

## Historic church closes doors

By Brendan McBryde

After 112 years as part of the community, a historic church in Makarewa closed its doors on Sunday.

About 80 people packed into St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church Makarewa for the de-consecration service, coming to join in the occasion from Waikiwi, Invercargill, Winton, Morris Bush, Dacre, and Dunedin.

Otago and Southland Presbyterian Synod moderator Bruce Fraser said the Makarewa church was the oldest part of the St. Stephen's parish, and was originally part of early Wallacetown.

"This is a significant moment in the life of this congregation," Mr Fraser said to those gathered.

"Although this will be a time of sadness for some, God is still with us and He will lead us on."

St. Stephen's lay minister Peter Noble said the closure of the church was due to a combination of dwindling attendance and suspected structural integrity

issues following an earthquake assessment.

"One has kind of prompted the other. We suspect that it's going to get the thumbs down earthquake-wise," Mr Noble said. "Everything that's made of brick is going to be suspect."

Mr Noble has been the St. Stephen's parish minister since 2002, and said congregation sizes at Makarewa tended to be between four and 12.

For this reason, any upgrades were unlikely to be cost-effective, and parishioners would probably shift to the main St. Stephen's church at Waikiwi.

"I think it's just too much, and I'm not sure we want to prop up something that belongs to a bygone age," he said.

"People are happy to travel these days, and these buildings are from the day when people didn't even have cars."

During Sunday's service, a brief



The final congregation gathers outside St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church Makarewa after its de-consecration service.

history in the words of early parishioner Doris McLean was read to the congregation.

"The determination and faith of many led to the decision to

purchase land on which to build a church; half an acre of ground for 50 pounds, and the church was built for 470 pounds," she says.

"Services conducted were very

traditional and no one seemed to smile or even speak in church.

"They were very solemn affairs and we must have been very dedicated to endure them."

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