

DUNEDIN METHODIST PARISH

Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone

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| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|
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PARISH BULLETIN

16 July 2023

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY

23 July 2023

| | | |
|----------|------------|----------------|
| 09:30 am | Mornington | H Watson White |
| 10:00 am | Mosgiel | D Poultney |
| 11:00 am | Glenaven | H Watson White |



PHYLLIS MYRA GUTHARDT - 1928 – 2023

It was my privilege to offer at her funeral a tribute to Phyll, whose record as a minister of the Methodist Church of New Zealand is unparalleled. Her achievements as a minister of the Gospel, as an ecumenist, through her commitment to tertiary education in this country, and as a pathfinder in the journey towards gender equality, are remarkable. We learned something of the spirit of the Guthardts. Her father was a man of principle, and her family background remained with her throughout her life. It happened that she grew up in Nelson Methodism, at St John's Church, in her teens and beyond under two significantly gifted and challenging ministers – Ashleigh Petch and Charlie Oldfield. By the time she was in her late teens she was leading a bible class – including Ken and Judy Russell and my wife. They spoke of Phyll with great affection and acknowledge her impact.

Phyll didn't immediately decide on a career within the Church – Methodism wasn't yet ready for that. The Church, in fact, agreed in principle to the notion of women in ministry in 1950 but no practical steps were taken. So Phyll studied in Christchurch to be teacher and began her university studies there. She returned to Nelson to teach for a year or two. Only then did she follow the processes to become a candidate. In Auckland, as a candidate for the ministry she entered Trinity College, in the days when its Principal was Eric Hames. I have spoken with one of the dwindling number of her contemporaries at Trinity and he, while stressing the exceptional gifts that she brought with her, and her contribution to the College, in other ways business went on as usual for the otherwise wholly male student body -

Phyll was not treated as an exception to the rule. She told me once of an occasion at the very beginning of her first year when she went to Eric to discuss various things and asked him for some guidance as to how she should 'comport' herself. Eric said "Keep your head down". That was not advice Phyll accepted, and when she told me that story she had a grin on her face.

There followed the three years of study, the graduation from Trinity, her completing a BA at Auckland, and then her M.A. She then went to her first stationed appointment at Lincoln Road in Christchurch. It was not long, however, before the next move which was a quite momentous one. She received a scholarship to Cambridge University and the scholarship was augmented by funds raised by Methodist women around New Zealand. While at Newnham College she completed her PhD in biblical studies – Garth Cant told me the particular subject was "Sin.". Phyll, despite her exposure to the traditions of English university life, with its links to the Established Church, never lost sight of her Methodism. She returned to this country and began her ministry in 1962 at Melville, part of the Hamilton Circuit. After several years there the newly established University of Waikato set up an ecumenical chaplaincy and she was appointed to this position. I worked alongside her for some years. Waikato University took advantage of the presence of so accomplished a scholar by making her as lecturer in English and religious studies.

After leaving Hamilton she spent the final years of her ministry in Christchurch – at Upper Riccarton Methodist, and here at Knox Church. It was during her time here that Phyll became the President of the Methodist Church in 1985, the first woman to be so honoured. Having committed her spare energy, as it were, to tertiary education,

and having become a member of the Canterbury University Council (something to which she gave 21 years of her life) the final move to Knox Church Bealey Avenue enabled her to remain where she felt most needed. Phyll retired from ministry in 1990, after 33 years of service. Within three years, and on the initiative of the Methodists Women's Fellowship she was made a Dame of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This unique honour recognized her service to the Methodist Church and to women – acknowledging her as the first woman of any denomination to be ordained in this country., Another honour, of a different and more demanding sort, occurred when she was appointed Chancellor of the University of Canterbury, a role she filled from 1998 till 2002. For her services to the University she receive an honorary doctorate – something that had already happened with the University of Waikato.

By then it was time for her to take care of herself. She, with her friend Clarice Greenslade, made their home at Governors Bay. Her retirement from ministry was a busy one, of course, and not until her term as Chancellor was completed did she really have time to relax. Governor's Bay was a lovely place to visit, to walk and talk – but it was her health that decided the move back into the city. So, eventually to Papanui and to the community that minded her so well until her death - which came peacefully enough and in the fullness of time. We remember her in different ways – as a minister, as our colleague in church and university and elsewhere, especially as a friend - bonds made for a whole lot of different reasons. She was a good friend and she certainly gave much to us. We all have so much to be thankful for, and we honour Phyll for her contribution to our lives and to the wider concerns of life in this country.

Donald Phillipps