##### **From 5 to 100 - Sheffield Uniting Church, Tasmania – service in the community**

This week we head to the beautiful Kentish town of Sheffield in Tasmania, where we join Leoni Reed and the small team at Sheffield Uniting Church. Here, every day is a celebration of the community. The famed ‘Town of Murals’, Sheffield is located inland from Devonport in the foothills of Mt Roland.

**Describe your faith community**

On the 27th of November 2022, our congregation celebrated a special birthday, its 140th. What was there to celebrate, you might ask?  Regular Sunday Services have not been held for nearly two years and the membership has dwindled from around thirty to five.  We certainly discovered many things about its past. What was previously the Methodist and now the Uniting Church faithfully served the Sheffield Community since 1882.

**What makes your community unique?**

Just five of us? Hardly a viable congregation! Always optimistic, after many unsuccessful attempts to grow the congregation, we were encouraged to close. Sheffield is a busy, prosperous, small rural town, with many tourists and a steady flow of newcomers. With such a prime location on Main Street and attractive grounds, surely the church would grow?

Over the last few years, the church’s role has changed dramatically. Grow? Perhaps “grown” is not the right description. Today the church is buzzing, used every day, by about a hundred people each week. These are not people passing through en-route to their activities, but people with whom we have developed a relationship, sometimes offering assistance and pastoral care.  Instead of a church focussing on Sunday worship, it has found a new lease of life, new direction, and new ways of serving, which has caught us by surprise.

An ecumenical worship service is held every Tuesday morning. It started off as a Taize Service, but in response to community input, we have changed to using the Fig Tree Worship resources which are prepared by the Gippsland circuit, where our former minister, Rev Gospel Railte is now based.

We have become a Mission Centre, managed by a small task group, representing different facets of Sheffield and the types of activities taking place within the church. Our church has become home to the local hospice fundraising committee and also the Kentish U3A, which offers a variety of social, recreational, educational and fitness classes for the over-fifties. The church started a youth-focused community choir, the Mountain Echoes, in 2020. There is also a drumming group and a group of friends who meet regularly. This weekend a local couple are opening a mobile bistro in the church grounds, offering gourmet food two Saturday evenings a month.

**Where do you see God at work in your community?**

There is a wide variety of Christian ministries. This is because ‘ministry’ means ‘service’ and there are many different ways we can serve God and people.

Just like a mustard seed planted in the ground, small and unseen, the kingdom of God is present in our midst in our power and potential. God’s kingdom is present here in our community. It is present in the members of Christ’s body. It is present in the churches – proclaiming the gospel, ministering to the suffering, confronting the powers of evil and glorifying God.

**What are the intercultural and/or intergenerational aspects?**

We have a close connection to the 40 or so Kiribati farm workers who are working at Forth. We have really appreciated their singing group, ‘The Kiribati Boys' and have involved them in many of the festivals at Sheffield UC and other places, including the Choral Festival, our 140th Anniversary, the Devonport Jazz Festival’s ‘Gospel Song’, as well as the ‘Big Sing’ in Devonport. They have also held social functions in our hall.

The Mountain Echoes which we started in 2020 is an intergenerational singing group.  As well as our two leaders, we have around 15 members who meet every Wednesday after school, from 4-5 pm. Definitely intergenerational! We have our youngest member, Bruce (who is five), five teenagers, several parents who sing with us each week and eight seniors.

**What are some of the challenges you are facing?**

Our group has started a new venture and taken over the Library Aid International charity which sends a container of school books to needy schools in a developing country. It is a huge project, but we have faith that with God’s help and lots of support from the Kentish community, we will be able to do it.

Maintenance of our old church building is a challenge. We are still in the process of the repainting shabby, flaking weatherboards, which remind us each time we come through the gate, that as soon as the weather improves, we need to continue. Recently we finally had the roof in the church fixed, which had been leaking for years!

**What can the rest of the Church pray for you and your community?**

Pray for us as we continue and celebrate the role our church plays in our small country town.  It’s a celebration of talents of those contributing to the life of the church. A celebration of those to whom the church plays a part in their daily lives – the worshipping community, the musicians, the artists, the children, the Mountain Echoes and the Kentish U3A groups.

We feel it important to show the community that what the church does, matters.  It affects lives and effects are lifelong. It can heal hurts, lift spirits, form friendships, boost morale, self-esteem and self-confidence and turn lives around. We know that because we have seen it with our own eyes. The mission outcomes will not be to rest on our laurels. We have learned so much over the last few years. This is just the beginning.