

AN ADDRESS GIVEN BY C.A. STINSON ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. LUKES ON SUNDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 1978.

When we think of St. Lukes, we think also of George Hemming. The two are synonymous.

My short talk will reveal the link, certainly to those who are new to Fiji and, possibly act as a reminder to those of us whose memories are dimming, the connection between St. Lukes and the Rev. Dr. George Hemming. But first let me introduce Dr. Hemming to you.

Dr. Hemming came from Queensland to Fiji as a medical practitioner and an Anglican priest. In Queensland he was a state school teacher and after graduating from the theological college he was appointed a Curate of the Queensland parish. In 1939 Dr. Hemming graduated in medicine. Fiji first came to know of George Hemming in 1940 when he came here to take up a post with the Colonial War Memorial hospital, a position he held until 1946. When his term finished, George decided that he should devote more time to the church. He left Fiji for the Solomon Islands where he became a medical missionary in Malaita. He remained there until 1949.

On returning to Fiji Dr. Hemming set up in private practice in Suva but in 1954 he again decided to offer his services to the needy and it was through his efforts that the Bayly Clinic came into being and, as we all know, he has remained in the Bayly Clinic ever since.

Another interesting point of course is that Dr. Hemming became honorary priest in the diocese of Polynesia back in 1940 and from that day to this he has worked entirely in a voluntary capacity never seeking reward for his services.

Well now you have a picture of George Hemming!

Let us now look at the history of St. Lukes. It was in 1939, in fact the month of October that the idea of building a church room at Suva Point was first discussed. Shortly afterward a lease was obtained on which this hall and church now stand. However, from 1939-1950 there was no progress as far as any building were concerned and services were still being held in the guide hall and in private homes. It was at one of these services an evensong held at Dr. Hemming's home that a final decision was taken to build a church instead of a hall and that the church should be built of stone. An enthusiastic band of workers then and there volunteered to help.

This enthusiasm is all the more noteworthy when it is realised that the balance in the Church Room Fund was only six pounds, four shillings and seven pence. It must have been a small fund throughout the years because the bank interest shown in account for the years 1939-1944 amounted to only thirteen shillings and seven pence. Rent for the lease was one shilling per annum and in fact in 1940 a careless treasurer of the time paid one shilling and one pence, much to the annoyance of the

auditor. The decision to build therefore was based on a shoestring budget and a great deal more than plain enthusiasm was called for.

It was sometime after the building of the church that the late Rev. Herbert Figgers, the Dean and Rector of Suva touched on the ingredients required when he commented after looking at the historical background of St. Lukes, "It is an outstanding example of what can be achieved by the living church when inspired with a purpose and led with dedicated enthusiasm." He had placed his fingers on the pulse. I shall come back again to this point of dedicated enthusiasm.

On a forgotten Saturday in 1950 before a mountain of lime stone, the dedicated band of volunteers assembled. They were short and tall, in longs and in shorts, slim and portly, dark and fair, strong and weak, bold and nervous and all armed with picks and shovels, spades and forks, wheelbarrows and crowbars, axes and tomahawks, measuring tapes, twine and pencils; to inspect this well equipped body of men was our commander in chief, Dr. George Hemming, who was lost to the photographers when he walked between the ranks. Our quest of honour on that historic day was none other than the Bishop in Polynesia, Bishop Kempthorn.

And so the work began!

Let it always be remembered that throughout the years of building the ladies of the parish played a most important role, that of a type of Gungadin, but providing marvellous afternoon tea and not just water. I often wondered whether the workers went out on Saturday to partake in the building or really as an excuse to join in a very fine tea parties!

This forgotten Saturday marked the beginning of 3 years of tough, backbreaking work, handling rocks, constant chipping and facing of stone, digging trenches and the gruelling task of mixing concrete and plaster. This hard work slowly weeded out the not so enthusiastic. Some fell by the way side.

Finally the church was completed.

It would take far too long to tell of the trials and errors, the buried mistakes, the blisters, the jokes told and about the fine fellowship and the deep sense of pride that prevailed throughout. But I must touch on one point. After the church had been completed George Hemming found he had nowhere to hand a bell that a parishioner presented to him. George was not satisfied to hand it from a bracket on the back wall of the church and decided a tower would have to be built and he would have started and finished the tower himself if a band of workers had not been shamed into doing so.

We are here tonight celebrating the 25th anniversary but St. Luke's ties with the church in Fiji goes back over 75 years, as the ceiling, the roof beams all of the finest New Zealand Kouri, and a great deal of the roofing iron came from the old Pro Cathedral that once proudly stood on the site now occupied by Air Pacific House.

Just before leaving the subject of the church it is interesting to note that the record shows that the bank balance in April 1953 held at twenty pounds and this was after

meeting the cost of the building which incidentally totalled one thousand, one hundred and eighty-two pounds. Fourteen shillings and seven pence.

Well so much for the church. What happened to George?

By this time George was struck with the building fever and those who did not keep away from him caught it. It was after the 1953 hurricane that George put in a bid to buy the partly damaged home of Mr Carl Corbett and for this he paid one thousand pounds. This house had to be dismantled and transported to this site and when it was found that there was sufficient material available to allow for the building of a vicarage and a hall, work was started and never stopped until the project was completed.

This story clearly points to what can be achieved by people who have a will to serve. Is this spirit still with us today? Do we still have leaders with dedicated enthusiasm? I believe we do and I also believe that even today there are men and women with exactly the same desire to dedicate themselves to tasks that will benefit their community but one of the greatest problems people face is the uncertainty of what to do or where to start. It is only when dedicated leaders come to the fore that these helpers rise up and grasp the opportunity to serve.

I said I would refer again to dedicated enthusiasm. We see this in the life of George Hemming, a man who has meant so much to us all in this community, a man ready at all times to attend to our needs. So let me close by saying that we thank God for our lovely church and we thank God for George who for 25 years has cared for us without ever seeking reward.
