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Farewell as new life begins

Thursday, June 9, 2011 9:52

A last service is being held at Midhirst's Wharehuia Church to celebrate its 100th anniversary and to farewell it before the keys are handed to its new owner. The old building has been sold to a local businessman who intends to restore it to its former state, says church trustee Barry Hosking. The building is in need of repair, with piles sinking on one side and some boards needing replacing. The trustees are pleased it will be restored by its new owner, he says.

Anyone who is interested is invited to the special service at 2pm on Sunday, June 19, with afternoon tea to follow across the road at the community centre.

No regular services have been held there for the past decade, although a few couples have tied the knot there.

Barry remembers attending Sunday afternoon services there as a young child. "I went to Sunday School and also Bible class here. I inherited being a church trustee from my father."

The sun streamed into the church during the afternoon services, which caused some funny moments, he recalls.

"Sometimes in summer, the farmers who had been working long hours would fall asleep in the pews, and their wives would have to give them a nudge to keep them awake."

In the early years, the church played a big part in the community. Some of its history is detailed in a booklet from its 70th jubilee in 1981.

Back in 1910, parishioners were attending church services at the Stanley Rd School, and a few months later tenders were called for the construction of a new church.

It was built on land opposite the Stanley Rd School by a builder, Mr A Davis, for the sum of 163-12.

The church was opened on Easter Sunday, 1911, with two inaugural services conducted by two ministers, one from the Primitive Methodists and the other the Wesleyan Methodists. It was the first church in New Zealand erected for the United Methodist Church.

During the war years, the Wharehuia Ladies Guild, a group headed by the minister's wife, raised money for furnishing the church and later to have the organ tuned and a new carpet runner purchased.

During the war, the women wrote letters and posted food parcels to boys serving overseas, and after the war, continued sending parcels to aged people in England and on the continent. They were also busy at home, visiting the sick and aged. The guild went into recess in 1978 as membership dwindled.

Members of the community have taken turns keeping the lawns around the church mown and the shrubs trimmed, even some who had not been members of the congregation.

For more information about the final service, phone Barry on 762 8674.



CHURCH trustee Barry Hosking outside the 100-year-old Wharehuia Church building on Beaconsfield Rd, Midhirst.

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