

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

REASONS FOR CELEBRATING YOUR CONGREGATION'S HISTORY

DARE TO REMINISCE

Remember the days of old; consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you. Deuteronomy 32:7

"Celebrating our congregation's history showed us the lives of people who were connected to our own lives. What they did and what the Lord did through them gave us new refreshed hope to take on new challenges facing our depleting church community." (Comment from a local parishioner)

WHY CELEBRATE?

Celebration is marked throughout the Bible. It is marked with 'all kinds of instruments', by feasts, Passovers, festivals, dance, candles and thankfulness. Ample precedence exists in celebrating and remembering.

"Churches as a whole provide sources of meaning and hope for more people than any other single type of volunteer organization. A congregation is a cherished home, a place full of memories, traditions and meaningful associations. The action of a congregation is the oldest and most enduring form of human activity. Throughout the Bible, the story of groups brought together to worship has been written down and passed along with the generations. The faintest ink used tells a better story than the best memory."

MILESTONES

The life of a congregation contains significant milestones. An anniversary is an opportunity to recognise these milestones. They are times where we can pause and look over what has gone before us in order to gain strength and make plans for that which lies ahead. We can make these occasions a celebration, an anniversary, a birthday, or a thanksgiving by our community of faith for past blessings that God has given.

For many of us these significant milestones have become blurred and even lost to us. It may require some delving into parish histories and minute books of our congregations to locate them. Search through the work of the woman of the parish, explore the of outreach work which is now forgotten, activities amongst the young people of the district, the literary clubs, a revival in the past, a stewardship programme or overseas mission support. You will be both surprised and amazed at where the milestones were and what has been achieved which is worth acknowledging and celebrating.

HAVE A PARTY!

We as individuals enjoy celebrating and most of us can find any number of reasons to party. Why not do the same publicly in our congregation! The first decade, 50th, 75th the centennial and so on are popular occasions to plan an anniversary. We can celebrate the opening of a new church or the anniversary of the building of a church.

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Why not celebrate reaching a significant milestone made by the congregation, or the ministry of an individual or minister. Be creative and find other reasons to celebrate.

Our anniversary celebrations can take many forms: an arts' and music festival, a mid-winter festival, faith and praise festival, a choral festival or a floral festival.

JOURNEYING TO THE PAST- MOVE TO THE FUTURE

Celebrating an anniversary is about the past, but the idea that the past can tell us about ourselves, who we are, where we have come from so we can move into the future should prove to be true. Our anniversaries should remind us that the journey of faith is not static; it is a forward journey which God calls us to. Celebrating the journeys of the past is an invitation to consider where God's future is leading us.

Where is God calling us? What is the church that we are called to be? What new and bold things await our future ministry? What role will each of us play as this new era in the life of our church unfolds?

Reading this story makes sense of the present. But it does not determine the next chapters to be written by people who keep arriving at this church. This is a great story that keeps writing itself.

(*'Forward'*, by Graham Millar, in *First a Church ... the continuing story of the Ngaio Methodist, Presbyterian and Union Churches*. Elaine E. Bolitho, Ngaio Union Church, Wellington, 2004.)

THANK YOU

By celebrating, we are saying thank you to all those who have gone before us, the pioneers, planners and dreamers, ministers, deaconesses and teachers, men, women and children, whose stewardship and vision was faithful in its moment and whose legacy to us today is beyond measure.

Presbyterian Church Centennial Service, Petone Foreshore 1940

