

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Reverend's life is never dull

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

To many people being a minister is a sober, narrow existence. The old saw about everything that's fun being either illegal, immoral or fattening seems to be the way a minister's life must be in many people's eyes. Then they meet Andy McKenzie and discover he doesn't fit the image.

Rev. Andrew McKenzie, who has spent 22 years as the minister of Knox Presbyterian Church in Acton, will leave the congregation the end of January to take over new duties in Perth.

Rev. McKenzie has done a lot of other things during his time in Halton and it is these outside interests that give the lie to the straight-laced image of a minister. He belongs to the Acton Rotary Club and served as president in 1960-61. He has been a director of the Acton Chamber of Commerce and its president from 1964 to 1968. He has been a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 197 since he first came to town. He was one of Halton's five delegates to the national Conservative convention in 1967. He was on the board of directors of the Acton Curling Club and took his turn as president in 1969-70. He is also a member of Walker Masonic Lodge and the Cullen Club in Guelph. Besides that he found time to raise seven children and take care of his congregation.

COMPARED NOW

"These days a minister must be a community minister more than a congregational minister," he says. "I am under more calls from outside than church than inside it. And these people are often more demanding than members of the congregation. Some of them want service now if not sooner when they call up. I don't feel there's much wisdom in getting a great pile of people you can't handle."

He feels that 500 members is the absolute maximum a congregation minister can handle on his own and he has no secretary at Acton. Luckily he loves the record keeping and filing part of the minister's work. He has officiated at 335 weddings, 420 funerals (172 for members), 530 baptisms and received 545 new members into the congregation during that 22 years. Since he estimates that 16 members of the congregation move per year his charge has increased only slightly in that time.

HURON COUNTY

Rev. McKenzie was born in May 1919 on a farm in Huron County. As the sixth child in a family of six boys and two girls he had no idea how he was going to get an education. He only knew he'd get one somehow. His father died months after retiring at the age of 62 because of heart trouble and Rev. McKenzie worked and borrowed to pay for his schooling.

He studied at Toronto Bible college, the University of Toronto, the University of Alberta, the Presbyterian College in Montreal, Yale University and the University of Sackville, New Brunswick. Winning the gold medal for the highest marks in theology during the three-year course at Presbyterian College Montreal, entitled him to the graduate's travel scholarship and this enabled him to go to Yale.

Rev. McKenzie's original intention when he went to Yale was to get his Doctorate of Divinity then take a teaching position in one of Canada's two Presbyterian Colleges. However, while he was at Yale the New Testament instructor's positions at both schools were filled by young men.

"It was a terrible disappointment to me," he says. "I could have gone ahead but there'd have been no place for me to teach when I finished so I very reluctantly decided that I'd better change my plans and become a congregational minister."

He preached for calls in both Windsor and Islington in the fall of 1947 and got the word from both places within 24 hours of each other that both congregations wanted him.

"I took the one with the most work and the least money," he chuckles.

The Islington congregation consisted of 70 members worshipping in a hall basement when he went there but it had grown to 470 members and a brand new building by the time he left in 1955.

NOT EAGER

"When I left there I felt if I never did anything more in the church I'd done a pretty good job," he says. "I wasn't too eager to come to Acton. I thought of myself as a suburban minister and I wondered how I'd stand the quiet, slowness and conservatism of a town. As the years passed I got to like it very much. Ten years

Rev. McKenzie lists curling, golf, hunting, gardening, photography and reading as hobbies. He also likes carpentry and built his own cottage on the French River in 1963-64.

golfing, curling and service club memberships. He will be the thirteenth minister in Perth as he was in Acton. He also jokes that Lanark County hasn't elected a Liberal in generations, a comforting thought for a dedicated Tory.

Although he is only five to seven years short of retirement Rev. McKenzie decided to move because he wants a fresh opportunity to use his experience.

"I think I've accumulated quite a bit of understanding of human nature and the way to motivate people to serve the church," he says. "I'd like one more change to use what I've learned starting completely fresh. This congregation seems to feel they want a man who has proved himself in another pastorate."

Rev. McKenzie met his wife when they were both attending Toronto Bible College at the beginning of the war. They married in 1942.

In many ways Rev. McKenzie feels he is lucky to still be in the ministry. After he had a heart attack in 1971 his health was so bad he feared he would have to retire early.

"My memory was so bad for a long time that I began writing full transcripts of my sermons and prayers and everything," he says. "I don't think most people realized how bad I was. I was just hanging on by my fingernails for about three years."

Heart problems run in his family, he says, but he has always had a slow heart and the attack was more like heart failure than like a heart attack.

LIKE FAINTING

"It was just like I was going to faint," he says. "My vision started to go and I had to pull off to the side of the road. I didn't faint though until I got to the hospital in Guelph. I think it was more an attack of exhaustion than a heart attack as such."

He has made great changes in his diet since then as well as curtailing some of his activities and about two years ago he began to pick up again.

Rev. McKenzie is a great family man and the stories he tells about his youngsters reflect the fact that just because they are raised in a manse doesn't keep them from being just like everyone else's youngster.

The eldest, Joanne Anderson, lives in Bramalea with her 11-year-old daughter and dog. It is the dog which has disrupted the orderly existence Rev.

McKenzie had mapped out for his family.

It seems that when Mrs. Anderson and her daughter Nancy moved into a house in Bramalea from an apartment in Toronto it was suggested that a dog might make a suitable Christmas present for the young lady who now had room to keep one. Rev. and Mrs. McKenzie went to the pound at Limehouse and found a little wire-haired terrier and took her home on a Thursday night to have her all ready when Nancy arrived Friday evening. Unfortunately for all his well-intentioned plans when Nancy arrived Friday night she had a dog with her.

"My heart just sank when I walked in and saw that dog," he says. "I knew exactly what that meant. We were stuck with the dog. Of course, Bill (his 15-year-old son) was tickled to death. He's been agitating unsuccessfully for a dog for years and I always said no."

Misty is now "infectious all over town," he says with a grin. She went down around the A&P supermarket one day and they gave her a bone and now they do it regularly. They have nicknamed her "The Reverend."

Rev. McKenzie laughs as he explains how eldest son Alan managed to hitchhike all over Europe and Asia at the ripe old age of 18. During the eight months he was away he only worked seven weeks on an electric turbine in Helsinki, Finland. He stayed in hostels and managed on next to nothing. Rev. McKenzie said. In the end he wired his father that he thought he'd come home if Dad would loan him the money.

GOOD MONEY

Alan has now left his semihippie ideas behind him and is earning good money as a well sight geologist. He completed his honours degree in philosophy and was persuaded to try working in the oil fields by a friend who promised he could have the necessary qualifications in two years if he applied himself. He did and finished his course in 18.

Rev. McKenzie says the best way to get his boys to do anything was always to dare them.

"They couldn't resist a dare," he chuckles. "When we were in the Bahamas for a week two years ago someone dared Bill to shave off his hair. He did. He looked like Baldis Beechnut when we got back." Son Glen, who lives at home

and works in Brampton at CN Express was once dared to streak through Acton high school and crashed into a plate

glass door in the process. The other three McKenzie girls have all left home. Marsha Roughley is a teacher at

the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Bonnie Alain is a bank teller in Innisville, Alberta, and Carol lives in Kingston.



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