



## SYNOD 2023 OBITUARIES

### REV. KEITH CLEMENT WEAVERS

12 December 1929 – 20 November 2021

As the third son of a war widow, Keith was born in Darfield near Christchurch, New Zealand. His education was in Linfield then Christchurch Boys' High school prior to employment as a window dresser.

Seeking further work experience, he travelled to the UK. Staying in a Toc H hostel in Manchester became a turning point in his life as he met Rev Tom Colvin through whom Keith became part of the Iona Community having various experiences over two years.

On Iona he was odd job man at the Argyll Hotel, commercial fisherman for salmon off the Island of Mull, assisted Tom with supervising Borstal Boys at Camas, and youth work both in Glasgow and on Iona becoming an Iona Youth Associate. He went to Rumania with the Community to a youth festival, failed to have the correct visa and was arrested. He played rugby at the festival and held a professional team from France to 26 – nil.

Feeling the urging of the Holy Spirit toward ordination, he and God had some robust arguments, which resulted in his return to NZ, education at Canterbury University, before studying at Knox College in Dunedin.

On 22 January 1961 Keith was ordained into the parish of Cobden - Runanga near Greymouth by the Presbytery of Westland/Buller within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa/New Zealand. His ministry lasted six years during which he was Clerk of Presbytery for five years. Through mutual friends, he met Helen, an Australian registered nurse on working holiday in NZ and they were married in 1965.

In 1966 he was inducted into the Upper Clutha parish (Wanaka, Hawea Flat, Luggate & Tarras) by the Presbytery of Central Otago for eight years. Three sons were born during this time.

In 1974 he was inducted into the New Brighton Union Parish (Presbyterian/Methodist) which included South Brighton by the Presbytery of Canterbury (Christchurch) where he served for two years

Keith served the Hastings East parish (Presbytery of Hawkes Bay) for five years.

Accredited as Industrial Chaplain with Inter-Church Trade & Industry Mission (Wellington) June 1982.

He was Chaplain at Lindisfarne Presbyterian Boys College for two years from 1983.

He branched out into management at a Hastings freezing works and also owned a grocery/dairy for two years before making the move to Australia.

After being accepted into the Uniting Church in Australia in 1985, Keith served the Stockton Parish in Newcastle (Stockton, Williamtown, Medowie & Tanilba Bay) for six years. 2/1986 – 1992. During this time Keith was Secretary for The Hunter Presbytery and also part-time Chaplain at Royal Newcastle Hospital. He was also invited by Synod to be part of a Ministry Disaster team at Nyngan following the flood.

Invited by Presbytery, Keith accepted an intentional supply, at Waratah/Lambton/South Waratah for one year. 1992 – 1993

He was invited by Synod to complete an intentional supply in Tamworth (with three ministers & nine preaching places) for eighteen months. 1993 - 1994

Having completed the Intentional Interim Ministry training 1994, Keith was inducted as the first Intentional Interim Ministry placement within the NSW/ACT Synod at Mayfield/ Mayfield West, Tighes Hill for one year. 1994 - 1995

He was inducted into the Harden/Boorowa parish in the Presbytery of the Riverina for an IIM for one year. 1995 – 1996. Keith believed that the way to deliver intentional interim ministry was to move house and live among the community he had been called to serve. Hence several separations of the family, much moving house and high telephone bills.

He served as IIM with West Wallsend/ Edgeworth/Holmesville within The Hunter Presbytery for one year. He became an Australian citizen in January 1993 as he was keen to vote.

Travelling overseas, on one of their four visits to Iona in Scotland, he and Helen worked as volunteers. Keith was Assistant Sacristan in the Abbey and Helen worked in the office for four months in the year 2000. During that time, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, Helen felt it was time to leave nursing and work with Keith in ministry.

On return it was decided that for Helen to complete the Intentional ministry course & embark on the lay preacher and sacrament courses, they could work together as an IIM team. Helen resigned after many years of nursing, completed the IIM 2001 and so became the first team IIM in the NSW/ACT Synod. Their first placement began in the parish of Warnervale, including Toukley, Wyong and Mannering Park in the Kuringai Presbytery for eighteen months 5/2001 – 12/2002.

Returning to Newcastle, Keith spent some time as Relieving Mental Health Chaplain and doing supply.

Team IIM resumed in Canowindra, including Cranbury and Cudal in the Far West Presbytery for one year 3/2003 – 3/2004. Negotiations began for an interim agreement with the Anglican parish of Canowindra, the Far West Presbytery and the Diocese of Bathurst to form the Canowindra Uniting Church/Anglican combined parish, the first in NSW. At the induction of the first Anglican priest into the co-operating parish, Keith and Helen were farewelled at the same service and returned to Newcastle.

Keith undertook part-time supply minister at Tarro for four years 12/2004 – 3/2008 where he played the trumpet for the last hymn each Sunday. If he failed to bring it to worship, the congregation complained.

Keith and Helen accepted Presbytery's invitation to conduct a team IIM in Cessnock/Bellbird for five months in 2016.

In semi-retirement within the Hunter Presbytery – Multiple supply situations and casual preaching commitments during which he served five years on the NSW/ACT Synod Faith and Unity committee and two years on The Hunter Presbytery Social Justice committee.

His ministry spanned 60 years and was celebrated by the Hunter Presbytery.

He was a keen tramper, a devoted fan of the All Blacks, a great cook who could bottle fruit and make jam, an amateur wine maker, was an artist, trumpeter and gardener. His health started to fail and he died at 91 during

COVID lockdown. He was committed to the Iona Community from the age of 22 and served his Lord as a humble and faithful servant.

He is survived by his wife Helen, Andrew and Vicky, Graham, Tim and Kelly along with Paige, Zac, Aidan and Blake.

### **THELMA MAY ATKIN** **4 July 1926 – 27 April 2023**

Aged 96 Years

Peacefully passed at Thomas Holt Village. Formerly of Jannali. Dearly beloved wife of Eric (dec 2009). Loving mother and mother-in-law of Lorraine & Alan, Brian & Narelle, Greg & Terese. Special Grandma to Mark & Kate, Andrew & Sarah, Elizabeth & Sergio, Chris & Rachael, Breanna & Scott, Lauren & Sam, Blake & Danielle, Tim & Rona, Jessica & Andrew, Michael & Emma. Great Grandmother to twenty one beautiful Great Grandchildren.

Lovingly now re-united with Eric.

A Memorial Service was held at Jannali Uniting Church, 527 Box Rd, Jannali on Friday 12th May, 2023 at 12.30pm."

### **MERILEE DAWN SECOMBE NE WILLIAMS** **13 July 1937 – 2 May 2022**

Merillee Dawn Secombe was born 13<sup>th</sup> July 1934, eldest daughter of Jack and Sylvia Williams of Sefton.

She was just 2 years old when her parents hosted the Methodist Church in their garage.

Merillee attended Chester Hill Primary School and Burwood Girls High School. Later she worked in Sydney making wedding dresses and on Sundays she would play the organ at the Methodist Church across the road.

Merillee's early life experiences had a big part in shaping the person she became, her views on life, her strong religious beliefs, and her love of family.

She married Rev James (Jim) Lawrence Secombe in 1955.

They had 5 children, David, Chris, Rodney, Janelle and Derek (d), 8 Grandchildren and 3 Great-Grandchildren.

Merillee served alongside Jim in his placements in the Methodist Church and Uniting Church in Australia.

1955 – 1958	Coonabarabran Circuit
1958 – 1961	Ardlethan – Barellan Circuit
1962 – 1965	West Wyalong Circuit
1966 – 1971	Mortdale Circuit
1972 – 1976	Fairfield Circuit
1977 – 1986	Gosford Parish
1986 – 1989	Endeavour Parish
1989 – 1992	Chaplain Concord Repatriation Hospital

Merillee was a gifted seamstress making many dresses including wedding dresses to supplement Jim's income for the family. Her cooking and baking were part of the hospitality she offered to the parishioners where they served.

She attended night school to secure her certificate as a craft teacher, a precursor to Special Education in schools, and taught in schools besides continuing to be wife, mother, and sharing in Jim's ministry.

They retired to their home at Lisarow on the Central Coast in 1992 where Merillee became very active in many of the local groups. These included playing cards, tennis, singing in the Church Choir, working with other women knitting, sewing, and doing other crafts for a variety of charities. Merillee's sewing skills were obvious in the many quilts the team in Wholly Quilts created for foster children, nursing homes, pastoral support for those who were grieving and Wrap with Love. Merillee cooking was also offered for fetes, church, school, and community gatherings.

Merillee died on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022.

Merillee will be remembered for her compassion; loyal, gracious, caring nature; and her strong Christian faith, which sustained her through good times and the challenges of life, and which she shared with others through her loving influence on all she met.

### **REV. WILLIAM WALLACE ROBERTSON**

**Dob – 6 February 2023**

Will entered the ministry in 1991 following early retirement from the Department of Education. He faithfully served our God through his ministry to several communities throughout NSW and in the Northern Territory. After a period of ministry at Ebenezer/Pitt Town, he provided supply ministry, responding to congregation requests from Orange and Glen Innes. He also trained for Intentional Interim Ministry, and was called to Richmond/Kurrajong, and to Katherine in the Northern Territory in 2002. After his return to NSW, Will continued to give freely for periods, in supply at Riverstone, Emu Plains & Jamisontown, Urunga, Finley, Tocumwal & Jerilderie

Will retired with Ann his wife to Smiths Lake, a small lakeside village south of Forster, where he worshipped. It was only recently before his death that both he and Ann moved to a retirement village in Tuncurry.

Will was a man of strong faith, love, and convictions.

### **REV. RON SHARP**

**29 September 1927 – 7 August 2021**

- Ron had a strong connection to the Presbyterian Church through his family in Harden.
- His father, John Sharp, served as the secretary of the Ross Memorial church for 30 years.
- Ron's parents were faithful churchgoers and sang in the choir, which had a big influence on his upbringing.
- Ron learned to play the piano as a boy and became skilled enough to play simple Chopin pieces.
- After World War II, Ron focused on voice and became a tenor singer in the Bexley Presbyterian Church choir.
- Ron excelled academically, becoming the dux of the primary school and completing a three-year engineering trades drawing course in one year.

- At age 15, Ron went to Sydney for job interviews as a draftsman and secured a position at the Morgan Crucible Co based on his school drawings.
- Ron became a skilled engineering draftsman and worked on various projects in Sydney and beyond.
- Ron joined the choir at Bexley Presbyterian Church and participated in a production called the "Television Tour."
- Ron had a sense of humour influenced by shows like the Goon Show and Spike Milligan.
- As part of the Presbyterian Church in the Sydney area, he got involved in a leadership training course with the aim of keeping young people in the Presbyterian Fellowship Association to build them up and encourage them in Christ.
- Ron got onto the Missions Committee and helped organise the annual missions conference at Thornleigh each October. The motto of the PFA was 'The best is yet to be'.
- He completed his theological training and was ordained into the Presbyterian Church of NSW in 1968. Then he became a minister, serving in various churches throughout his career after getting married to Margaret.
- He accepted a call to a placement at Brockelsby Presbyterian Church (west of Albury), then went on to Bondi Presbyterian Church, Hunters Hill Presbyterian Church, Warialda Presbyterian Church, Laurieton Presbyterian Church, Corrimal Presbyterian (soon to be Uniting) Church, Dapto Uniting Church and finally Culcairn Uniting Church before retiring.
- Ron was known for his dedication, sense of humour, and kindness toward others. He was a faithful servant of the church for many years – even after he retired, he continued to preside over marriages and funerals etc. In all these official and other less official functions, he was kind and compassionate in his interactions with others, always making them feel comfortable in their circumstances.

### BARBARA JUDITH WILSON

4 March 1935 – 20 April 2023

Barbara Lindsay grew up as a member of Willoughby and Roseville Methodist churches, and attended Methodist Ladies College for her high schooling.

After marrying a fellow member of the Roseville Methodist youth group Barbara moved to Killara where she became both a member of staff at Ravenswood, and a member of Gordon Methodist Church.

She continued as a member at Gordon Methodist after leaving Ravenswood, with both sons attending Gordon Methodist/Uniting. She was an active member of the stitching group at Gordon from its beginnings. Her elder son Rev Dr Matthew Wilson candidated from Gordon Uniting.

After retirement from teaching at Brigidine College and Abbotsleigh following her time at Ravenswood, she lived primarily at Medlow Bath, but retained an alternate home at Gordon, continuing her involvement in the groups there. From Medlow Bath, she became an active member at Katoomba Uniting as part of their leadership group and in later years, succeeding her husband Barry as Treasurer.

Barbara died after a long struggle with primary progressive aphasia in April 2023.

### MRS EELLEN WILSON widow of Rev Alan Wilson

1930-2021

Eelen was born Eelen Milburn 3 June 1930 and raised in Manly. At 19 she went on an overseas trip and spent a year in Britain. On her return after a couple of jobs she trained as a deaconess volunteering as a counsellor for the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade where she met Alan who was training her group. He had trained for the Methodist

ministry in Leigh College and was looking for a suitable lady as a minister's wife. They were granted permission to marry and after ordination Alan was appointed to the Manilla circuit in 1960, where Eelen vigorously exercised her own ministry gifts. She complimented, rather than supplemented Alan's ministry. When they became parents of a son then a daughter, she cut back on her activities to care for them. They moved to Revesby in 1965 where there were 5 preaching places, so Eelen often led services and occasionally preached when Alan was unavailable. Subsequent appointments were to Cronulla and finally Northbridge. In 1995 they retired to Wamberal on the Central Coast and joined the Terrigal congregation. Eelen always had a curiosity and interest in things, checking the church library, keeping active with crosswords (and leaving the garden to Alan). Failing health saw them move to smaller accommodation but they still sang in the choir until Alan died. Then Eelen worshipped in the midweek service always with a keen attention to the sermon. She was always grateful and matter of fact with an active mind and a positive faith. Eelen passed away 13 November 2021.

### **ROBERT WILLOUGHBY**

**29 July 1927 – 13 August 2022**

Robert (Bob) Willoughby was born on 29 July, 1927 and died on 13 August, 2022, having just celebrated his 95th birthday. He was a loving husband to Val for nearly 70 years and father to Mark (dec), Kerein, Andrew, Ann-Maree and Jane(dec).

Bob was a loving person who was passionate about seeing people included, loved, achieving their best and exceeding their own expectations. He wanted to show Jesus to people by reflecting Jesus' love through himself. Bob connected with people, no matter what their situation, by actively listening to them, hearing their stories and sharing stories of his own – which were shared with passion, humour and often embellishments.

Bob could not stand by and see people missing out, being lonely or isolated. The family house at Christmas was regularly full of laughter and fun with many people who would otherwise have found themselves alone for the day. Bob was often referred to as an old school minister, who spent time with people and desired the church to be an important and integral part of the community, not just a place some people went to on a Sunday morning.

Bus Tours, Senior Citizens Clubs, Single Society and Singing Groups were some of the initiatives Bob started when he saw a need in the various communities he worked in. He kept faithful to his original call of 2 Timothy 4:5 "Do the work of an evangelist".

Bob was sent as a Home Missionary in September 1967 to Glen Innes, in the Methodist Church. In January 1972 he moved to Narrabri. In 1974, Bob attended Leigh College and The United Theological College and was Ordained in Lismore (from Alstonville), in October 1977, in the newly founded Uniting Church. He then served in Maitland, Cobar, Wingham, Singleton and retired to Diamond Beach, then Caves Beach.

### **DEACONESS MAVIS 'JEAN' MCKINNON OAM**

**27 August 1922 – 7 April 2022**

Deaconess Mavis 'Jean McKinnon' was born at Oberon NSW on 27 August 1922, eldest child of John Edgar and Pearl Daphne (nee Coventry) McKinnon of Coonamble, and later of Wellington from the mid 1920s, where her father operated his own business in the town.

Jean's heritage was Methodist and her early life was spent in Wellington prior to moving to Tamworth with her mother and siblings at 12 years of age, her father remaining in Wellington until his death in January 1941. John McKinnon's obituary listed his many community involvements, including the conduct of dances for the young

people of Wellington and his rapport with them, and also his funeral service and burial in the Wellington Methodist cemetery. (One legacy from her father was Jean's love of dancing, specifically remembered at her 2022 memorial service.)

At Tamworth Jean attended the local high school, began her association with the Presbyterian Church and PFA and other involvements. Many years later Jean recalled first clearly hearing God's call to full time Christian service at an Easter 1943 PFA Camp at Bendemeer (where the Chief Speaker was Rev. J.H.G. Kerr,) and the challenge of the words 'Who can say 'Christ for me' and 'Me for Christ' and to responding to this appeal. Jean is pictured standing at right in a photo taken at this camp.

Other Presbyterian influences on Jean at Tamworth included Rev. Joseph Faulkner, a former Methodist Home Missionary and subsequently Superintendent of Presbyterian Home Missions, and also Rev. R. Lachlan McInnes and his wife Barbara. (Lach and Barbara had themselves met at a PFA camp prior to their marriage.) Lach McInnes was later ordained and inducted as Assistant at Tamworth in 1940, and in 2018, Jean referred to herself as having been a 'fan' of Lach and Barbara McInnes since that time. Another influence was Home Missionary Alfred W. Rodgers, Locum for Rev. C. D. McAlpine throughout the latter's Moderatorship in 1942/3.

Jean also recalled God's persistent call over the following months to serve as a Deaconess, culminating in her attendance at preparatory lectures at Church Offices and at the YWCA, her appointment as probationary Deaconess on 1 February 1945, her full-time training and residence in the former Ultimo Presbyterian Manse (later the UCA Harris Centre), her commissioning in the Ultimo Church on 26 September 1945 together with Deaconesses Leila Burns and Christine Anderson, and her continued service at Ultimo over 1945/47. Transferred to Glebe, her service over 1948-1951 was interrupted by flood relief work at Kempsey, followed by service at the Greta Migration Camp from 1952 to June 1953.

Her service at Redfern from 1953 to 1959 saw Jean as Senior Deaconess in the Social Service Department and residing at Earlwood, where she was joined by her mother (and also her sister Heather for a time). Jean's Redfern service was also interrupted for a time by flood relief work at Narrabri.

Jean then served as Deaconess and as Assistant in the Parramatta charge over the years 1960/69, being involved in extensive parish work, and also in work with residents at the former Parramatta Girls Training School.

Transferred to the Pitt Wood Homes at Ashfield in February 1970 as resident chaplain and undertaking various other duties, Jean worked closely with Deaconess (now retired UC minister) Margaret Moon, and thus began a close and enduring friendship between the two.

Throughout her long service, Jean also exercised a strong influence on other Deaconesses including Margaret Lawson, now retired and living in Queensland, and who maintained regular contact with Jean over the years by phone, letter, and by visits whenever visiting relatives in Sydney. Margaret recalls Jean as having a great sense of humour and as a creative artist, having been given one of Jean's original paintings, which she treasures today.

Continuing in residence in her flat at Pitt Wood following the death of her mother in 1975, Jean learned from her colleague Margaret Moon that Mrs Ellen Pass of the Temora Presbyterian manse was experiencing a difficult second pregnancy and needed to come to Sydney ahead of her expected confinement to be close to any necessary specialist care. Learning of this need, Jean quickly offered Ellen a 10 day holiday in her own flat prior to Ellen's move to the Alex Tulloh home at Pitt Wood and her subsequent confinement. This typically caring response by Jean was greatly appreciated by the Pass family.

Jean became Secretary of the Presbyterian Deaconess Council in 1976, and continued her work at Pitt Wood until March 1978. Following three months long service leave, she then entered the service of the Uniting Church, being

placed at the Leichhardt Parish Mission for the remainder of 1978, and where she was extensively involved in the mission's aged care programme. The period 1979 to December 1982 saw Jean's return to parish work in the Blacktown/Rooty Hill/Doonside parish, followed by her retirement from full-time Deaconess service in 1983.

Still residing at Ashfield, Jean then began serving Eastwood parish in February 1983 on a part-time basis, and where the Marsden Road (Carlingford) church became her particular responsibility until her 'retirement' to Gould Drive, Lemon Tree Passage in the Hunter Presbytery in July 1985. Also in 1983, Jean travelled overseas with long term friend and colleague Rev. Margaret Moon, maintaining pastoral contact with the parish by letter.

A record of Jean's service at Marsden Road highlighted her involvement in pastoral visitation, her ready use of her artistic and poetic gifts, and especially her work with the young people which included taking week-long camping trips with minimal adult assistance to Katoomba and Umina.

Jean's farewell at Marsden Road in June was marked by yet another demonstration of Jean's 'impish personality' in her presentation of a full suitcase of 'quirky gifts' to many of those present, each one highlighting some aspect of the recipient's nature or interests.

Retirement in the Hunter for Jean in 1985 was still not an option and she continued her active involvement in church and wider community from her new home at Gould Drive Lemon Tree Passage. Her many years of service to Church and community were recognized by the award of the OAM in the Australia Day Honours of 1990.

Jean's involvement in local parish and community work was maintained over the years 1985-2002 while initially resident at Lemon Tree and later at Tanilba Bay, where a new church known as Tilligerry Uniting Church was opened in May 2000. Jean some years later wrote that this was a time of 'hard work!!!!', including responsibility for the weekly under 5's play group, cooking and selling at a monthly church street stall, door steward, flower and morning tea roster, occasional assistance with local SRE, monthly community library duty, and more. (Jean omitted the Tanilba Bay/ Tilligery) preaching roster!)

The disastrous Newcastle earthquake occurred on the morning of 28 December 1990 and Jean immediately involved herself with post-earthquake recovery and counselling, while also over the years 1991/92 being involved with Uniting Church Retirement Living in the Hunter.

In her hand-written contribution to the 2008 Presbyterian Deaconesses Reunion booklet, Jean recorded that in all this, the 'Amazing Grace' of God had kept her going, and her belief that her work on earth was not yet done.

Having moved to Mayfield in the Port Hunter parish in September 2006 Jean's 65 year's service was recognized by a special service at Mayfield on 31 January 2010, attended by 10 members of her extended family and other friends of earlier years, including some from her service over 50 years earlier at the Greta Migrant Camp. (This service, including projected images of Jean's life journey, a record of her service, a poem composed by Jean, known also at Mayfield as the 'resident parish poet, was reported in detail in the monthly parish paper.)

Jean McKinnon died at Irwin Hall, Mayfield, on 7 April 2022 aged 99, four months short of her 100th birthday. Her long life of service to the Presbyterian and Uniting Churches was celebrated at Mayfield Uniting Church on 7 April 2022 in a service led by Lay Pastor Bill Hawkins.

Rev. Dr. Bill Ives, who knew Jean from his own student days, and also at Marsden Road, summed up Jean's life and service in words which would surely bring a loud AMEN from all who were privileged to work with her:- "Jean McKinnon was a saintly soul, and a faithful servant of God, radiating joy wherever she was..."

**JOHN RAYMOND ATKINSON****23 April 1922 –**

Ray, “Just Let Me Say How Much I Love You”! I’m assuming, anyone who knows me, wouldn’t want me to sing it ..... and, I won’t!

Oscar Wilde said “You don’t love someone for their looks, or their clothes, or for their fancy car, but because they sing a song only you can hear”.

Spending almost 56 years in love with one person is a wonderful statement about the gift of married life.

Some people have asked for our secret for a happy marriage probably because they regarded us as relics from a bygone age, where everything, including marriage, was built to last.

It’s funny that it’s the quantity of time that intrigues people rather than the quality. They are assuming those 56 years have been happy ones ..... And they would be mostly right. Laughing and loving has kept us together. BUT, I know Jodie learnt her first swear words from one of our arguments, and we have muddled our way through grief and upheaval. Once I even pretended to leave home – I was feeling taken for granted and certainly the third rung in the trinity, of God, others and. .... me! I cried all the way to Powell’s that day hoping he would miss me!!!!!!!?

But it’s great to feel trusted and to trust another person with your life. To know someone is there when you’re feeling like death, or to listen to you rant, and to laugh and cry with you.

No big mystery really – just the sort of deep, enduring love people yearn for but can search a lifetime to find. I didn’t settle for less than the best! It was so good to do a silly dance around the kitchen, someone to hold my hand when I needed an extra dollop of strength, to sit and cuddle with, without needing to say a word.

I know I had the most wonderful man in the world, and I knew this in spite of my father’s antagonism. My father certainly wasn’t keen for his only daughter to fall in love with a minister of the church – actually anyone at all. He wanted me to follow my career and be there for him – to be an adornment if you like.

BUT, I fell in love with Ray – not exactly my tall, dark and handsome fairy-tale, but this beautiful person. This man who was older for sure, but strong and wise about important things, loving and kind and good. AND, he loved me! AND, I believe he loved me more with each new day. He treated me as a precious gift.

Ray gave me freely whatever he had – his wisdom and indomitable optimism, his belief that it is possible to change yourself – to be transformed. His uncompromising honesty and fairness. His incredible warmth and humour. His curiosity. His lack of bitterness. And ..... perhaps the greatest gift of all ..... his grace and love of life.

I don’t wish to portray Ray as a saint.

He was anything but that. He unbelievably had flaws and failings. He was difficult at times, unreasonable frequently, nit-picking and infuriating, and he was sssssssooooooooooooooooooooo bad at buying presents, but then he would surprise me with beautiful pink roses – for no reason at all.

Like everyone, he was a combination of great and not-so-great qualities, and to everyone’s horror, whenever I would focus on his faults, taking his virtues for granted, I would suffer raised eyebrows of disbelief. He’s so perfect!!!

Though we forge our own way in life, the path we begin down is carved by our times, circumstances and family. Ray's family, his Mum and Dad, Annie and Jack, who I didn't have the privilege of ever knowing, but through his treasured Auntie Nel, Uncle Les, Brian and Robyn, and of course Ray himself, I experienced something decidedly unique – a breathtaking honesty, a rich depth of things spiritual, a warmth, a clever, insightful “turn of phrase”, moral integrity and a passion for others and our world.

Ray's manners and delightful politeness are part of the Atkinson DNA, influenced, I suspect, from the top.

The poem that Sam read speaks about two of Ray's most significant gifts - his dyslexia and colour blindness . Many of us would see them as liabilities rather than gifts but I see them as tools God has used mightily to mould and make Ray to be the person he was – quite the colourful character!

Ray's dyslexia helped people to relax, and not only laugh with him, but to also laugh at themselves.

His colour blindness helped him to see EVERYTHING, particularly things that no-one else ever sees. These weaknesses gave him a sage-like wisdom that saw qualities in people, and possibilities in situations that others would never dream of – the ordinary, the unique, the potential.

Ray, as you know was a “Gospel” person – he didn't need to hang onto anything. For him the ego was out of the way. He made a difference in the world precisely because he didn't need to. He didn't need to be first – didn't even need to win at table tennis or canasta, he didn't need to be important or number one. He didn't need to be wealthy or popular, so he could be who God wanted him to be, and free to do what God wanted him to do.

Ray knew without a doubt that he wouldn't be anything except for God's empowering – he had no pretensions about himself, truly a humble man of God.

Ray, has in his living startled the perplexities of a pondering Church; he has engaged debate as any torment would; he has sown seeds which have become an ethical and moral watch dog in a community of complacency. His gift I believe, to the many Church communities and Groups we have been part of. He taught us how to live our faith, what car tyres run best, about raising a family, why it's dangerous to swim without a mate, forgiveness, and the majesty of barbecue and camp cuisine.

Ray used humour to break down barriers, to help people laugh, sometimes making himself look and sound ridiculous. Then when people have laughed and enjoyed the joke he comes in with a serious and often profound solution. Another important lesson I have learned watching Ray is the dignity he affirmed in people as he properly listened to them – his advice was “listen listening”!

Children quickly gathered around him – Ray has the natural ability through his innate kindness and magnetism, to cut through cultural, social or age barriers.

Ray loved me and our girls with ferocity. As I see it, this “love” for the female species could change the world. I feel the windows would be opened, the light would shine and there would be less, perhaps no gender inequality and no domestic violence. This is Ray's legacy to me, to our families, and I hope, to the world.

Ray sought the answers to the meaning of life, and embraced its complexities, despite the challenges. He set out on a road winding through terrain that filled all of life with meaning.

Even following his Brain Bleed, 7 years ago, he became more luminous! Ray has spent the final years of his life ministering profoundly through his presence, and his simple, pastoral words of blessing, even 2 weeks ago he was

able to hold them, look into their eyes and love them. I believe his continued interest in people grew out of who he was: a heart broken before God and opened for others. He was complex and unfinished, even then he knew it well and did not pretend otherwise.

Ray hated what was happening to him and many times said “I am done”! In the grace of his dying, what I was looking at in its purest and simplest form was, I believe, the Spirit – the interconnectedness of this Spirit. It joined the 2 of us, particularly as I lay with him and we did the Lectio together or I whispered in his ear Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem – “How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Ways”.

Damn, I’ll miss love, being loved, a face looking at me and smiling simply because I’m there, a hand searching for mine in sleep. Telling me every day and many times how beautiful I am. Someone with whom I am fully me. Someone whose face I’d like to be the last thing I see before I go to sleep for ever. Indeed, when we love another we are bound to be hurt eventually – to have our hearts broken. Although I’m finding that the tears of heartbreak are something holy, and frankly, redemptive in shedding them together – with others!

Ray, this Larrikin of Grace, this political being, this natural feminist, thank you for the love, belief, encouragement, wisdom and extravagance you have poured over me.

As we walk, shop, run, play, work, worship this week, can we look at each other with Jesus’ eyes, eyes of Jesus, because unless we can see faith, love and acceptance in your eyes we can never become who God wants us to be.

## REV DR DON EVANS

21 February 1936 – 5 November 2022

Don was born in Wagga Wagga on 21st February 1936 to Norman and Doris Evans. Norman was working for the Commonwealth Bank at the time and, while in Wagga Wagga, Don’s sister, Val was also born.

In 1942, the family moved to Manly where Don’s youngest sister, Lyn, was born. Don attended Manly West Primary School and North Sydney Boys High School. The family attended Manly Methodist Church where Don was involved in Sunday School and Christian Endeavour. He began piano lessons there, eventually becoming an accomplished pianist and organist. His sisters and his children in later life all have warm memories of hearing him play.

Following school Don commenced a degree in Agricultural Science at the University of Sydney where he was a member of the university Christian group. Despite living near the beaches of Manly, Don spent many of his summer breaks working on his uncle’s farm in Wyalong.

At the time it was compulsory for men aged 18 to undertake 3 months of National Service and Don took time from his studies to do this in early 1955, which included time in Maitland and Singleton cleaning up after the floods.

On completion of his degree, he moved to Temora to work with the NSW Dept of Agriculture, and it is here he met Lesley who was working as a primary school teacher. They married, and Roslyn (1959) and Graeme (1960) were born at Temora.

Don felt a calling to go into ministry and the young family moved to Lakemba in 1962 for Don to take up a position of student pastor and commence studies at Leigh Methodist Theological College. While at the college, he also completed a Bachelor of Divinity through Melbourne College of Divinity. In 1963, Philip was born.

In 1966, upon completion of his training, Don was appointed to Tighes Hill Methodist Church and after 3 years, the family moved to Ashfield, Sydney, where Don ministered for the Central Methodist Mission under the leadership of Rev Sir Alan Walker. Though living in Ashfield, Don took the Sunday morning service at Wesley Chapel in Castlereagh St Sydney, and was involved in the evening services with Sir Alan at the Lyceum Theatre in Pitt St. The evening services, in which Don conducted the choir, were broadcast live on radio 2CH. David was born in 1970.

The family moved to Belmont in 1973, and Don would remain at St Luke's Uniting Church for the next 13 years. During this time, the children all attended Belmont High, and Lorraine joined our family. By the time Don and Lesley moved to New Lambton in 1986, they had celebrated the marriages of Ros and Peter, Lorraine and Allan, Graeme and Jane, and Phil and Anne. Don was Chairperson of the Hunter Presbytery in 1979 and 1980. Adventures on Lake Macquarie in one of the 3 boats he owned at various times were highlights of this season at Belmont, though Don proved to be a better fisher of people than the aquatic variety.

Don ministered at New Lambton from 1986 to 1993, during which time David met Sally who he later married.

In 1988, Don and Lesley spent 6 weeks in San Francisco for Don to work on this Doctorate of Ministry studies, which he completed in 1993, with his thesis title being, 'Unity in Faith and Mission: a creative response to the tension and diversity with the Uniting Church in Australia (U.C.A.) in New South Wales.'

From 1994-2001, Don was Presbytery Minister in the Ku-ring-ai Presbytery (pastor to the pastors), and he and Lesley lived at Niagara Park. During this time, he also served as Moderator for the NSW and ACT Synod in 1996-1998.

Don retired from active ministry in February 2001, aged 65, and he and Lesley moved into their newly built home at Rathluba, East Maitland, the first time they had owned a house since living in Temora 42 years earlier.

In early retirement, Don did 12 months' supply ministry at East Maitland in 2002, and 6 weeks in Dubbo in 2003. He also served a second time at Chairperson of the Hunter Presbytery.

In 2011, Don and Lesley moved into Closebourne Retirement Village, Morpeth, where Lesley still resides. Declining mobility meant that Don moved into full time care in March 2017, and he peacefully passed into the arms of Jesus on Saturday 5th Nov, in the presence of Lesley, Roslyn, Phil and Anne, with piano hymns playing quietly in the background. The inscription on his plaque at Newcastle Memorial Park, Beresfield, reads:

In loving memory of  
Rev Dr Donald Charles Evans  
21/2/1936 - 5/11/2022  
Loved husband, father, grandfather and  
pastor in the service of Jesus.  
*'Preach the word of God...  
Encourage your people with  
good teaching' (2 Tim 4:2)*

Don's faithful ministry as a servant of Jesus has left a profound impact on his family, and on all who knew him, and this continues through his children who are all actively involved in their respective churches and wider Christian ministry. His love for God and care and skill with others was evident daily; he was a people person who accepted people just as they were. Don once commented that his fondest memory was, 'A beautiful life with my wife.'

His family are incredibly thankful for the legacy he and Lesley have left us all, and rest in the hope of eternity with the Lord.

### REV. NOEL THOMAS

Noel was born in Broken Hill. His father was a violinist so Noel was introduced to music and began piano lessons at an early age. He retained his love for music throughout his life.

The family moved to Sydney when Noel was fourteen. He left school at fifteen and worked in an advertising business.

Some years later neighbours invited him to go to Concord Wesley Church and it was there that Noel became a Christian. In his late twenties Noel felt called to ministry and spent a pre-collegiate year in 1959, at Dorrigo, where he travelled everywhere on his faithful motor scooter, Diana.

He attended Leigh College from 1960 to 1962 and gained his L.Th. and Dip. R.E.

The following two years were spent at The Entrance Circuit, where he met Margaret and they married in 1964. In 1965 Noel ministered at Dundas for three months and then Crows Nest for nine months, before taking an appointment at Peak Hill for the following four years.

From 1970 to 1974 Noel was second minister at Lismore.

He then served in the Dungog parish for seven years during which time he trained as a marriage counsellor. His last parish was North Lake Macquarie, where he was minister for seven years before becoming an industrial chaplain for seven years, mainly spent at Alcan, Kurri, and Newcastle bus depot.

Margaret's enthusiasm for travel inspired Noel and they travelled extensively overseas during retirement.

Noel is survived by wife, Margaret, and four children eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

### REV. NEVILLE GRAY

**19 April 1936 – 21 February 2022**

Rev Neville Gray started his ministry journey at the Evangelist Institute at Central Methodist Mission under Rev Dr Frank Rayward and Rev Dr Alan Walker. Neville served in Robertson, Boggabri, Woy Woy, Windsor, Hornsby, Orange, Nowra, Berry, Hamilton UCA College (Victoria), Cavendish (Victoria), Forbes and Gymea-Miranda. Neville also served at Elsdon United Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois, USA, whilst studying at the University of Chicago from 1971-1974.

“Everyone who new dad, knew he was all about love and respect. He never judged anyone and always welcomed everyone. He was patient, kind and respectful. He was a deep thinker, very considered and thoughtful.” From Tia's memories at Neville's service of thanksgiving.

Despite leaving school before he was 15, he completed two degrees at Sydney University, all theological studies at Leigh Theological College and two degrees at the University of Chicago.

While working as a machinist fitter and turner, Neville said, God spoke to him and called him to join the ministry. This decision led him to meet Dulcie and they were together for 59 years.

The family, with their young children Leigh and Tia, moved to America to study, without certainty of accommodation or work. As it happened, a church was seeking a part-time pastor, with a manse provided – accommodation and income sorted.

He also participated in a Peace Conference to 6 socialist countries and on to Russia, where he met the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Neville, in partnership with Dulcie, continued to work full time and study, still finding time for playing sport with the children and his own sport on the weekends. In later years he was very present for the grandchildren's school and sporting events – always proud regardless of the outcome. He also loved teaching scripture classes and the children's story at church on Sundays.

Neville spent ten years of his retirement writing a book "Why me? God". Just a few weeks before his death, he said: "You know, it's simple really, God IS the answer!". He was ever polite, ever giving, ever the gentleman.

A service of thanksgiving was held on 28 February 2022 at Kincumber UC.

With thanks to Tia for her memories of Neville, prepared for his service of thanksgiving.

### **REV. KENNETH JOHN RODGERS**

**9 April 1938 – 10 April 2022**

Ken Rodgers was born in North Sydney on 9 April 1938, elder son and second of three children born to Walter John Gillard Rodgers, tailor, and Maude Eleanor Casey.

Nothing is presently known of Ken's early life and education or the circumstances under which he was called to full-time Christian service, but he subsequently attended the interdenominational and evangelical Sydney Missionary and Bible College at Croydon where he completed his Diploma in Theology. Ken was then accepted for service as a Methodist Home missionary, serving initially for six years at Chester Hill (1960), Mayfield (Lay Pastor 1961-62), Bombala (1963-64), and at Inverell as Circuit Assistant to Rev. Alan Watts in 1965.

(During his Mayfield term, Ken had met June Lloyd, three years his junior and then undertaking nursing training at the Royal Newcastle Hospital. Ken and June, who had herself grown up on the Hunter Coalfields, were married at Kurri Kurri in 1962 on completion of June's training. Leonie Jean, the eldest of three children born to Ken and June, was born at Kurri Kurri in May 1963, followed by Karen Louise, who was born at Bombala on 12 May 1964. Following his service in the Inverell circuit, Ken returned to secular employment over the following seven years, and Grahame John was born at Kurri Kurri during this period in 1969.)

Ken then rejoined the service of the Methodist Home Mission Department in 1972, offered himself as a candidate for the ministry in 1973, and entered College in 1974. Completing his ministerial training in 1977, he was then ordained at Coonamble in 1978, and ministered there until 1982. (Coonamble had functioned successfully as a Joint Parish for some time prior to the inauguration of the Uniting Church in 1977.)

Accepting a call to Yass effective from January 1983, he then ministered there until February 1988. Ken later recalled the struggle and upheaval that accompanied his early ministry at Yass as pastor and people together gradually came to terms with their new identity in the Uniting Church. Ken and June themselves here discovered afresh the Biblical premise that ministry and mission were the responsibility of the 'whole people of God'. The promotion and introduction of the 'Telecare' ministry by a lay person from Rye Park during Ken's ministry was a significant contributor to this development and proved especially well suited to the widespread Yass parish and

its seven preaching centres. This focus on the 'whole people of God' in ministry would remain significant throughout Ken's later ministry.

Ken and June's first grandchild Michael Eades had been born and baptized at Yass, and Yass remained a special place for the family thereafter (see photo at left).

February 1988 saw the Rodgers family move to the Oberon Parish where they ministered for three years, moving to Maclean in January 1991, to Corowa in May 1994, and thence to Wentworth in June 1999. Wentworth, at the confluence of the Darling and Murray Rivers, was then under the jurisdiction of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

Meanwhile on distant Norfolk Island, ministry to the island community and a growing number of tourists was increasingly involving visiting clergy and lay people in addition to local lay preachers over the years following the passage of the Norfolk Island Act of 1979.

The minister on Norfolk in 2000 was Rev. Dr Bob Wyndham. Bob and his wife Margaret (a retired teacher and lay preacher) had introduced a range of new initiatives during their time there with the support of Rev. Alistair Christie, the Sydney North Presbytery Minister. (Norfolk Island was formally related to this Presbytery.) A long-standing medical condition had re-emerged earlier in 2000 and acting on medical advice, supported by specialists and the Synod's medical referees, Bob and Margaret were forced to return to Sydney where Bob would receive urgently needed surgery and specialist care. Bob and Margaret delayed their departure by some weeks to minister to a dying lady who had been born on the island and was a prominent member of the Norfolk community, eventually leaving at the end of August 2000.

Rev. Alistair Christie was actively involved in seeking out a minister who could take up the ministry of Bob Wyndham in these difficult circumstances, and in September Rev. Ken Rodgers was invited to visit and preach on 22 October with a view to settlement, and with interim supply by a lay preacher from New Zealand.

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The Church Council subsequently unanimously resolved to invite Ken and June Rodgers to accept the three-year settlement, with Bob Wyndham later recalling that Ken Rodgers had previously been extensively involved in training members of his Wentworth congregation for engagement in various lay ministries. He also recalled that Ken and June had purchased a home in Orange to which they hoped to retire after their many years ministry to rural and remote communities.

Rev. Ken Rodgers was subsequently inducted to the Norfolk Island parish on 28 January 2001 by Rev. Alistair Christie in the presence of both the Administrator and Chief Minister of the Island, together with the ministers of other denominations on the Island. Alistair also took the opportunity later in his visit to address the Church Council on their responsibilities and the structures of the Uniting Church, and Ken thereafter introduced his long-standing practice of presenting a minister's report to the Council as a means of accountability to the Council and congregation.

Features of Ken and June Rodgers' ministry over the following two years were a growth in Christian tourism from the mainland, fostered especially by former Norfolk Lay Pastor Les McPhee, active encouragement of community use of church property, and also on-going development of ecumenical relationships with the Anglican and SDA churches. The suicidal bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York in September 2001 brought the outside world into closer focus for the somewhat isolated Norfolk Island community, and this was followed by a special

ecumenical service of remembrance two days later. This wider focus was further enhanced by the anticipated arrival of 800 athletes for the South Pacific Mini-Games and the development of an ambitious ecumenical outreach to the participants.

Ken and June Rodgers expressed their desire to retire from active ministry early in 2003, no doubt aware of the financial difficulties then confronting the NSW Synod and its probable consequences for the work on Norfolk Island. The Church Council however expressed a strong view to the Presbytery that their three-year settlement should continue, and Ken and June Rodgers left the island in November after a Closure of Ministry service on 8 November 2003.

Eventually Ken and June moved to East Maitland to be near to June's extended family, June receiving her home-call on 17 December 2017, with Ken following her on 10 April 2022 at 84 years of age