

Church enters new era

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By GARY PARKES

PACKED congregations featured at the closing and opening ceremonies of St Joseph's Catholic Parish churches in Hawera at the weekend.

On Saturday night the congregation overflowed on to the footpath for the final Mass in the old church, which was opened 65 years ago.

Yesterday parishioners were joined by visitors, including civic leaders, to swell the congregation to an estimated 600 as the new church was opened by the Bishop of Palmerston North, the Most Reverend Peter Cullinane.

During the opening Mass, Bishop Cullinane acknowledged warmly the representation of clergy from sister churches, who joined Catholic priests from Taranaki. He also thanked Archbishop Thomas White, who is also Apostolic Nuncio (Papal diplomat) to New Zealand, for coming.

He congratulated all who were involved in the \$1.3m project.

In particular, he spoke of the contribution of the two local priests, Fathers Brian Walsh and Joe Grayland.

"In them, you have two priests who give priestly service and leadership of the highest order," he said.

In his homily, Bishop Cullinane said it was a great day for all, not just for the unfolding of memories but through the call for people to live by their faith.

"People of this parish have experienced the sacrifices and discomforts of going from the past to the present and into the future," he said, pointing to scriptural precedence in the Old Testament.

While explaining why a building was a special place for worship and reflection, he asked the congregation to remember that at the end of the day, it was not the place of worship that mattered, but getting close to God.

"The church is not the building, it is the people. If a building takes the name as a church, it is only because it rubs off the shoulders of the people in it."

The celebrations ended with afternoon tea in the Hawera Community Centre.



NEW ERA: The Most Reverend Peter Cullinane (centre), with the Most Reverend Thomas White (left) and the Reverend Father Brian Walsh.