

SESQUICENTENARY

1876 - 2026



**Celebrating Presbyterian Faith
in Palmerston North**

Introduction

This booklet gives a brief overview of the development of the constituent parishes that came together to form Pathways Presbyterian Church. Their story begins in the 1870s and 2026 marks, broadly speaking, 150 years of Presbyterianism in Palmerston North.

Presbyterians have been actively involved in Manawatū since Reverend James Duncan began his work in the district in 1844. Exactly when the first Church service in Palmerston North took place has been a point of contention. Lindsay Buick suggested in Old Manawatu that Reverend Elmslie, a Presbyterian Minister from Whanganui, took the first Church service in Palmerston North at Peter Manson's sawmill in Terrace End, during spring in 1872.

Peter Lineham's research, however, has subsequently revealed at least two prior services. Reverend Abraham Honore, a Presbyterian Minister appointed to promote Christianity among Māori in Rangitikei, is recorded as having taken a service in Palmerston North on February 25, 1872 and James McWilliam, from the Church Missionary Society based in Otaki, led a service on February 18.

The land upon which the Church is built was originally part of the Te Ahu a Turanga Block, which was transferred from Rangitāne o Manawatū to the government after its sale in 1864. In October 1872 Wellington Presbytery, the organising body for the Presbyterian Church in Wellington Province, authorised the purchase of a section in Church Street for £35. It took a further four years before building commenced. The New Zealand Times Palmerston North correspondent reported on 14 October 1876 “Church building yet seems to be the mania of the inhabitants here. There are two others now in the course of erection, the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian.”

The selection of 1876 as the starting date for the Sesquicentennial is, admittedly somewhat arbitrary in nature. It does, however, reflect a year when the Church had a designated worship leader (Robert McGregor) and the Church was under construction. Moreover, 1976 was chosen as the centennial date for St Andrew’s on the basis that the 100th annual report of the Church was published in that year, so 2026 has accordingly been chosen as the Sesquicentennial year for Presbyterianism in Palmerston North.

150
years

St Andrews Church



Formally opened on Sunday March 25 1877, with Reverend J. Ross from Turakina taking the service. The Manawatu Times of March 28, 1877 reported that the Church (on the front cover) had cost £400 to build, of which £298 had already been raised in subscriptions.

- The new Church expanded rapidly:
 - An 1881 meeting recorded 32 communicants
 - By 1893 the congregation numbered 200, resulting in the building of a new Church by A.R. Munro.
 - The St Andrews centennial history They Ventured - Who Follows? states that the name “St. Andrews” was first used at the January session meeting in 1894
 - The manse was built in Ashley Street in 1897
 - The end of the nineteenth century was a turbulent period for the Church, which briefly split into two congregations, one worshipping at St Andrews; the other in a hall at Main Street. The Church was, however reunited in 1900 and by 1910 the parish roll numbered 391.
 - The First World War saw at least 160 members of St Andrews having served, of whom 36 died, as recorded on the memorial plaque inside the Church.
 - The Memorial Hall was erected behind the Church in 1923 in their memory. The Gothic influence on this and the first two churches is unique in Palmerston North and relates back to the Scottish origins of Presbyterianism.
 - During the interwar period St Andrews also established Sunday Schools at Wood Street and West End. In 1941, a Hall was built on the corner of Thomson and College Street, West End, Reverend Hercus being the inaugural Minister.

The Formation of New Parishes: 1913–45

As both the parish roll and Palmerston North expanded, new churches were founded to minister to suburban parishioners.



The first of these was **St David's**



- In April 1913, 66 perches of land were purchased on the corner of Main and Rainforth Streets and a church was built at a cost of £308 4 shillings and six pence
- St David's was formally opened on 7 December 1913 and became a full charge Parish in September 1923 under the leadership of Rev. James Henry Bredin
- St David's experienced financial challenges during the interwar period but by 1929 the parish roll numbered 136 and the Sunday School roll 120.

150
years

Post-war Boom and New Parishes: 1945–2000

The two decades following the Second World War saw a marked expansion in the Church, with new parishes being founded in Highbury, Awapuni, Milson and Hokowhitu and a new Church building on the St Andrews site. This was, in part, a response to the post-war “Baby Boom” which was particularly evident in Palmerston North, whose population nearly doubled in 20 years, rising from 25,277 in 1945 to 46,832 in 1966.

- During the Second World War, in which 100 members of St Andrews served (of whom 14 lost their lives), the need for a new Church was apparent as by 1942 its roll had expanded to 950.
- Under the leadership of Rev. John Hubbard, a vigorous fundraising programme made possible the opening of the third Church on the site in 1957 (the present building).
- The cost to parishioners was £60,000 (equivalent to approximately \$3,856,639 in 2026). Its designers, the architects Gray, Young, Morton and Caulder, also designed the Wellington and Christchurch railway stations and many Victoria University campus buildings.
- George Petersen, the then Parish Clerk, suggested that the design was inspired by contemporary churches in Scotland, notably the Pont St Church of Scotland in Knightsbridge, London.

- Unlike the utilitarian nature of many Presbyterian Churches, the present St Andrew's Church was, Petersen records, "an effort to give the worshippers the atmosphere of a house of God"
- The site was further redeveloped in 2000 when the Memorial Hall, the Sunday School and "the Pad" (a 1911 building which had been used as a second Sunday School) were sold.
- The Manse in College Street was sold in 2001. The Church was then redeveloped with the community room on the Ashley street side being completed in 2009.
- A Korean Congregation was established in 1996, Reverend Kim being the inaugural Minister. The St. Andrews Annual Report for 2001-02 indicates that the Korean Congregation were accepted as a Presbyterian Church by Presbytery in that year and that John (Joung-yeol) Kim could be licensed as a Presbyterian Minister.



150
years

St David's Expansion

St David's was also very active in the postwar period, initiating a number of new Churches. During the lengthy Ministry of Robert Warnock (1938-55) Land was purchased on 647 Featherston Street and the Home Ministry directed St Andrews to pass on Church land in Kelvin Grove to St Davids (the Kelvin Grove site remained undeveloped and was sold in the 1980s).

In 1953, adjacent sections in Rata Street and Vogel Street were purchased as was land in St Alban's Avenue. Knox Hall in Roslyn was opened in November 1954. and St Albans Hall was dedicated in December 1955.

In 1959, **St Alban's Church** became a full charge congregation and has retained a distinct identity and vibrant ministry in Hokowhitu.

The Home Ministry also purchased land at Milson, which was placed under St David's Administration and a worship hall built on the site in 1962. This subsequently became **Milson Combined Church**, a joint venture between St David's, St Peter's Anglican Church and St Paul's Methodist Church, with the first service being held in 1968.

The Church expanded on both the Eastern and Western sides of Palmerston North during the 1950s.

The decision to start new branches was reflective of an era when the majority of people in New Zealand identified as Christians and new Churches were built to cater for anticipated parishioners in newly developed suburbs.

In 1953 the congregations at Wood Street and West End were constituted as the Parish of St John's in 1953 under Reverend Victor Mead. Initially located in Nikau Street, St John's Church was moved to Brentwood Ave in 1973. By 1957, the Church had purchased another block of land near the corner of College Street and Pitama Road.



St Mark's Church



St Mark's became established as a Parish on 1 July with Reverend Warren Schrader becoming its inaugural Minister on 10 February 1959. Initially, the Parish had halls on both its Thomson Street and College Street premises

150
years

- During the 1960s, St Marks concentrated development in College Street. The Manse was dedicated in 1959; the worship Hall opened in 1961 and one of the two halls from Thomson Street was shifted onto the College Street site to become the Church Hall.
- The two acre Taylor estate adjoining the Church was purchased by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in 1962 and gifted to St Marks, becoming the site for the carpark.
- By 1962 the St Mark's Parish Roll numbered 143 and there were 435 families under pastoral care, justifying the decision to establish a Church in Awapuni. The remaining hall on Thomson Street was sold to the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association in 1967, which assisted clearing the debts accrued in the process of establishing the Church.
- In 1982, a new building called "The Nest" was built, near the carpark, for Youth Group activities. It subsequently became the Op Shop, playing a valuable role in providing low cost clothing and fundraising for community organisations. By 1983 St Marks had 204 communicants; 60 enrolled in its Sunday School and 38 in its Youth Group.



150
years

Following the Second World War

The four decades following the Second World War were the high point of membership for the Parishes of St Andrews, St Davids, St Marks and St Johns. Although broadly similar in theology; each Church developed its own characteristics. If there is such as thing as “High Presbyterianism”, it was exemplified in the architecture of St Andrews, with its elaborate symbolism and pipe organ.

In terms of appearance, St Marks, St David’s and St Johns were much more modest in design, with each one being closely connected to their suburban community. During the 1990s, however, declining attendances presented a challenge to the Church. The number of Presbyterians in New Zealand, which peaked at 85,000 in 1960, had dropped to 29,300 by 2008. As society became more socially liberal from the 1960s, church attendance declined; and many younger people wanting a more modern style of worship were attracted to the Charismatic churches which became established during the 1970s and 1980s.

During the Ministry of Paul Ranby, St David’s remained close to its 1987 figure of 257 communicants. Despite these stable numbers, many saw a need for a more coordinated approach to Presbyterian Ministry in Palmerston North. Whereas families had previously tended to worship at their local Presbyterian Church, the advent of cheaper second-hand cars from the 1980s made such distinctions obsolete; in a compact city like Palmerston North people increasingly attended the Church of their choosing.

In 1998, 2000 and 2002, discussions about cooperative Ministry were held between St Marks, St David's and St Andrews. Although they did not result in a unified Church, they can in retrospect be seen as the origins of the subsequent union of the three parishes.

Coming Together Again as One Church

St Marks and St Andrews became a twinned Parish in 2004, a reflection of the declining numbers in the parishes and the consequent financial difficulties of sustaining full-time ministry.

St David's made history in 2003 with the induction of Pamela Tankersley, its first woman Minister. Pamela would go on to become Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in 2006, and, at the conclusion of her Ministry, National Church Coordinator for Overseas Mission until 2025.

During the second decade of the twenty-first century, a combination of declining rolls and the need to vacate St David's and St Andrews for earthquake strengthening in 2016 and 2017 saw a consolidation of congregations.

In 2017, the former congregations of St Andrew's, St Mark's and St David's were collectively worshipping at the Lychway Funeral Home whilst earthquake strengthening work was underway at the respective churches. They combined to become Presbyterian New Church (the initial name chosen by the combined congregation). One factor which assisted their amalgamation was the shared connections between members built over previous decades. Reverend Susan Blaikie became the inaugural Minister of Presbyterian New Church in September 2019.

After considerable discussion, a strengthening and redevelopment plan for the St Andrews site was adopted. Its main features were the addition of external buttresses for earthquake strengthening and a redesigned interior which saw the older pews removed and the stage brought forward. On Sunday October 30, 2022, St Andrew's Church was formally reopened at a service led by Interim Moderator Rev. Don Hall, by which time the parish had adopted its present name Pathways Presbyterian Church.

Reverend Shelley Alexander became the inaugural Minister of Pathways when she was inducted on October 19, 2023. In 2021 the Church had 131 members and 32 associates.

Since 2010 the Korean Congregation have been led by Rev. John Lee. They celebrated their 30th anniversary at a special service on Sunday, March 22, 2026. Under John Lee's leadership the Korean Congregation have evolved into an international congregation, holding services in Korean and English and attracting parishioners from a variety of ethnicities.

The St Mark's Church and Manse site was sold to the City Council in 2024 for future use as a community hub, an initiative which had been championed by the church for several decades. It remains a space for community outreach.

2026 Sesquicentennial Celebrations

The 2026 Sesquicentennial Celebrations has involved a number of activities over the year; these included a Lecture Series on historical change, public concerts, publication of a history booklet, with an Open Week at Pathways St Andrew's Church. The latter culminated in a celebratory Sesquicentennial Service, held on Sunday, August 16, with Reverend Peter Dunn, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ), the Palmerston North Mayor Grant Smith, previous ministers, and parishioners and the community in attendance. As a result of a collaborative design effort between Pathways Presbyterian Church and the Palmerston North City Council, a sign acknowledging 150 plus years of Presbyterianism in Palmerston North was installed outside the church on the corner of Ashley Street and Church Street.

Will Pathways be able to sustain itself for another 150 years? Like many Presbyterian Churches, its future is at best uncertain. Pathways is presently in a period of vacancy, under the able guidance of Interim Moderator Rev. Don Hall. Statistically, speaking, the majority of the congregation is over 65 and there is a pressing need for more younger people. Fortunately, Pathways has a core of experienced parishioners who have ensured both continuity of worship and the continued provision of the many community activities in which the Church is engaged. It is to be hoped that their ongoing witness will enable the Church to continue and build upon the rich legacies of those who have gone before.



Ministers of St. Andrews

Rev Robert McGregor (1875-78)

Rev. A.M. Wright (1879-92)

Rev. W. Thomson (1892-1900)

Rev. J. Chisholm (1900-01)

Rev. Isaac Jolly (1901-10)

Rev. Alexander Doull (1910-22)

Rev. G.T. Brown (1922-33)

Rev. John Hubbard (1934-65)

Rev. Iain McMillan (1966-72)

Rev. Newton Fink (1973-82)

Rev. Roger Wiig (1982-89)

Rev. B. John Franklin (1990-93)

Rev. Edwin B. Clarke (1995-2002)

Rev. Sally Carter (2004-2005) – Twinned Parish with St Marks

Rev. Ken Wall (2005-15) Twinned Parish

Rev. Don Smith (2015-2017)

Ministers of St. Mark's

Rev. Warren Schrader 1959-63

Rev. Lawrence Barber 1964-69

Rev. Ian Milner 1969-76

Rev. Don Fauchelle 1976-80

Rev. Ian Hewson 1981-1988

Rev. Bruce Howat 1989-1993

Rev. John Franklin 1994-2000

Rev. Philippa Horrex 1997-2000

Rev. Sally Carter 2000-2004

Ministers of St. David's

Rev Alan Doull (1913-20) – NB: also Minister at St Andrews

Rev. James Boyd (1920-23)

Rev. James Bredin (1923-29)

Rev. L.G.B. Whitehead (1930-33)

Rev. John Smith Pate (1933-38)

Rev. Robert Warnock (1938-55)

Rev. Ian Purdie (1955-65)

Rev. James Park (1965-69)

Rev. Martin Cleland (1970-79)

Rev. Jim Cunningham (1980-85)

Rev. Alan Savill (1981-86)

Rev. Dugald Wilson (1985-87)

Rev. Paul Ranby (1987-2001)

Very Rev. Pamela Tankersley 2003-2010)

Rev. Gene Lawrence (2014-2016)

Deaconesses at St. David's

Sister Valerie Brooker (1953-55)

Sister Reita Wilson (1955-59)

Minister of Presbyterian New Church

Rev. Susan Blaikie (2019-2021)

Minister of Pathways Presbyterian Church

Rev. Shelley Alexander (2023-26).

Interim Moderator: Rev. Don Hall (2026-)

Minister of Korean Congregation

Rev. Kim 1996-98

Rev. Rev Hyun Soon Myung 1999-2000

Rev. John (Joung-Yeol) Kim 2001-07

Rev. Young Man (Isaac) You 2008-2009

Rev. Byungik (John Lee) 2010-



150
years



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