

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

The Guild of Saint Raphael in New Zealand

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The first Branch of the *Guild of Saint Raphael* in New Zealand came into existence at St Michael's Church, Christchurch, on 13 May 1960, under the Chaplain, Rev'd Fr Cecil Gault.

It was another year until the opening of a second Branch at St Thomas' Church, Newtown, Wellington South, 16 April 1961. This was partly due to the fact that little was known about the *Guild* until Dr Elizabeth Milne, a GP practicing in England and a member of the *HQ Council* there, visited this country to lecture early in 1961.

In 1959 Billy Graham conducted a crusade in Wellington. All churches were asked to pray for this outreach and a Prayer Group of over twenty members was formed at St Thomas's Parish under the vicar, the Rev'd Nigel Williams. When the *Graham Crusade* was over, the group decided to continue together in order to pray for the sick and needy, so when several members of the group attended a lecture given by Dr Elizabeth Milne, they brought back her message and ideas, and it was decided to become a branch of the *Guild of St Raphael* since we had already been working along Guild Branch lines. On 16 April 1961, the group became a Branch with 23 members with the Rev'd Nigel Williams as Chaplain and Margaret Bryant as Secretary. Nigel was tireless in his efforts to instruct us and to expand our thinking about our prayers for the sick. We were accustomed to the congregational prayers for the sick each Sunday and soon learned that, as individuals, we could contribute towards people's well-being and recovery. Today, of course, this is being recognised by some within the medical profession as a proven

fact.

Once formed, the Branch held monthly meetings and two groups were also formed to meet in homes in the Parish. These arose spontaneously through the desire of lay people to keep up the momentum of the prayer work during the week, to encourage each other in their ministry and to explore the many facets of the healing ministry. Initially, these meetings met quite a lot of suspicion and opposition from people who wondered what the laity were getting up to! This was a new development, though the concept of house-groups is now a normal part of life in many parishes.

Another new thing began to happen. People became more conscious of prayers offered on their behalf, especially before and after operations when fears were forgotten and recovery was rapid. Prayer was effective. Repeatedly testimony was given about this, and miracles did happen even when no cure was considered possible.

Through the now defunct newspaper '*Church and People*', enquiries were invited about the Church's ministry of healing. Before long, the *St Thomas's* Secretary was increasingly occupied in dealing with many enquiries from both individuals and parishes. Within a couple of years, branches of the *Guild* had been formed in New Plymouth, Wadestown, Palmerston North, Dunedin, Auckland, Wanganui, Papatoetoe, Invercargill, Cambridge and Opotiki.

Planning began in 1963 to form a New Zealand administration of the *Guild*. This was completed

in May 1964, with the approval of all the Bishops – with special support coming from the Most Rev'd Norman Lesser, Archbishop of New Zealand, and the Rt Rev'd Henry Baines, Bishop of Wellington.

In contrast to the work of the 'faith healers' who were visiting the country, the concept of intercessory prayer for the sick, not in place of, but alongside, the work of the medical profession, was being increasingly supported. Within a few years, there were twenty-seven Branches of the *Guild* in New Zealand. Today, there are fewer. Membership numbers were never large, but the *Guild's* influence has affected a great number of people, clergy and lay.

From the beginning, the Executive saw quite clearly that the *Guild's* English and Catholic image would not be very acceptable in the New Zealand Church. They, therefore, made every endeavor to make it plain that the sacramental means of healing were for everyone, no matter what churchmanship they practiced. This is widely accepted now in the Anglican Church, and also amongst other denominations.

To achieve a degree of stability in the *Guild's* operation, a simple form of constitution was introduced in 1964 (amended later in 1974). This stressed that the aims of the *Guild* were to foster the practice of prayer (both individual and corporate) for the sick and to restore the ministry of healing to its natural place as a normal part of parish life.

The *Guild* has kept in touch with other healing groups, principally the *Order of St Luke*, the *Divine Healing Fellowship*, and the *Guild of*

Health.

There are still many parishes where the concept of healing through prayer and through the healing sacraments is not truly accepted. Healing must be seen in the widest way. The words 'healing' and 'health' are related to the words 'whole' and 'wholeness'. Everything which happens in that spirit-mind-body-soul complex has an effect on each of the other elements and on the sum total. Every element in life needs to find satisfactory growth and integration within the functioning of the whole. Healing is not just a matter of physical repair. It must represent growth and wholeness in every possible way.

The power of the *Guild* lies not so much in its 'doing' as in its 'being' i.e., what it stands for. It exists to bear witness that Christ is present in His Church today and that He wills, through its priest and lay members that, not only should the Gospel be preached, but that the sick should be brought to healing in body, mind and spirit, through sacrament and prayer and in co-operation with the medical profession.

The *Guild*, as a servant of the Church, will have accomplished its task when the healing ministry is indeed a normal part of the life of every parish. The need, however, will always remain for groups of Christians, dedicated and knowledgeable about healing prayer, to use this ministry every day, to help the restoration of sick people to health, and to minister to them personally as opportunity arises. The *Guild* also stands as a bridge of reconciliation and reunion between the two promoters of health, the medical profession, and the Christian Church.

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