

Church to combine congregations at central site in city

By MARK BIRCH

BIG CHANGES are envisaged for the Methodist Church in New Plymouth, with a "coming together" of all activities on a central site in Liardet St.

The move involves:

- Combining the present congregations of St Luke's (Westown), Fitzroy and Whiteley and the Samoan fellowship.
- An extensive revamping (over time) of the Liardet St property, to form a New Plymouth Methodist Centre.
- The eventual sale of the present Westown and Fitzroy churches.

"This will eventually allow for one Methodist community," said the Reverend Doris Elphick, superintending minister of the parish, yesterday.

"This is a very exciting time for the parish, and while some may take time to adjust to change, we are convinced that the decision will be well worth the effort in terms of effectiveness, greater variety of worship and outreach.

"Methodist was the first major denomination to be established in New Plymouth with the advent of European settlement, and it is hoped to preserve as much evidence of the church's 158 years in New Plymouth as possible."

She said various memorabilia would be brought from the outlying churches and installed in the new Liardet St centre.

"In this high-tech age it is necessary to make the fullest and most

efficient use of the churches' assets," she said. "We think this can best be done by concentrating our efforts in the one spot and developing our extensive facilities for the best advantage of our worshippers and the community."

Although some worshippers would have to travel from outlying suburbs to Liardet St, that would not be a drawback, because a team of people would run a transport service.

Changes envisaged for the Whiteley Church site in Liardet St included:

- A new name — the New Plymouth Methodist Centre — to emphasise the community building process.
- Extensive improvements to car parking for the use of the congregation and the public.
- Reorganisation of buildings on the site to make better use of the room available.

"Quite apart from our own activities for worship," said Mrs Elphick, "the present Liardet St buildings are used extensively for community interests, including concerts, dancing, cultural events, meetings and other local activities, and we are keen to encourage even greater public use of these facilities."

She said the parish's architect was already working on reconstruction plans, which would be submitted to the congregation for further consideration.

Meanwhile, the three communities would officially merge at the end of this month, coinciding with the beginning of Advent. The occasion would be marked by special services.