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Margaret Reid Martin: A journey of faith

The Very Reverend Margaret Martin was a treasured member of the Mount Albert Presbyterian Church for over 30 years, serving as Honorary Assistant Minister, Missionary Union President, Minister's confidante, and Parish Council member. In 2018, at the age of 95, Margaret died, and her funeral service was held in the church she had served so faithfully.

The fact that Margaret lived to 95 is a story in itself. "How", she asked in a memoir, "did I get from a semi-invalid state as a 6-year-old to my present old age and good health? It's a long and strange story."

Health

Margaret was born in Wanganui in June 1923. In 1925 her Father, who had tuberculosis, died, and Margaret, aged 2, was discovered to have been infected. In March 1931, Isabel Reid, Margaret's Mother, who had read widely about 'Nature Cure', took Margaret to Leysin in Switzerland for 'the best treatment in the world'.

The food was largely carbohydrate and the drinks sweetened, something she hated, and after two months she was dehydrated; her knee where the TB was centred was not improving and she was showing signs of nerves. She was nearly 8 years old.

At an Anglican service in the village, Isabel heard a sermon based on John 21, where Jesus advises unsuccessful fishermen friends to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, awkward for right-handed men, but with good results. The preacher described this action as 'being prepared to do the unusual, the unconventional, the exceptional. Taking a leap of faith into the unknown'. This encouraged her to take her daughter away, which the doctors described as 'signing Margaret's death warrant'.

Upon returning to Britain, Isabel continued studying Nature Cure under Dr Stanley Lief. Margaret became a patient at his health clinic, Isabel became assistant matron, and a period of heat lamp treatment, massage, and exercise began. Margaret remembered the intense pain in her right knee, which had almost completely stiffened. In 1932 they returned to Wanganui, to her grandparents' home, where Isabel consulted the family doctor about Margaret's



Margaret in her later years.

further treatment. Although he did not approve of her ideas, he 'agreed to back her'.

So began six weeks of life in bed in traction, sun-bathing on the porch when the sun shone, massage, and hot and cold baths. For food nothing but fruit. Then dried fruits, nuts, and milk were added, for another six weeks. After the three months, x-rays showed that the TB was gone, leaving only scar tissue and the stiffened knee joint. They got Margaret mobile at once in a walking calliper, but the shortening of the leg meant that later a built-up shoe was needed so that her spine wouldn't be too much affected.

By the end of 1932, aged 9 and still in the pre-biotic age, Margaret was free of TB, alive and healthy, far from the predictions of the Swiss doctors. Years later she acknowledged the courage and determination Isabel had shown then and continued to show for others in her role as healer.

Formal Education

Ill health had meant somewhat erratic schooling, but as an avid reader, Margaret largely taught herself. Sunday school brought reading too, and camps often led by her mother. Girl Guides satisfied her love of community after the isolation of illness.

Intermediate School was more stable, and the compassion of an excellent form teacher inspired Margaret. At Wanganui Girls' College she distinguished herself by becoming Head Prefect. Along the way she studied piano and violin.

In 1943, Margaret set off for Otago University College to study science and found herself immediately at home at Knox Church. She got involved with the Student Christian Movement (SCM) at University, and was soon teaching in the Knox Sunday School.

After completing a BSc in 1948, a 'leap of faith' took Margaret to the Presbyterian Women's Training Institute to study theology. She completed a three-year theological course, and in 1950 graduated as a Deaconess looking for her next challenge.



Margaret as Deaconess.

Teaching

The Principal of Wanganui Girls' College offered her a position teaching Science. She also taught Scripture to all 3rd and 4th formers. During her five years there, Margaret became an educational representative for the National Council of Churches. Those were busy years: inspiring her pupils; carrying out certain deaconess duties in her spare time; and preaching in a country church.

For the next three years, as the only woman on staff at Waverley District High School, Margaret was involved in every aspect of school life and also active in the community, developing 'lasting, enriching friendships with many Waverley families'.

A Christian Educator

Christian education in some form was to be Margaret's priority for the next thirty years. In 1959 she joined the New Zealand Council for Christian Education (NZCCE), then spent four years as Field Secretary travelling the country, three years as Assistant General Secretary, and twelve years as General Secretary.

This role took her into primary and secondary schools, teachers' colleges, and universities. She often trained Sunday School teachers and Bible class leaders, and worked with parents' groups.

In 1961 Margaret was sent to the United States, first attending a three month programme with Presbyterian women from 23 countries, and finishing with a national conference of 5,000 representatives.

She went on to a Summer Session at Union Theological Seminary in New York and, in addition to attending Christian education courses, was able to read extensively in the area of religious and moral education. These experiences with Christians from all over the world and people of different faiths challenged Margaret's own views, and made her more aware of women's issues, racism, abortion, gay rights, and euthanasia.

Ordination

The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand had been discussing the possibility of women's ordination since as early as the 1920s, and finally in November 1964 at the General Assembly in Auckland, which Margaret and Isabel attended, the final regulations required for women to be ordained were passed. A Minister sitting behind them tapped Margaret on the shoulder and told her she would be the first. Three weeks later, at her Mother's instigation, she applied and was accepted as a candidate for ordained ministry, something that hit the headlines.

On May 13th 1965, after further study, Margaret became the Reverend Margaret Reid. As Field Secretary for the NZCCE, working with people from many different denominations, clergy and lay, she had become widely known, so the news of her ordination 'spread with interest rather than horror'. She particularly enjoyed congratulations from a Salvation Army Officer friend: "Congratulations on the Pressies catching up on what the Sallies achieved 100 years ago!"



Margaret at ordination, 1965.

In her speech after ordination, Margaret paid tribute to her inspirational Mother, who was prepared 'to do the unusual, the exceptional, the unconventional, taking a leap of faith into the unknown'. Her Mother said, however, 'that Margaret had launched into deeper waters than she ever had'.

Clerical dress was an issue for a woman so for semi-formal occasions Margaret wore a dark grey dress and jacket. When she went to the first General Assembly after ordination and joined the other new ministers to be welcomed by the Moderator, they were all in clerical dark suits with dog collars. In the morning tea queue later, Margaret was beside Reverend Dave Martin from Mount Albert, who asked, "Where is your dog collar?" She pointed to the pearls round her neck, to which he replied, "Too expensive". Her response; "One shilling and eleven pence from McKenzie's."

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Margaret continued working as General Secretary of the NZCCE (Churches Education Commission after 1972) until 1978, when she married and came to Mount Albert. In 1977, that same Reverend Dave Martin, an Auckland host from field officer days, widowed and taking some leave to recover from caring for his aging Father who had recently died, met up with Margaret again in Wellington. His subsequent marriage proposal saw Margaret make her own 'exceptional' move.

The Mount Albert Years

In 1978 Margaret became a member of the Mount Albert Presbyterian congregation. She assisted Dave in his ministry until his retirement in 1980, and then carried out other ministries with him, in Auckland and in Suva.

In further positions after 1978: 8 years in the Presbyterian Department of Parish Development, and Mission consultant; and 8 years as National Coordinator for Christian Research Association, she described 'learning as much as I may have given.'

Margaret's step-daughter Glen Bryant describes her amazing theological understanding and interest in modern thinking. Together they attended several theological events and took Te Reo classes. Margaret said that she could not have had a better step-family than the Martins, and Glen's and Ron's daughters, Kirsten and Tessa, acknowledge their great Nanna.

As Moderator

Margaret's standing in the church was acknowledged in 1987 when she became the first ordained woman Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand. On her moderatorial journeys she and Dave travelled around New Zealand and overseas.



Margaret at granddaughter Kirsten's wedding.

Mount Albert U3A

In June 2001 Margaret was an inaugural member of the Mount Albert U3A. As a teacher, learner, and leader, this was just the sort of organisation to attract her. She led a group on world religions and (Phyl Belsham writes) she had a keen interest in religions other than her own branch of Christianity. She organised visits to temples, mosques, and different churches, and was highly regarded by leaders of these other faiths. At the age of 80 she took on the role of President, and continued attendance until she physically could no longer get there.

Later years

Dave's ill health curtailed their activities, but their almost 24 years together until his death in 2002 brought them both great happiness. Margaret's Christian research into church life and even more into changes in New Zealand society kept her enthused, and in her 80s she conducted services when asked, and continued to study and reflect.

The fact that she had good health into her 90s, she emphasised that she owed to her Mother's courage. A woman who, like Margaret, was prepared to step out, do the unusual, take that leap of faith, and commit her life to service to others.

Thanks to Margaret's step-daughter, Glen Bryant, for the material she gave me. Quotes from Margaret's own electronic memoir are given in 'single quotes'. Other sources include comments from Reverend Tani Haunga, Valerie Candy, and Kirsten Bryant. And finally, thanks to Phyl Belsham, who was with Margaret in U3A



Margaret with granddaughter Kirsten and her husband Rob Bevan.

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

Sunday 1st December, 2:30pm, Ferndale House

High Tea: Members only, \$25 a head. The Auckland String Quartet, which we so enjoyed last year, will perform. Registration is essential. Contact Judith Goldie: judith.goldie@xtra.co.nz, 09 817 6279 or Victoria Turner: victoria.turner@bayleys.co.nz, 027 224 4892.

Sunday 15th March 2020, 1–4pm, Ferndale House

Mount Albert Historical Society Heritage Day: Including Settler fancy dress, children's games, a photographic display, and local books presented by their authors. Ice cream, coffee, and cake carts will be on site. Just mark this one on your calendar, bring your children and grandchildren, and help us celebrate Mount Albert's history.

Dave Martin's Ministry: His daughter Glen remembers

The Martin family arrived in Auckland 26 March 1957. The manse (house provided by the church) had been moved from behind the Presbyterian Church at 16 Mount Albert Road, to 19 Allendale Road, an empty section beside the Wakefields' house. It was cut in half for moving, the second half moved the day the Martins arrived in Auckland. Obviously it was not habitable and it was several months before it was.

David Martin, Dave, or DB to his friends and family, ministered in Mount Albert for nearly 25 years. His two children grew up in Allendale Road, attended Mt Albert Primary School, played tennis on the Presbyterian church tennis courts in Lloyd Avenue (beside Morgan's paddock), and participated in the choir and other church related activities.

That was the heyday for churches: the church was a centre for social life; women's and men's organisations flourished; Sunday Schools at Mount Albert and Gladstone were blooming. The Bible Class was huge. It attracted many girls in the area, especially when the Mount Albert Grammar School houseboys attended church services. The Girls' Brigade was strong; flags of the uniformed organisations were displayed permanently in church.



Dave Martin

Dave's first wife, Dorothy Martin, supported his ministry by playing an active part in women's organisations, which mainly met on Thursday afternoons. Soon after the Martins arrived in Mount Albert, Arthur Simpson discovered that Dorothy was a maths teacher. He persuaded her to teach with him at Henderson High School, which she did for many years, though only part-time as she had to have Thursday afternoons off.

She taught in several schools from then until she died in 1975. Her other subject was embroidery, a School Certificate subject in those days.

Dorothy shared her skills with ladies of the area in groups that met at the manse in the winter.

Dave was involved in local combined church activities through the Ministers Fraternal. It was called by that name even when women were involved. The Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian congregations combined for worship services for many years on Easter Day and Christmas Day.

After Dorothy died, Dave kept house for his son David and his father, a retired high-country shepherd. He and his father had a wonderful vegetable garden. Dave was an Army chaplain during World War Two, and always marched on Anzac Day, but never darkened the doors of the RSA.

Spending time with his granddaughters was a special treat, and his face would light up when they were around. They remember his reading books like *The Hobbit*, and playing games on Christmas Day. They especially remember the wicked twinkle he always had in his eye. He was very proud of their achievements.

Glen Bryant



Alice Wylie & her grandson with Sir Harold Marshall, ANZAC Day Service 2019



Flowers at the ANZAC Day Service 2019