

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

An Opportunity to Plan De Novo (from the ground up)

Friendship House, Manukau, South Auckland

A Place for People in the Heart of Manukau.

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(AHS Newsletter 34; August 2006)

This Paper was offered at the
2005 Conference of the Religious History Association of Aotearoa New Zealand.



Friendship House, an ecumenical agency, is a busy place. Located strategically alongside the Westfield shopping centre in the heart of Manukau City, it has a staff of 16 persons and 12 contractors, supported by many volunteers. It offers a variety of programmes that give support and care to a wide range of clients. Services include a drop-in centre with a cafe, social workers, counselling, Living without Violence programmes. In addition, attention is given to social justice issues, and until recently on Thursday evenings there was a 'Community Dinner.' The operations of Friendship House are managed by the Director, who is employed by the governing body, the Friendship House Trust Board. The Board includes representative of the six participating Churches: Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and the Salvation Army.

The purpose of this paper is to note three key factors in the formation of Friendship House that display the hopes for innovative ministry in South Auckland in the 1970s, and the unique result of what one participant, the Reverend Barry Jones, called 'pragmatic ecumenism.' The key factors were:

- The ecumenical climate
- The vision and energy of several people who helped launch the project
- The motivation and goodwill of the Manukau City Council

Manukau City came into being in 1965 when the Manukau County amalgamated with the Manurewa Borough. In its early years there was a great deal of pioneering work done with regard to health issues and community development. The appointment of David Haigh as Social Services Officer was the first such appointment in New Zealand. There was a strong welfare component with particular concern for families

in need. This led, in Otara, to the co-ordination of all social agencies working there. Community development came to the fore, with an emphasis on communities working towards their own aspirations and dreams. A natural development was a network of community facilities infrastructure. Community houses were established and in 1972 the Otara Citizens Advice Bureau was formed, one of the first in New Zealand.

The projected rapid population growth of Manukau City attracted the attention of the Churches. There were two mission concerns for the Churches. Firstly, how could they provide traditional resources for new parishes e.g., church buildings, halls, and houses for the clergy? Secondly, there was a deeper concern - how could they care for people and be part of the building and development of communities?

With regard to the first concern there was the

reality that the Churches would find it difficult to fund traditional Church facilities in every new suburb. In the ecumenical climate of the period this meant that some Churches took very seriously the alternative of working together e.g., in Glenfield on the North Shore, also at Hornby in Christchurch. Enterprises such as the Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission were also established in this period. This desire to work together was also fueled by the concern for the building and development of communities. Although formal negotiations for Church Union had broken down in 1971 there was continuing goodwill and energy amongst the Churches for co-operative work. This included Churches that were not part of the Church Union discussions.

Early in 1973, the Reverend Barry Jones took up the Auckland based position of Superintendent of the Development Division of the Methodist Church of New Zealand. He became one of the key figures in the planning for Friendship House. In a note to me while making arrangements for my interview with him last year, he stated that: 'The development of Friendship House was premised on the assumption that the Church needed to take seriously the development of the new Manukau City Centre and have a physical presence within the Centre.' He attributed this mission concern to some significant 'ground-breaking' World Council of Churches studies in the 1960s, and quoted from a book written by Hans Reudi Weber, who worked as Associate Director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches:

'The message of the Bible does not support the common conviction that the Church's only task is to look after the 'religious department of life ... Christians are called to share Christ's concern for the whole world, with all its harsh realities. God made it; He loves it; and because He loves it, He set us in it. The world is God's first love, His first fiancée. Therefore, the first covenant which the Bible speaks about is not about the covenant with Abraham and Israel or the Church, but the

covenant with Noah and the whole living creation. Also, the last promise we have from God is not the promise of a renewed Church, but of a new heaven and a new earth'

Barry Jones soon met Archdeacon Ted Buckle who was working as Ecumenical Development Officer for the Anglican Diocese of Auckland. These two men were key figures in the ensuing development of Friendship House. Barry made this comment about Ted Buckle: 'Ted Buckle took me down to Wiri and showed me the rolling farmland just south of Papatoetoe, where Manukau City Council was planning to build a City Centre. Ted was passionate about the Church being there at the formation of the new Centre. He was equally passionate that it had to be an 'ecumenical presence .' Not simply because no one denomination could afford to create a presence in the Centre on its own, but because a tangible Christian presence in the Centre should portray the broadest possible image of church .'

Ted Buckle had begun working closely with Manukau City Council staff in late 1972. It seems apparent that his vision of a broad 'image of church' gained a responsive note from staff who were driven by community development concerns. Ted Buckle reported on 16 May 1973 to the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Auckland:

'Preliminary discussions have been held ... concerning the development of the Wiri Centre ... The questions concerning the Manager and the Chief Town Planner are related to whether a major Church Centre, e.g., a 'Cathedral' should be planned into the 100-acre development, whether space should also be provided for 'head offices' of various departments such as the churches, Social Welfare, Māori Mission, etc'

Later in this report, after mentioning that the matter had been reported to the Joint Regional Committee and to various 'church related agencies', Ted Buckle summarised:

'The situation is that we have been given the

opportunity to plan de novo with the Chief Town Planner the heart of a city from scratch. The issue is do we simply wish to perpetuate separate structures of social welfare, administration, and the units given to the nurture and promotion of the spiritual life in the form of the compartmentalized units as we now have them, or can we create together a more intensive yet comprehensive approach to a total city society.'

In my interview with Colin Dale, who until recently was City Manager, he confirmed Ted Buckle's estimation of the potential for an ecumenical project in the City centre:

'So, we had a fit between the new city and a church spiritual and Christian presence. And I suppose in a modest way, whereas cities of years gone by would have a cathedral, it was thought that this would be very appropriate for the new Manukau City ... But there was also, as I understand it, at the time in the community area, the view that it would well be a citizens' advice type of concept, you see. And that sort of gave it legitimacy for the Council to be involved ... we were all very excited about this, actually, because it was - well it was almost recognition that we were a city by the church ... that was an alignment that had a lot of meaning to us. Because as a city, everything was new, and it was ... really building on the significance of the Christian following and such.'

Colin Dale confirmed Ted Buckle's interpretation of the City's enthusiasm for the project:

'Oh yes! That's absolutely the case, because concurrently we were promoting very strongly community health, and the concept of the community health-centre which was a place for doctors, but was also a place for all the paramedics – with the backup physiotherapy services, etc - and also social agencies, Social Welfare, Probation and Salvation Army, Barbados, etc'

The Churches, individually and collectively, were now seriously considering their response to

mission opportunities in the South Auckland region. The Anglican Diocesan Standing Committee, for example, had in 1970 established a 'Church Development Sub-Committee', with Ted Buckle as Convenor. In 1973, the Standing Committee considered a paper, 'The Shape and Form of Urban Ministry in the Future', which included these comments:

'In Wiri, for example, where we can anticipate that 30,000 workers will be housed in offices, and something like 30,000 people will daily shop in the major city complex, the ministry becomes one to the mobile community and to the occupational life of people ... it is obvious that when we think of Church Union and the possibility of say a Diocese of South Auckland, we must give considerable thought to the form that the Church expresses in the 'capital' or regional major centre.'

In late November 1973 a Wiri Consultation was held at St John's Presbyterian Church, Papatoetoe. This gathering was planned by the Christian Education Departments of the Anglican and Methodist Churches, in consultation with the Rev. Peter Carter, convenor of the Ministry Committee of the South Auckland Presbytery. Sixteen people from the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches were present, and Mr. Ron Wood, the City Manager, and Mr. Bilson, the Town Planner attended as well. These latter two took the group on a bus tour of the area under discussion.

Matters discussed included these questions:

- Should the Church have a presence in the proposed City Centre and what form should it take?
- How does the Church influence the formation of the community?
- How can the Church arrive with the first people?

There was agreement that any development should be carried out on an ecumenical basis, while recognising that 'different churches may

have different styles of ministry and different understandings of mission and this will influence any joint planning that is to be done.’ It was felt that there should be a presence in the City Centre, although it was not clear what form that presence should take.

A committee, known as the ‘Wiri Interchurch Planning Committee’, was established and had its first meeting on 4 March 1974. Membership included representatives from several Churches: Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Associated Churches of Christ, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and the Salvation Army. Anglican Methodist Social Services, Presbyterian Social Services, and the Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission were also represented, as was the Auckland Joint Regional Committee, which was a committee charged with the oversight of several ecumenical and co-operative ventures.

The task of this new committee was to help the churches plan and implement a joint strategy in Wiri, and to relate to Local Bodies and commercial interests in the area on behalf of the churches involved.

On 11 February 1974, Ted Buckle wrote to Barry Jones informing him that the Diocese of Auckland was prepared to purchase Lot 43 in the proposed Centre so that the land could be secured for an interchurch property. He concluded: ‘Such an investment does not prejudge all the questions of just how the Churches wish to provide a presence in Wiri Centre, though you can rest assured that we are all of one mind that our intentions do not envisage the provision of a Cathedral.’

During 1974 discussions were setting the parameters for later developments. Consideration was given to the establishment of a Creche in the proposed Shopping Centre. The Interchurch Planning Committee was offered first option to operate the facility, with the developers underwriting the operating costs, and any surplus going to the body operating the

facility. Anglican and Methodist Social Services made several suggestions from the experience of a similar creche in Birkdale, and commented: ‘the Wiri creche would have valuable potential in some aspects of community development. It would be a waste to fail to capitalise on this potential.’ Although the Interchurch Committee later decided that they could not proceed any further with the Creche proposal, the Churches’ interest in the Creche proposal was a precursor of the hospitality ministry that was to develop at Friendship House when it opened in 1976.

The Interchurch Committee was pondering other matters as well e.g., links with educational authorities, with the Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission, and ministry to the residential areas.

Ted Buckle, who was writing and speaking quite extensively in this period on the Church’s ministry in urban areas, questioned whether the Churches should perpetuate traditional patterns of church development in South Auckland. He proposed an alternative course of action, using ‘the natural foci of community’ (schools and shopping centres), and lay leadership along with professional clergy.

Barry Jones gave a report to the Interchurch Committee’s meeting in October 1974, based on his observation of what were known as ‘new town developments’ in England and the USA. Commenting on the specific learnings appropriate to the New Zealand scene, Barry listed the following:

- The degree of ecumenical co-operation
- A declared ecumenical strategy to provide ministry for the developing of a congregation and the building of community
- The maintenance of a balance between ministry in developing areas and established causes
- Clear division of responsibilities to ensure a recognition and acceptance of the three primary roles of Christian Ministry: Priestly -

Pastoral - Prophetic

- Denominational overview of developing areas of settlement and evolving patterns of ministry
- The investment of human resources in developing areas before the provision of physical resources
- The use of lay helpers to supplement essential ministries
- Securing Government financial assistance to sustain specific projects
- Involvement of lay leadership, drawn from the area of concern, to assist in the planning and implementation of specific proposals

On 14 July 1975, Ted Buckle wrote to the City Manager on behalf of the Interchurch Committee, requesting that the Council consider leasing Lot 43 to the Churches at a non-commercial leasing price:

'You will recall that the Churches are seeking to approach the social and religious needs of this new region on a corporate basis. We believe this approach to be essential for the well-being of the community and at present our aim is to provide facilities for a wider ranging number of religious and para-religious services. Our planning at the present time envisages space for the major social service agencies ... In this respect it is our expectation that we will be providing for Wiri a creative and community-centred service facility which will have as its goal the well-being of the total community rather than denominational or sectarian interests.'

Because some of the participating Churches had assumed that the proposed centre was to be basically a social services centre, four members of the Interchurch Committee wrote a statement early in 1976 that spelt out the theological rationale behind the centre. Major points in this statement were:

- The project is an attempt to provide maximum variation and flexibility in the outworking of Christian ministry

- It is a response to a unique opportunity to plan and implement a genuine ministry in the inner city of Manukau
- It is an attempt to bring the concerns and the resources of the Churches to people who work and shop within the City Centre
- The prime objective is the provision of a base from which the Church can carry on its age-long function of the proclamation and celebration of the Gospel

In August 1976 a consultation was held so that members of South Auckland churches could be informed about the proposals. Fifty people attended. Speakers included representatives from the Manukau City Council and the Interchurch Committee. The programme included a short address by the Reverend Chris Pryor, who had recently begun ministry in the Wiri area, working as a 'community minister' in the Manurewa Anglican Parish. A member of the Development Council of the Anglican Diocese, he had worked closely with Ted Buckle in the proposals for an ecumenical Church Centre at Wiri. He and his family had taken up residence in a house in Kerr's Road, on the Dilworth Farm, just behind St David's Anglican Church in Wiri. It was hoped that he would particularly work among residents in the new subdivision being developed between Kerr's Road and the Manukau City Centre, and that he would link people with the proposed Interchurch centre. However, because of the change from a Labour to a National Government there were delays in the Wiri subdivision work. So, there was little progress with Chris Pryor's work in Wiri. Unfortunately, he died in 1981. It is interesting to note that in 1988 the Sisters of Mercy, a Roman Catholic order, relocated from Otahuhu to Wiri. The women quickly established a strong community profile, and now have a Community Centre alongside the Wiri School. One of the women, Margaret Martin, also served from 1991-2004 as a Catholic representative on the Friendship House Trust Board.

With the arrival of two Lockwood houses on site on 15 August 1976, the Interchurch Committee achieved its objective of having a temporary centre in operation at the time that the shopping mall was opened. The initial staff of Friendship House included Audrey Dickinson as Hostess-Coordinator and Jean Brookes with her focus on community development. The hard work and vision of both these women did much to help establish Friendship House as a vital part of the Manukau City Centre.

Once the temporary centre was in operation the Churches moved on to make their decisions about participation in what was now called 'Friendship House'; decisions about the design of the permanent centre; and decisions about the management of the centre.

Why did this venture prosper? I feel that there were three major factors:

- The ecumenical climate of the 70s,
- The vision and energy of several individuals, with Ted Buckle, Barry Jones, Audrey Dickinson and Jean Brookes standing out in particular,
- The motivation and goodwill of the Manukau City Council.

The common threads in these three factors were a passion for community development and a willingness to think and act 'outside the square.'

The uniqueness of the beginning of Friendship House, and its vibrant and successful life for the last thirty years, is that these factors and threads all came together at that particular point in time. History is indeed God's story.