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Reverends David Self and Bev Chatterton at the door of St Johns Church at Otakeho where they have led many services. CATHERINE GROENESTEIN

# Festive farewell for shut church

**CATHERINE GROENESTEIN**

Hay lay drying outside as *Away in a Manger* was sung in the last Christmas service in South Taranaki's oldest church.

St John the Divine Church at Otakeho stopped holding services in 2015, but the pews were full again for a special Christmas carol service on Sunday.

People from the area were joined by others with past associations with the church, many travelling from New Plymouth.

The organ was in fine form apart from a misbehaving B flat, as was the congregation, singing a range of carols, before

sharing communion and, after the service, Christmas cake and sparkling grape juice.

Former organist Glenyss Bethell, nee Ross, drove from New Plymouth to attend the service and remembered the instrument, which was unusually small for a pipe organ, well.

"I played it from when I was 18 to 21 - that's not yesterday," she said.

The organ was ordered in 1941 as war broke out, Reverend David Self, who has been taking services at the church since 1966, said.

Parishioners were praying it would arrive safely without being torpedoed, and it did. It was originally a pump organ but was later converted to electricity.

The church, which was consecrated in 1894, closed because of dwindling attendances, he said.

The future of the old timber building was unknown at this stage.

There were various ideas being talked about, once being to move the old church to King Edward Park, Hawera, where it could be the setting for weddings, but it was just a rumour at this stage, he said.

The Anglican Diocese would make a decision about the building, which sits beside SH45.

He and Reverend Bev Chatterton led the service, a task they shared many times over the years.

Between 50 and 60 people had turned up.