

Newspaper Clippings, Stories, Articles and Photos over the time of the Parish

Church-Hall Built by Voluntary Labour In Stokes Valley

Reference: "NZ Tablet 4th October 1959"

A PIONEER effort by the Catholic families of Stokes Valley, a semi-isolated suburb of Lower Hutt, reached through the Taita Gorge, has produced by voluntary labour the nucleus of yet another Hutt Valley parish.

In three and a half years of Saturday work the parishioners have saved an estimated 3,500 pounds by building their own church-hall, bringing to an end a ten year period during which Mass has been celebrated each Sunday in the former fire brigade hall or the state school.

Stokes Valley remained in SS Peter and Paul's parish after the new parishes of St.

Bernadette's, NaeNae, and St. Michael's, Taita, were established in 1948 and 1952. The hall now completed is erected on a ten-acre property bought in 1947 and situated in the middle of the valley, with frontage on the main Stokes Valley road. The property, extending back to the hills, is being separated into two parts by a new road which will provide access to many building sections being opened up by the Hutt Valley City Council. There is adequate space on the property for the eventual erection of school, church, convent and presbytery.

The hall has been dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, one of the patrons of New Zealand.

Estimated at the time it was designed nearly four years ago to cost 8,000 pounds if built by contract, it has been erected through the efforts of parishioners for an expenditure, up to the end of September, of pounds 4,020.13s.6d and is expected to cost about 4,500 pounds when the finishing touches have been put to it.

"This is a very happy day for the Catholics of Stokes Valley, who have at least reached the point where they have at least one building they can call their own," said Rev. J. J. Fletcher, parish priest. He paid tributes to all who had assisted, particularly the architect, Mr. Russell, who had taken charge of administration and ordering, as well as working Saturday after Saturday, Mr. George Pearce was called in at the end to supervise the finishing touches, Mr. Jim Walker, who had worked at weekends almost all the 3.1/2 years, Mr. and Mrs. J. McKay and Mr. W. Hiscock.

"I might add I have done a few things myself," said Father Fletcher, who suggested he was still not a tradesman as his apprenticeship had lasted only 3.1/2 years. The effort of voluntary labour had been well worth while; no parishioner had received a penny in wages and a great contribution had also been made by the women, who had not complained though there were many jobs for their menfolk around their homes.

The Mayor of Lower Hutt, Mr. P. Dowse said he had lost count of the number of times he had been present at Catholic opening ceremonies in the city. The council was opening up many sections in the area surrounding the church property and he predicted that the Stokes Valley population, now 4,500 would reach 8,000 in "three or four years." The new hall would be a valuable focal point for Christian family life, itself the basis of national life.

"This is only the first step in establishing a parish," commented Mr. W. J. Scullion, chairman of the hall committee, who predicted that it wouldn't be long before it would be necessary to think about further building. The Valley's Catholic community was fortunate in having the necessary central and convenient property to develop, thanks to the foresight shown in the purchase immediately after World War 11.

"Many have helped on this job though they have been building their own homes at the same time," he said. Along with building activity had gone social activity to raise funds, and homes

had been lent freely. Stokes Valley tradespeople had never once said “no” to requests for donations, display of notices and help in the sale of tickets, and the local branch of the R.S.A. and the Stokes Valley Rugby Club had helped also.

“A real inspiration to parishioners” had been Father Fletcher, said Mr. Scullion. “Only last week we saw him on the end of a shovel, mixing concrete for the driveway, and he has taken a part right through, from the boxing for the foundations to installing the roof beams.”

Many from Lower Hutt itself had also driven up to Stokes Valley to assist, particularly with the final painting.

“I hope that this spirit of unity and community effort referred to by Mr. Dowse and Mr. Scullion will live on, and that the Catholic people here will always maintain their spirit of generosity, sacrifice, loyalty and unity,” said His Grace Archbishop McKeefry. The sincerest thanks of the archdiocese were due for the effort put into providing a centre of Catholic life, such as it was difficult to visualize when he had come to Stokes Valley with Father Summers one day 12 years ago and made the decision to purchase the property. The priests of Lower Hutt had displayed great foresight and their work had been of great spiritual and practical worth.

The Stokes Valley Catholic Women’s Club provided afternoon tea for a large number of visitors who also took the opportunity to inspect the new hall, which incorporated small, side rooms which make it convenient for social occasions as well as for concerts. At the back of the low stage, sliding doors can be thrown back, revealing an arrangement of hinged platforms and behind them the altar. A room at the side of the stage can be used as the sacristy.



CHURCH HALL OPENED

"Reference: Article October 1959"

Sunday, October 4, marked a new era in the valley for the Catholic community with the opening of the St. Francis Xavier Church hall.

Officiating at the ceremony Archbishop McKeefrey congratulated the congregation and expressed his best wishes for the ultimate goal of a full parish in the valley. The Reverend Father Fletcher paid tribute to the loyal working bees who had been on the job for nearly four years and thanked the designer, Mr. Russell, the electrician, Mr. Footer and Mr. Jim Walker, Mr. Pearce, Mr. Jim McKay and Mr. Bill Hiscock for their outstanding contribution to the work. The Mayor, Mr. Dowse, added his congratulations and commended the value of the Catholic contribution to Christian family life in the community and the nation.

Anglican Gift to Roman Catholics

"Reference: Article November 1975"

"Historic and unique" was how the Rev. Fr Hugh McHale, Stokes Valley parish priest, described the presentation of a ciborium by the Anglicans of the Valley to the Church of St. Francis Xavier.



The Reverend Ray Ladd (right), handing over the ciborium to Father Hugh McHale.

It was the second gesture of friendship by the Anglicans to the Roman Catholics. For a period while the Church was being built and the old hall was out of commission, St. Philip's Church was made available for Roman Catholic worship. Members of St. Philip's Church gave to ciborium-a vessel to contain the bread at Mass-to St. Xavier's to mark the opening of the new church. The vessel was presented by St. Philip's vicar, the Rev. Ray Ladd, at a morning service attended by both Anglicans and Roman Catholics in St. Xavier's hall.

"Gestures of this nature are a step in the right direction towards unity, peace and harmony," said Fr McHale, in accepting the ciborium. "For many years now everything I have done has been to promote these – unity, peace and harmony.

This occasion is historic and unique. I have made inquiries to see if anything similar has happened in New Zealand. I do not know of its happening before. This is the first time such a presentation has taken place in New Zealand. So you are witnessing an historic occasion. "On behalf of the Catholic community, I express a sincere and warm thank you," Fr McHale said. "I hope that in the future we can do something for you."

Presenting the ciborium, Mr. Ladd said this was an important function.

"The Anglicans of Stokes Valley desire to celebrate with you the dedication of your new church," he said. "It affects not just the Catholic community. It affects the whole of Stokes Valley. It is a reminder that God is alive and active in the community. I present this ciborium with prayers and good wishes."

PENSIONER FLATS

"Reference: HUTT NEWS 30 April 1985"

Cardinal opens, blesses SV units

It was all smiles for Cardinal Tom Williams and three residents of a new pensioner housing complex in Stokes Valley at the official opening by the Cardinal last week.

With the Cardinal, who is Roman Catholic Archbishop of Wellington, are Bert and Irene Dallas and Mary Ryder.

The eight units, completed and tenanted late last year, were built jointly by Lower Hutt City Council and the Catholic Church's Society of St Vincent de Paul.

The total cost of the units, \$278,000, was financed by Housing Corporation loans and subsidies. The land is owned by the church, but the council will decide who will rent the units and it receives the rents. The new units bring the council's total for pensioner units to 298. Two of the units are designed to cater for handicapped people.

Carpets and curtains were provided by the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Stokes Valley Rotary and Lions Clubs.



MONSIGNOR OWEN DOLAN

"Reference: Article Evening Post 16 August 1986"



Monsignor Owen Dolan: "For some we've come too fast and for others not fast enough."

Monsignor Owen Dolan, Vicar General of the Wellington Archdiocese: "I'm very hopeful about the state of the church in New Zealand. Vatican II introduced a concept of participation that was not our mentality until that time. It's happening and rolling — it can't and won't go back."

"We've not fully made the transition yet and this causes some tension. For some, we're changing too fast and for others not fast enough."

"Reference: Article 9 August 1990"

Friest to step down

Monsignor Owen Dolan, who has been Vicar General of the Wellington Catholic Archdiocese for 10 years, is to step down from the position in January.

His successor has yet to be named.

Monsignor Dolan, who in March was made a Prelate of Honour by the Vatican, said today he was to take up a five-year appointment as national director for the Church's overseas missions. For five years, until 1978, he was a missionary in Peru.

His new appointment meant he would also have to step down as parish priest of St Joseph's, Mt Victoria.

Monsignor Dolan was ordained in Hawera in 1954, serving in parishes in Taranaki, Manawatu, Hawkes Bay and the Hutt Valley until he became a missionary.

On his return he was parish priest of Stokes Valley for three years before being appointed Vicar General.

It is a position second only to the bishop in a diocese. The Vicar General takes over the bishop's responsibilities when he is absent.

Bishops Meet

"Reference: Article 9 December 1995"

All but one of New Zealand's nine Catholic Bishops will attend an ancient ceremony tomorrow at Palmerston North's Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in which Monsignor Owen Dolan will be ordained coadjutor bishop for the Palmerston North diocese. Monsignor Dolan will help Palmerston North's bishop Peter Cullinane and have automatic right of succession to Bishop Cullinane.

FATHER JOHN BERRY

"Reference: Article 1996

Thank you from Stokes Valley Parish

by Kathy Brown

The congregation of St Francis Xavier parish in Stokes Valley want to thank all of those who responded to their article in the July *Wel-com*.

Our roof appeal has received several donations from a variety of individuals as well as from Religious Orders and parishes. Donations have also been received from many people living outside the archdiocese who have been sent *Wel-com* by family or friends.

Thank you for your kindness and generosity. With our ongoing fundraising - the parish has a number of activities over the next few months - we will be able to welcome you all to a dry church in the near future. Donations can still be forwarded to the St Francis Xavier Roof Appeal, P O Box 37030, Stokes Valley.



Warm welcome appreciated by new local catholic priest

Reference: Article "Stokes Valley Times Page 10 1997"



Keen to get to know his first parish - Father John by the carved doors to the St Francis Xavier.

Father John has only been resident in the Parish of St. Francis Xavier a few weeks, but already he is enjoying being part of a local community in his first job as a Parish Priest.

He has come to us from the inner city ministry of the Cathedral in Hill Street, Wellington, but says he loves the Parish Ministry.

"It is nice to be here in a local community where the heart lies."

"Everyone has been so welcoming, especially as I am coming in here on my own."

He is keen to get about and "keep building on the community spirit in the Parish here", encouraging them to enjoy God.

"I want to encourage everyone that God does make a difference – in very ordinary sorts of ways. He is not out of reach and can help in people's lives."

Father John is currently getting to know his parishioners, to find out how they each need support and to provide that help.

“I believe we must have open doors – show what we are about – encourage people in to deepen their faith, spirituality, and show them how God is going to make a difference in all our lives.”

On a more sobering note, the local community has some debts which have to be turned around, but he is confident this will happen.

About 250 attend Mass regularly and he is sure there are many other Catholics in the Valley he is keen to attract back to the regular congregation. Anyone who wants to get in touch with him can ring the Church House (563 8901) or call at 152 Stokes Valley Road.

Links

Father John is also keen to meet the wider Stokes Valley community and work together ecumenically with other congregations – as well as forging strong links with his “back neighbour” the Koraunui Marae.

In the wider church community Father John is the Diocesan Director of Liturgy, responsible to the 48 parishes for offering, training and advice on matters liturgical.

He is also a member of the national Liturgical Commission. “Which is great – I meet so many people around the area and I enjoy it.”

While he has not much spare time at at since he came to Stokes Valley, Father John loves flying and was able to take to the air after being given some lessons as a present. There is nothing he enjoys more than catching up with a few good friends and a special pride is his two-year-old niece, the daughter of his twin sister. His parents still live in Paparangi.

Father John reminds all parishioners that St. Francis Xavier has weekly Masses at 7pm on Saturday nights, 9.30am on Sundays and weekday Masses every morning at 9.30am. He invites everyone to come along and say hullo and sharing the liturgy with them.

Liturgically he says he likes to give people scope to use whatever prayers suit their particular lifestyle.

“The whole point is for them to learn of the great love of God and learn also to love one another.”

When helping plan liturgy he feels it is good to be flexible, to use different forms of prayer – but says it is also important not to forget the traditional. The power of prayer can have such a wonderful effect on people’s lives, he says.

With a soft Irish burr in his voice which acknowledges his birthplace was Dublin, Ireland. Father John came to New Zealand as a three-year-old and grew up in Paparangi, (Newlands) Wellington.

He’s been back to Ireland twice, once on his kiwi OE and then on a study trip in 1993. He worked at the Bank of New Zealand, for several years before training for the priesthood at Holy Cross College in Mosgiel from 1983-88.

Recollections from a Parishioner Mr. Jim Walker. October 1999

Recounted by Mr. Jim Walker of 58 Ruakawa St, Stokes Valley, 1945 – 1999. He gave the sharing below on Saturday 23rd October 1999. This was the day Mr. Walker now aged 89, left Stokes Valley to live in Hawkes Bay.

Mr. Walker lived with wife, Noreen, and daughters Dorothy and Helen, old girls of Sacred Heart, at Raukawa Street. During the Second World War, Mr. Walker seeing the destruction of various churches, and especially the one at Tobruk, resolved to come back to New Zealand and build a church. He returned and built his home in Stokes Valley in 1946.

The Catholics of Stokes Valley at that time were serviced from Lower Hutt Parish, or sometimes the Marist Priests from Silverstream College. Mass was held in a local hall [cf attached Tablet article] or in various private homes. Word would go around that “Mass this Sunday was at ...’s home”. Noreen and Jim Walker provided one of those homes. Some people were not keen to be having Mass in the building they had watched pictures in the previous night, so were keen to build their own church.

So workers came on a voluntary basis to build, usually on Saturday afternoons. Most people had to work Saturday mornings to get a worthwhile wage. Often people would not get a job, especially in the local car firms, unless they were prepared to work Saturday mornings and Monday and Tuesday nights as well. That freed builders on Monday and Tuesday nights, as car workers did not like builders working over them lest something dropped on them. When the building of the church got under way on those nights, they would set up lights inside. A lead was run from a garage next to the church property.

Mr. Walker was able to work on Saturday mornings as well. Despite this, it was decided to get a builder in to finish things off, it was taking so long. The building took from 1955 to 1959.

The ‘rose window’ above the altar is not quite plumb. Jim and his wife were working on the scaffold from outside and it was hard to get it exact. When he came inside, Jim noticed it was not quite centre. However, Monsignor Fletcher, who often worked with Jim, said to leave it as it is.

Monsignor Fletcher came up from the Hutt to help. He had to leave early, though, to go back to the Hutt for Confessions.

Mr. Jim Walker inspected the building on 23rd October 1999 in the presence of Te Waireka Puhia, kaumatua of the Koraunui Marae. The Marae now care for the building, on its new site on the property behind the present Church. Jim was pleased at the way it had lasted (over 50 years_ and that the main joints had not opened up. He hoped maintenance and painting would continue. It was good to see the building in good use within the Marae complex thus provide a living memory for Jim.

A photo of Jim Walker and Ted Puhia on the steps of the building was taken. [cc with those marked * below]

Philip Cody SM 23/10/99

Copies: Mr Jim Walker*; St. Francis Xavier Parish*; Koraunui Marae*; Marist Archives.

Other Buildings on St. Francis Xavier Site

SCOUT DEN



St. Vincent de Paul's



Koroanui Marae



The "Koroanui Marae" Entrance



"Koroanui Marae"



"Koroanui Marae Kitchen"

