

# CAN 150

FIRST SERVICE—APRIL 7TH 1860  
“Learning from our past, preparing for our future”

NEWSLETTER No 2 March 2007



## What George Dyson teaches us



STANDING Mr. F. G. M Dyson, Sister Martha, Sister Annie, Sister Louie  
SITTING Mr. S. Hanna, Rev. G. F. Dyson, Supt., Mr. J. H. G. Jasper

As we move towards our 150th Anniversary the church faces issues of great moment in the life of the congregation: We therefore use this occasion to look to our past church heroes for inspiration towards our future Mission.

George Dyson, founder of the Carlton Methodist Mission in 1914 is one of the Carlton church's foremost heroes.

Brian Howe shared some insights from his original research on Dyson at our first Founder's Day Service in 2006.

Dyson championed a turnaround in the Church's fortunes and created a significant church presence in Carlton for three decades.

Of his many achievements Dyson showed us that:

- Prayer is the starting point for renewal.
- A new structure was founded, **The Methodist Mission** moving away from an over institutionalised church.
- His motto “the need is the call” was the basis of a large weekday welfare program which flowed

into increasing church congregation attendances.

- An active church mission could overcome demographic trends of population decline, out-migration and poverty.

We thank Brian for his work and welcome Professor Ian Breward a distinguished church historian to join us at our Second Founders Day Service on April 15th 2007.

Paul Madden, *Editor*.

## Remember our heroes!

Reverend George Dyson stands with Dr E.H.Sugden (1890s) and Rev.Norm Lowe (1960s) as perhaps the three great Ministers in the one hundred and fifty years of our Church in Carlton. There also have been many great lay people whose stories we would like to tell in future newsletters. Each of the three ministers was an innovator responsible for a significant boom in the development of the

Carlton church.

Dyson was visionary. A former missionary in Samoa and Tonga (1857-1868), he was president of the *Victorian and Tasmanian Methodist Conferences* in 1893 and appointed to Carlton in 1914. Dyson revived the con-

gregation in the inter-war period through establishing the Carlton Mission, paid off the church debt and built the new Mission Hall in 1933, the major part of our current church buildings

Dyson was influenced by the “forward movement” in the British church in the late 19th century. This new thinking was an attempt to reach out to working people and adopt new methods in inner urban neighbourhoods. Thus grew inner city missions often called central hall as opposed to Wesleyan churches. There was a great emphasis on lay involvement with people from other suburbs assisting as volunteers. The founding of the lay women volunteer corps the “sisterhood” was an important development of lay-people.

Dyson was influenced by the great church-men Hugh Price Hughes in Britain and in Australia, Rev. Sugden, an advocate of applied Christianity introducing the ideas of the “forward movement” to Melbourne congregations.

The *Dyson Auditorium* still stands today as the Senior Citizens Centre.



Second Founders Day Service, Sunday April 15 2007, 10am

Church of All Nations 180 Palmerston Street, Carlton 3053

# GEORGE DYSON AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CARLTON METHODIST MISSION: 1914

**T**he Carlton Methodist Mission was created in 1914 when George Fielding Dyson was appointed superintendent minister to Carlton. At the time the church was so deeply in debt that closure was seriously being considered. Church Conference was proposing to sell both Wesleyan Church in Palmerston St and the parsonage at 636 Lygon St.

## Pre WWI Poverty

Both the Wesleyan and the Anglican Church, St Judes were suffering from the impact of the 1890s Depression on the Carlton area.

At the time of Dyson's appointment there were high rates of poverty in central Carlton, and the migration of young people marrying and moving to the suburbs. High rates of unemployment made war an attractive option for young people. Many young men from Carlton would either join or be conscripted.

Those fallen are recorded in the church today.

For Dyson then, Carlton was hardly a plum appointment!

## Attacking the Church Debt.

Dyson began immediately to focus on the church's debt and the calling for a commitment to revival. The Wesleyan church's fifty third anniversary celebrations were held on July 5th 1914, preceded by three preparatory services held in June of that year.

*"The Trustees and officers of the Palmerston St Church have laid it*

*upon their hearts that the time has come for an earnest effort to fulfill the conditions of blessing and revival".... calling on the whole church to make a special effort to liquidate the debt of nearly two thousand pounds*

## Church turn-Around Begins with Prayer.

The church was called by its minister to commence a season of prayer, praying for fifteen minutes daily leading up to the greater service of Thanksgiving. In those War-time years, great emphasis was placed on the power of prayer with exhortation to the spiritual life.

Dyson told the congregation at the 1916 Anniversary:

*"An alarming weakness is that we are producing Christian activities faster than we are producing Christian experience and the Christian faith; that the discipline of our souls and the deepening of our acquaintance with God are not proving sufficiently thorough to enable us to meet the unprecedented opportunity and responsibility."*

## Renewal

By 1918 the Carlton church was seen to be back on its feet and Conference endorsed the name change to Carlton Methodist Mission. Dyson believed this name not to have the institutional connotations of the word "church" and further:

- The church is really for the benefit of the masses and not just to build up a denomination.
- The church is to render com-

munity service irrespective of class or creed; time, place or occasion: "the need is the call"

The Mission provided Relief, Philanthropic, Employment and Boarding Departments. Dyson felt that the outreach of the church through the provision of social services had resulted in many of the people being assisted becoming members of the congregation. The week-day activities of the church involved services for all age groups, with a significant involvement of younger women bringing with them children cared for in the crèche or kindergarden.

By 1929, Dyson was able to report that the membership of the Palmerston St church had over fifteen years increased from 296 communicant members to 465. This increase was despite the outgoing migration of younger adults to the suburbs. Annual income to the Mission church increased from 375 to 726 pounds.

*This is an edited text from Brian Howe's sermon to our first Founders' Day Service on April 7th 2006.*

**Professor Brian Howe was Superintendent of the Fitzroy Methodist Mission in 1969, the Founder of the Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre, pursued a distinguished political career leading to Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, and since 1996 has been Professorial Fellow at Melbourne University.**