



Dunedin Methodist Parish

Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone

www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz

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Mornington:		

PARISH BULLETIN

19th April 2015

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 26th April

9.30 am	Mornington	R Mitchell/G Davis
9.30 am	Mosgiel	S Pole
11.00 am	Glenaven	R Mitchell/G Davis
11.00 am	Wesley	S Pole
1.00 pm	St Kilda	TBA

MORNINGTON METHODIST WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP - The April Meeting will take place on the 22nd April, in the Church Lounge at 2 p.m. The programme is "Women in War" - The Programme Committee people will give a talk about the tales - fact & perhaps some fiction? of women who did "their bit" during WWI. All Welcome to come along to hear this interesting talk. Please remember your small change for the Fellowship of the Least Coin.

MOSGIEL METHODIST CHURCH Mid-week service will be at Maranatha Resthome, Wednesday 22nd April, 2pm. All are welcome.

EXPLORERS GROUP: The next meeting will be on Sunday 26 April at 4.30 pm at Mornington. It will include a discussion on 'Passing on the flame to the next generation', led by Siosifa Pole and Rod Mitchell.

IMPORTANT SUBMISSION FOR PUBLIC ISSUES re Protecting NZ from Corporate Law Suits re the TPP

We have a chance to have our say about stopping NZ being sued through Trade agreements. A submission has been sent to all parishes, Synod Supers and Public Issues groups. The submission is for you to amend as you wish and send to select.committees@parliament.govt.nz by 24th April.

New Zealand's Free Trade agreement with the Republic of Korea has an Investor States Dispute article, which allows multinational companies to sue the Government. This FTA is at Select Committee and this is one of few opportunities to make our position known about the suing provisions. It is not a submission about free trade per se.

THE PROPERTY FINANCE & RESOURCING COMMITTEE meets on Wednesday 22nd April at 7.30 pm at the Mission Board room. Wesleydale Trust applications will also be considered. Enquiries to Jenny Winter, mcleanwinter@clear.net.nz, phone 478-0491.



Thelma Howison & Naomi Pole cutting their Birthday cake last Sunday.



A SMALLER THAN USUAL crowd (24) turned out on a bitterly cold Wednesday night this week for the Open Education programme devoted to the music of British composer **RALPH VAUGHAN**

WILLIAMS (1872 – 1958), presented by Colin Gibson. However, a homely warm dining room and a hot chicken casserole with vegetables and two salads, followed by a blackboy peach crumble did much to ward off the chill outside. Colin's lecture was much appreciated for its meticulous research, and rousing examples of the great composer's



contribution to English hymnody and sacred song. Emphasis was placed on Williams' volunteer contribution as a medic and stretcher-bearer in WW1, and its undoubted influence on his

commitment to peace, as expressed in his extensive focus on peace throughout his extensive repertoire. Photos show a happy kitchen staff, Marion, Andrea and Judy, and Colin beside a picture of Kings College Cambridge where some of the Williams music was performed.

EASTER 2015 was a non-event for Judy and me. We coughed and wheezed our way through those special days. Missed



the songs, the tears, the joy, the full gamut of emotions we associate with the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Worst of all, we missed the stories of Easter, the precious vehicles by which the tragic/victorious dramas of life are renewed year by year.

We listened in vain for such stories on national media, but thank God for a friend who delivered us the parish bulletin where Donald Phillipps reminded of the most "intriguing and challenging" (and convincing) of the traditional stories, that of the encounter on the road to Emmaus. Helpfully, Donald concluded his sensitive interpretation with the observation that what convinced Cleopas and friend that Jesus was alive was not an angel's message, nor even the sight of a resuscitated body. There in their own home they recognised something that could not be counterfeited, the "brand Jesus", alive in the familiar way the stranger broke the bread.

The words "brand Jesus" have hung with me while the antibiotics have done their work, and now I'm so much better I'll tell you two Easter stories I've picked up while doodling the internet. A longer and a shorter story. And why these stories? Well, they're Methodist stories, contemporary stories of the "suffering for my sake" variety.

The United Methodist Church of the USA (UMC) so highly regarded from afar by us Methodists of the antipodes, has in its

time championed many profoundly significant reforms within its own life, and been associated with most of the important groundswells of Christian conscience - a great Church, a broad and liberal Church with missionary and educational influence around the world. All the more ironic, therefore, that currently the same UMC is wracked by a division of such severe proportions as may well jeopardise its future. The issue is same-sex marriage. (While we may comfortably congratulate ourselves as having faced and overcome the same roadblock in the life of MCNZ, many of us know that the evils of homophobia lurk not far from our door.)

My first story concerns Rev Dr William E Alberts, former minister of the Old West United Methodist Church in Boston Mass. where he was known as a fierce opponent of racism in all its forms and strong defender of minority rights in the city. Bill Alberts sprang to the attention of the wider UMC when in 1973 he officiated at the marriage of two men, both students at the Boston University School of Theology, and both active members of his Church. He would say in retrospect of those events, his was a pastoral response to two people who sincerely loved each other and wished to live together in a committed relationship. It was also a celebrant's duty within the State of Massachusetts where same-sex marriage was a legal right even at that early stage. Thus began a long and tortuous series of events for Alberts himself in which first he was accused of breaching the terms of the Methodist *Book of Discipline* which defined marriage as being between a man and a woman, and then, when he refused to recant, the indignity of being hauled before the highest court of the New England Conference and forcibly

retired as being "unappointable". Being a qualified pastoral and psychotherapist, Alberts had no option but to move out of Methodist ministry. He became Hospital Chaplain at the Boston Medical Center, and while not renouncing his Methodist relationship he began an association with the Unitarian Universalist Church.

But that was not the end of the Alberts story. He appealed his treatment by UMC to the State Supreme Judicial Court, and in 1985 the appeal was allowed and damages awarded. That judgment was taken by UMC to the Supreme Court, which declined to take the case, entirely agreeing with the finding of the state court, leaving his erstwhile accusers discredited. But over the period of time to the present day, much has changed. The bishops have hardened their position behind the *Book of Discipline*, and UMC ministers expressly forbidden to conduct same-sex marriages. Meantime, scores of other Methodist clergy, retired and in active service, have defied the episcopal authority of the church and conducted same-sex marriages where state laws have permitted. Some have been tried in church courts and defrocked. Others have found their appointment rights severely compromised. Others have had no alternative but to join other denominations where their ministry is unimpeded by the harsh literal interpretation of the Methodist *Book of Discipline*. The losses to UMC in the process, not to mention the distraction of the yawning division over the issue, have been immeasurable. The prophetic integrity of American Methodism on a range of demanding public issues has been sadly diminished.

As for Bill Alberts, now well retired, he remains defiant of UMC authority but vindicated at law. He is an outspoken advocate of gay rights inside and outside the Church, and an articulate opponent of the denial of human rights at home and abroad. (Key in *Rev Dr William Alberts* to Google to learn the Alberts story in greater detail than I can possibly tell.) Do you agree it's an authentic Easter story?

My second tale is as recent as the Easter just passed. First United Methodist Church, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, has been part of that community for 136 years, constantly witnessing against the deepseated racial abuse practiced in the so-called Bible Belt states of the south. In more recent times the hot topic in town has been the blanket opposition by the majority in the community to gay and lesbian people per se, with First United Methodist a significant and often lonely voice raised for the civil rights of all, regardless of sexual orientation. As is their custom the churches of Eureka Springs hold an Easter Parade, but this year noticeable absentees were the local Methodists - banned because of their insistence on carrying a banner that said "Jesus loves all." Unbelievable. Sad, but true.

It's not a high profile Easter story. No one dies, no one is illegally imprisoned for speaking the truth, simply a small Methodist congregation standing up in their community against the rampant evil of discrimination. Just a small banner proclaiming unconditional love that was too hot for a homophobic community to handle. It is the same stuff that made for the inevitability of Jesus' crucifixion before ever the possibility of resurrection could be realised. That's Easter. Not

a static institution in the annual calendar, but a cycle of death and life enacted in the countless challenging situations that confront every christian community anywhere in the world on a daily basis. One cannot take the cross out of an authentic Easter - ask Dr Bill Alberts; ask the Eureka Springs Methodists.

I come back to Donald's reference to the "brand Jesus." It's an unmistakeable brand. It's a costly brand. It's a brand that early in his ministry demanded of Bill Alberts that he speak the truth for gay and lesbian people, and not with the forked tongue of the UMC bishops, professing love and inclusion, but doing the opposite.

Another Easter has come and gone, but the stories of death and life, suffering and triumph, by those brave enough to put the Jesus brand to the test, continue to challenge us all.

Ken Russell