

## AN ECUMENICAL DEVELOPMENT AT SKENE

As the Minister of a North-East parish that has experienced, and is still experiencing, the birth of a new town, I am encouraged by the interest and prayerful support so many fellow ministers have shown in recent years.

When I came to Skene in 1972, I came to a rural charge, a few miles from Aberdeen. Property developers were very interested in Westhill - the eastern part of my parish 6 miles from the centre of Aberdeen. Throughout these past 11 years we have seen more and more houses being built there, turning a quiet hamlet of some 25 houses into a "garden suburb" or new town of at present approximately 2500 houses. It is a pleasant community, well-designed with an increasing number of amenities.

My Kirk Session were always concerned about reaching out to this new Community and in 1976 we agreed that the Parish Church needed another building. Skene Church, situated some two miles west of Westhill, is a beautiful Church but was proving too small for the increased population. We used the local village hall for some Church activities but we needed our own hall. Helpful discussions took place with the Home Board of the Church of Scotland.

The Ashdale Land and Development Company, who owned Westhill, offered ground for a Church building on condition that it was used for interdenominational purposes. We were most grateful to the Company for their generous offer.

In 1978, discussion took place with the Roman Catholic and Scottish Episcopal clergy, with whom I had a good friendly relationship, and it was agreed to send a questionnaire to every home in Westhill to find out whether residents wanted a Church in Westhill and if so, whether they wanted it to be interdenominational. The result was a resounding yes to both. The interdenominational aspect of Trinity, therefore, is a grass-roots development, rather than one imposed upon us by Church authorities.

The Home Board through its National Church Extension Committee met with local parties and agreed to fund the project - through a grant and a loan.

Now we had the offer of both land and finance.

The next stage was the drawing up of a leasing agreement between the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic and Scottish Episcopal Churches. After finalising the form of agreement, which involved the Church being owned by the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland and leased to the other two Churches in return for an agreed rent, the land was handed over to the Church of Scotland by Ashdale.

The building contract was given to Stock Bros. of Leeds and work commenced in May, 1981.

The steering committee representing the three Churches was now hard at work organising the purchase of furnishings and numerous other matters. At this point we received the offer of chancel furniture from the former Trinity Church in Aberdeen. Their generous gift was gratefully accepted and in recognition of it, it was agreed to name the Church, "Trinity" Church.

The Church, a multi-purpose building, was completed in October 1981 and was dedicated in November, 1981, during a moving service conducted by the Presbytery of Gordon. The local Bishops of the Roman Catholic and Scottish Episcopal Churches and lay members of the three congregations involved all took an active part in the service, and the sermon was preached by the Very Rev Professor Robin Barbour.

Trinity Church was born. What has happened since?

Each Sunday, there are three morning services.

The Roman Catholic congregation meets for Mass at 9 am and this is followed by our own service at 10 am. After our service, the Scottish Episcopal congregation have their worship at 11.15 am. Each congregation, therefore, has its own worship and its own congregational life.

However, we have not forgotten the ecumenical dimension. We meet for joint worship at various times throughout the Christian year, we have a joint committee which meets regularly, and we have held a series of "Getting to Know you" meetings during which members of each congregation

learned about the background, the organisation and the style of worship common in the three denominations. We intend to further such ventures in the future.

The clergy also meet together, a mini-fraternal, and work together in the local schools in other ways. It has been an exciting and stimulating experience for me and I look forward to the future.

As far as my own congregation is concerned, we have one Communion Roll, one Kirk Session for the two Church buildings. Trinity we use both for worship and as a hall during the week. Members, therefore, can worship either in Trinity or at Skene.

Our services follow a typical Church of Scotland liturgy and we enjoy lay participation in these services. Recently a few young adults have volunteered their services in leading the children's part of the service on a regular basis, increasing in particular the musical content through choruses & modern hymns with guitar accompaniment. We also have regular evening worship and sometimes these services are led and conducted by members.

We have, ofcourse, a number of the usual organisations: Sunday schools, Bible Class, Youth Fellowship, Boy's and Girl's Brigades, Ladies Group etc.

There is a Bible Study/Prayer Fellowship which meets weekly and also every Wednesday afternoon a group of ladies run a very popular "cafe". This has been a successful enterprise - allowing ladies in particular to meet and make friends. In a community, so new and so large, it's possible to feel lonely and isolated, - particularly if one's husband is offshore on an oil-rig, the children are away at school, and there are no relatives near. Trinity is a meeting place for many in our community and we see this as an important part of our Church life.

This brings me to mission and outreach. This is particularly important in our community. We want to be a caring welcoming congregation - we want people to feel at home not only in our Church building but also to feel at home living in Westhill, and especially to know they can be "at home" with God. There is loneliness, there is materialism - the oil industry pays high wages - there are problems. We want to share the fullness of life Christ offers with people in our community and so outreach will be high on our agenda as a Kirk Session and congregation.

I would, personally, very much welcome it if you would contact me about anyone whom you know who moves to Westhill so that we can visit them and welcome them.

My hope for the future can be summed up in the words that I used in the Commemorative Brochure - "I look forward to working with members of my own congregation, old and new, and also to co-operating with the other denominations in the service of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is an exciting and challenging situation.

Another hope - very practical - is that we will be able to repay our loan to the National Church Extension Committee on time, or even better, ahead of time. We have a loan repayment of £8000 per year for nine years - quite an undertaking. In 1982 we met this commitment, and I am confident that we will continue to do so.

Finally, I'm often asked - how does a shared building work when it comes to furnishings? The answer is - no bother at all. The chancel furnishings consists of - communion table and chairs: choir seats: pulpit: lectern: baptismal font and organ. These are used by each denomination. The Roman Catholics have a portable crucifix and candles.

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SKENE