

RADIO CHURCH DOOMED?

Supporters Fear that Financial Difficulties May Silence Voice Of Otago's Popular 4ZM

Contributed To The "Record"

by

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ONE day four or five years ago a Dunedin business man, Mr. R. Walls, owner of the B class broadcasting station, 4ZM, had an idea. No reflection intended. This was one of those ideas that get themselves remembered. He thought it would be a good idea to run a short, undenominational, sacred session on Sundays.

Almost at the same time his attention was drawn to a young fellow who made frequent purchases of sacred records. Casually, Mr. Walls asked the young man if he felt competent to conduct a short session such as the one he had in mind. There was no hesitation. Don Adams said: "I'd like to."

Almost immediately the Radio Church of the Helping Hand or its germ went on the air from 4ZM.

In those days Don's voice was rough, he had had no microphone experience, and he had very little idea of what to say or how to say it.

But Don had started. He was keen and young. His voice rapidly improved, he gained confidence, and to-day, as "Uncle Don" of the established and beloved Radio Church of the Helping Hand, he is known and respected by thousands of South Island listeners.

But, really, we are a little ahead of ourselves. The Radio Church did not come into being quite like that. Mr. Walls was delighted because of the public's reception of Don Adams's little session. Why should it not go further? He thought of the Rev. Leslie Neale, of the Octagon Central Mission, a man who enjoyed an enviable reputation as a humanitarian. Neale was a busy man, but he listened. He liked the suggestion that he help the religious session, but he could not spare the time. Mr. Walls was disappointed. He told Mr. G. L. Johnson, manager of the Octagon Picture Theatre, of his disappointment.

There may, at first glance, seem to be a wide gap between a minister of the Methodist Church and the manager of a picture theatre, but in those days pictures were shown during the week in the hall that on Sunday became the church in which the Rev. Mr. Neale preached the Gospel. Mr. Johnson liked the idea, too—so he promised to talk to Mr. Neale.

Then, almost before anyone knew just how it happened, Mr. Neale was on the air, and the Radio Church of the Helping Hand was in its infancy. The minister soon became known far and wide as "Uncle Leslie." Other "uncles" joined the group and the Radio Church went from strength to strength.

NO one could stress too greatly the value of the work done by the South's first radio church. Hundreds have benefited from it, many a hungry man has been fed; many

a poor man clothed; many a cold man given bed and firing.

Letters poured in. They came from Anglican, from Presbyterian, from Methodist, from Roman Catholic. For the Radio Church remained as it began—undenominational.

Thousands of listeners joined. Collecting boxes were sent out and the unseen congregation gave its freewill offerings, depositing them in the boxes which were sent in to the station periodically. To-day there are 4000 of these boxes distributed throughout the city and country districts. Last year these boxes alone produced the amazing total of £2000. In four years the average has been £1600 a year.

And the spending of that money is closely watched. A listener sending in his offerings receives a numbered receipt. He may, any time he wishes, inspect the books of the Radio Church, and can see to what good purpose his money has been put.

Raised £25,000 for Children

BOOKS, clothing, food, substantial cash donations are continually being left to be distributed among the more unfortunate sections of the community. Those who leave these things know they will go to the right quarter, that they will be appreciated as necessities hitherto withheld by circumstance.

It was the Radio Church that first conceived the idea of a children's rest home at Company's Bay, down Otago's sunny harbour. The appeal for funds to build this home went over the air, was heard, and heeded. No less than £25,000 was raised by the Radio Church.

But now it was that Uncle Leslie made a decision to have a pronounced effect on the status of the station at a later date. He might have called the home, "The Radio Church Children's Home," but he allowed the word "Methodist" to be used. It was, essentially perhaps, a Methodist home, but the Radio Church which gave so much money was an undenominational one. Not that listeners were greatly worried. The matter was one of policy.

THE Radio Church is on the air 45 minutes every day, excepting Saturday. On (Continued on page 38.)



MR. R. WALLS.

The man who had the idea. . .