group met to develop the idea into a practicable model for working together. There was much discussion over whether the new venture should be described as a "Parish" as this could lock into old models but since the wider Church only recognised "Parishes" it was agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to use this term. On Sunday the 10th December 1995 a celebration was held at St Oran's where the United States Ambassador, His Excellency Josiah Beeman, gave the address. At this service nine congregations joined together lighting candles and signing the covenant.

At the beginning of the following year Parish Counsellors were appointed and Neville Price was elected the first Chairperson for the Hutt City Uniting Congregations. On February 27th 1997 Wainuiomata Union Parish was incorporated into the HCUC by the lighting of a candle and signing the Covenant. Many Parish worship and social gatherings have been held. At a Parish Service in August 1997 we were privileged to have the Governor General Sir Michael Hardie-Boyes to bring the address. The annual Mid-winter Meal has been a highlight of the year with good food and entertainment always drawing large numbers.

As well as the many happy celebrations there has been sadness as members have died or moved away, and as Presbyters who have become close were farewelled. In the life of the Parish some congregations have agreed to unite. This has necessitated the sale of some Church properties. A Church is not just a building but also a repository of memories and a place to touch the Divine. Many have been saddened to leave the buildings that have been so important in their lives and that of their family.

During the life of the HCUC over twenty Presbyters have given leadership and countless lay people have given unstintingly of their time and energy. In 2002 Craig Forbes was asked to prepare a report revising the structure of the HCUC. The result was the Parish Council being supported by the Parish Management Group, Personnel Committee and Parish Advisory Group. As the HCUC was formed it was said many times "we are on a journey". Things change as we travel. The Parish today is not the venture that was set up 12 years ago. And it is still on a journey. Over these years structural and building decisions have dominated life as a Parish. It is important that this maintenance of what has been built now supports a vision for mission in the Hutt. The Mission Statement of 12 years ago is as relevant today as it was then.

The members of the Hutt City Uniting Congregations, covenant to nurture the spiritual in ourselves and other people and explore new ways of experiencing and sharing God's love in Christ.