

FAITH MEETS HISTORY

BY KIRSTY MUIR

A day spent immersed in the richness of our oldest church.

The Church bells rang out through the small town of Maketū on a radiant sunny Thursday morning in July. Fifteen members of the Catholic Women's League (CWL), Mount Maunganui chapter, were welcomed into St Peter's Catholic Church by Deacon Douglas Rewi. This pilgrimage, organised by Margaret Sherry, was made with the main aim of learning about the history of the oldest church in our diocese.

After the opening prayer Deacon Doug spoke of what an honour it was to be asked to present the event and of how it was a chance for him to personally thank the CWL for their donations made over the past years to the Maketū community.

Deacon Doug began his introduction by acknowledging how blessed we are to come together as family in the Church - for many present it was their first time to Maketū. We entered the Church to Mike Maason ringing the church's bell as we joined in a welcome song. "There will be many hymns sung during the next 1 ½ hours," Deacon explained. "It gives us time to refocus." Deacon Doug's daughter Tania was also present assisting in the song with her beautiful musical talents.

Deacon Doug handed the microphone to his lovely wife, Hariata, and she gave the group a historical timeline of events during which our Catholic faith was founded in New Zealand and discussion of those who brought the faith to



Maketū.

As most of us know, Bishop Pompallier arrived on our shores in Russell in 1835, and on March 11 1840 he said his first Mass in Tauranga. Everyone there that day - Including those present from Ngāti Whakaue of Maketū - received a Pompallier prayer book.

With the height of war between Ngāti Rangi and Te Arawa in 1841 Chief Tangaroa made his way to Russell to seek a priest for his people. Bishop Pompallier returned to the Bay of Plenty on August 22 1841, on the ship Sancta Maria, which he anchored off the coast of Maketū. As he came ashore, as the story has been handed down for many generations, he shocked the people of Maketū, being dressed all in purple including his stockings.

He was there for six days and baptised and confirmed the chief's wife among others. By 1880, with priests coming and going over the previous few decades, many local Catholics were either meeting in homes or attending Anglican services. January 1887 saw Bishop Luck, accompanied by Father James Maden and Father Becker, visit Maketū. After thirty-five years without a priest in permanent residence they led the Rosary and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin was sung in Latin with around fifty people in attendance. Following this a committee was quickly formed and funds raised and one year later on January 1 1888, Bishop Luck consecrated St Peter's Church, celebrated Mass, and confirmed twenty locals.

Father Van Dyke would travel from Tauranga to Te Puke on horseback, staying there Saturday night before continuing to Maketū for Sunday Mass at 10.30am once a month. Father Henry Boyd served during 1946 - 1967, baptising and confirming Hariata and presiding at her first Holy Communion, and he also married her and Doug.

1960 saw big changes for St Peter's: the back wall was found to be rotting so with that needing to be fixed, it was the perfect time to make an extension to the back of the church. Coinciding with Vatican II the communion rails were removed as was the green paint of the interior.

In 2017 the Parish of All Saints by the Sea was amalgamated by Bishop Steve, including St Peter's Maketū, St Patrick's Te

Puke, and St Thomas More, Mount Maunganui (and later including Suzanne Aubert Primary School, with Mass being held weekly at their school). Hariata finished with special mention of all the memories the church contains, with many memories of the faithful servants who once prayed on these grounds: may they rest in peace.

Deacon Doug then took the mic to explain all the carvings, starting with the archway or gateway at the front of the church which we had walked through. Bishop Pompallier is represented prominently in the middle of this carving. Deacon Doug explained that both the gateway and the carvings inside the sanctuary on the altar, the lectern, and the presider's chair were all carved by John Hathfield who dedicated these precious taonga to his mother, who was baptised in St Peter's in 1928.

The altar represents a canoe with the spirals around the edges signifying the waves, and the crown of thorns, St Joseph, St Peter, and Mother Mary all feature in this most ornate of carvings, symbolising strong anchors combining all our peoples in faith from all lands that have come here. The lectern feature is John the Baptist professing the Word of God. His tattoos within the carving demonstrate his strength, with an octopus holding the lectern strong so the message is clear. The presider's chair has four authoritative figures of our church history, and only right they are on the head's chair: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The tabernacle was built around the same time as the church, with the same key element omitted: nails. It was removed from the church and classed as "missing" for many years, but in 2011 Doug overheard a conversation which led to the tabernacle being returned to its rightful place.

After the final closing prayer and blessing by Father Matthew our group joined the Rewi family and Mike for lunch. It is impossible to put 135 years (plus!) into a two-page article. The Rewi family are currently waiting for documentation from Rome, once this has been completed the diocese will be producing a booklet on the history of our oldest church complete with commentary and photos. We hope this has given you an insight into the rich history we contain within our very own diocese and we hope you look forward to reading more once this project is completed. •