

# Courageous clergyman

August 31, 2002

**C**ourage was the hallmark of the Very Reverend Dr Alan Brash, who died at his Christchurch home on August 24. He was 89.

Daughter Lyn and son Don said their father showed remarkable courage to stand by his pacifist belief while ministering to his first parish, in Wanganui, during World War 2.

Dr Brash was attacked from many sides and suffered social stigma, but never forced his views on others. He strongly opposed the stockpiling of weapons, and spoke against a Presbyterian assembly remit to disqualify conscientious objectors from voting in general elections.

He showed similar courage years later, flying into North Vietnam with aid cargoes and bringing out wounded during the Vietnam War. He visited Communist countries frequently during the height of the Cold War to support beleaguered Christian churches.

Dr Brash was born in Lower Hutt, the fourth child of Tom Brash, who was the first head of the New Zealand Dairy Board and also a Moderator of the Church — one of only three lay people to hold the position.

After school in Wellington, Dr Brash completed a masters degree in philosophy at Otago University in 1934. He studied theology at New

College, Edinburgh, graduating in 1938. He received an honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Knox College, Toronto, in 1971.

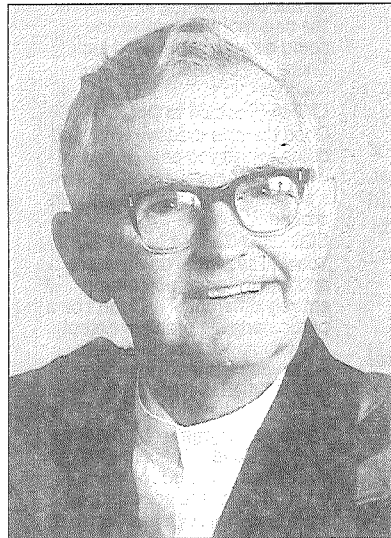
While in Britain, he represented New Zealand at conferences from which the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed.

Returning to New Zealand, Dr Brash married Eljean Hill, of Wellington, in 1938. She had done social work in Britain and the couple adopted a foundling child from there. Two children were born to them in Wanganui. Don became Reserve Bank Governor and an MP. Lyn became deputy chief executive of Christchurch Polytechnic.

The family provided a home for a young Czechoslovakian Jewish refugee whose family had been killed in a German concentration camp, and some early Colombo Plan students from Asian countries.

After the war, Dr Brash's plans to do missionary work in China were thwarted when China expelled missionaries. He was appointed, instead, as general secretary of the National Council of Churches, in Christchurch.

Apart from being Minister of St Giles, Papanui, from 1952 to 1956, Dr Brash served the council from 1947 to 1964. He became active in ecumenism and international aid. He was involved with the establishment



Alan Brash

of the prison chaplaincy service and with Maori welfare programmes. He received the OBE in 1962.

Dr Brash represented New Zealand at a 1957 conference in Indonesia where the East Asian Christian Conference was founded. This led to part-time work for the conference, for which he became the full-time secretary in 1964, based in Singapore.

During his five years in this position, he visited every Asian country except China, helping with

aid and disaster relief programmes.

From there, Dr Brash moved to London in 1968 as director of Christian Aid for the WCC, greatly increasing its aid income. The WCC transferred him to Geneva in 1970 and appointed him deputy general-secretary in 1974.

On his trips home he preached throughout the country. Lyn Brash said he worked hard on his sermons, believing that emotional appeal was never enough.

Don Brash said his father was a powerful preacher who could leave his congregation reeling.

Dr Brash returned to Christchurch in 1978 as Moderator, then retired to Auckland in 1979. When his wife died, in 1991, he moved back to Christchurch to be near his daughter.

Lyn Brash said her father had a deep social conscience and strong convictions.

"Dad really struggled with the 'haves and have-nots' issue. He was pretty Left-wing politically, because he believed there were a lot of powerless people around."

He had been active in the anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid scenes and maintained interest in international affairs up to his death, voicing concern at United States threats of war with Iraq.

Former Moderator Bruce Hansen

said Dr Brash was the "face of ecumenism" in New Zealand and had "a passion for peace and justice".

Dr Brash was a loving father who gave constructive criticism when it was needed but "never dwelt on punishment and the use of guilt as a tool", Lyn Brash said.

"His love was absolutely unconditional."

Don Brash said his father brought him up in a Fabian-Socialist environment but never tried to influence his beliefs.

"He was dismayed when I first stood for National but he was personally very supportive. Though he was not enthusiastic this time (2002), he said he would still respect and support me."

Don Brash said his father was "remarkably tolerant". He espoused gay rights when, in his 80s, he explained in a book that the Bible was not all meant to be taken literally.

He continued group Bible studies until his death. He loved playing billiards, made hooked rugs, and was "amazingly domesticated for his age", Lyn Brash said. —Mike Crean

● Very Reverend Dr Alan Anderson Brash, OBE, born June 5, 1913, Lower Hutt; died August 24, 2002, Christchurch. Survived by Ian, Don, and Lyn, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.