



**FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES**  
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**Saint Margaret's and the Ordination of Women**

Welcome to the twenty-eighth edition of "From the Parish Archives". We hope that you will enjoy reading about the history of the Parish. This is especially so with us in our 150th year.

The "From the Parish Archives" aims to be factual. However, any opinions expressed are personal and may not be necessarily shared by other parishioners.

Geoffrey A Sandy, Parish Archivist and Parish Historian.

**Introduction**

The Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) began in 1983 when a group of women in Sydney nailed their demands for the ordination of women to the priesthood to the door of the Chapter House at Saint Andrews Cathedral. It is ironic that to this day this conservative diocese refuses to ordain women as priests or bishops. That is not the case for the rest of Australia. Soon after the "nailing of demands", a meeting was held at Saint Margaret's Eltham to also demand the ordination of women to the priesthood. The proactive involvement and advocacy of "equal" gender representation in the church has continued to the present day in this parish.

In 2012, we are as a parish celebrating 150 years of service and mission to the Eltham district. The church opened on 12 December 1861. We are also celebrating 20 years of women priests in Australia. In March 1992, ten women were ordained as Priests in the Diocese of Perth. Many other dioceses quickly followed. By the end of 1992 ninety women had been ordained priest across Australia and two others ordained overseas who were able to exercise priestly ministry in Australia. A celebration of the Perth ordination was held at the home of Helene and Chris Bell, former parishioners of Saint Margaret's.

It is also appropriate that this issue coincides with our Patronal Festival. Saint Margaret of Scotland was a reformer of the Scottish church and had strong character and faith.

**Our Impressive Record**

The commitment of this parish to gender equality in clerical leadership is impressive. Glenys Collis remembers Saint Margaret's early involvement with MOW. She recalls herself and Susan Sandford undertaking some planning for a first Victorian meeting. When that day arrived she remembers it being sunny. Members of Saint Margaret's present included Glenys Collis, Susan Sandford, Judith Ireland, Jennifer Willis and Father Ron Dowling, our vicar.

The inaugural meeting of MOW (Victoria) was held on 16 August 1984, the leader or Moderator being Janet Gaden, wife of the theologian Rev. John Gaden, with the Vice-Moderator Diane Heath, the public relations director of Melbourne's Mission of St. James and St. John.

In 1985 a MOW meeting was held at Saint Margaret's with Monica Furlong from England as the guest speaker. In 1985, the parish was offered and gladly accepted as a theological field student Elizabeth Smith. A support group was established, by Judith Ireland, and this included a monthly dinner with Elizabeth.

Members of the Parish were involved in protests outside Saint Pauls Cathedral. Glenys Collis remembers one when they were particularly strengthened when a group of Catholic nuns joined them. She remembers the wearing of "protest" aprons - one read "A Womans Place is in Bishops court". At the February 1992 protest Geranium (Glyn Pritchard) was in attendance wearing a Christian clown costume. She held the notice "I'm glad GOD called me to be a Christian clown and not a priest". Jennifer Willis remembers prior to the ordinations was at times virulent. One such example was that "ordination of women was equivalent to ordaining a dog". Some parishioners left the church over this issue. Most returned, some did not.

Indeed, throughout the 1980s, the parish was willing to take a number of other female theological students, as well as male students. These included Clem Taplin, Diane Heath and Jenny Rockwell. MOW paid the airfare for a deacon from the Diocese of Sydney to come to Saint Margaret's for an interview by the incumbency committee. The Revd. Erica Mathieson was that deacon and was subsequently priested in 1997 by the Archbishop of Melbourne. She was appointed priest-in-charge of Saint Margaret's Eltham. Erica resigned from her appointment in 1999 due to ill health.

The parish was open to an appointment of a new priest of either gender. Subsequently, the Revd. Elizabeth Delbridge was initially appointed as locum, then in 2001 priest-in-charge and in 2005 appointed as incumbent. In 2006, a former theological placement student at Saint Margaret's, the Revd. Clemence Taplin, was appointed as Assistant Priest. In 2008, the Revd, Deidre Ragless was ordained Deacon and appointed to Saint Margaret's. She was Assistant Curate in the Parish from 2008 until 2012.

In August 2006, Saint Margaret's hosted in its mud brick hall, a MOWatch pre-conference. Parishioner Kathleen Toal, who has been strongly associated with the Movement reported that some of the delegates to the MOWatch arrived unexpectedly early at our parish on a Red Eye Express flight. She reports that parishioners responded with a welcoming breakfast and blankets on pews for catching up with much needed sleep. In 2011, the mud brick hall was again a venue for MOWatch delegates and a presentation from Meg Warner.

Kathleen Toal also reports on those parishioners or former parishioners who are or were members of MOWatch. These include Glenys Collis, Helene Bell, Pirriall Clift, the Revd. Elizabeth Delbridge, the Revd. Ronald Dowling, Shirley Hall, John Ireland, Judith Ireland, Shirley Nash, Glyn Pritchard, Deidre Ragless, Susan Sandford, Clemence Taplin, Gary Toal, Kathleen Toal, Rachel Toal, Alison Wailes and Jennifer Willis. We may also note women parishioners who have been ordained Priest. The Revd. Joanne Hall who was deaconed in 1990 and priested in 1992 and the Revd. Pirriall Clift was deaconed in 2001 and priested in 2001.

### **The 1990 Pre-Synod Meeting**

On Sunday 11 February 1990 a special pre-synod meeting of the parish was held at Saint Margaret's and was concerned with advice and support to our Synod Representatives as it discussed the election of a new Archbishop. However, the

issue of woman's ordination was to the fore. The meeting was attended by 54 adult parishioners. The three agenda items were:

1. What help can we give our Synod representatives in choosing a new archbishop?
2. Can we give our Synod representatives a message to take to the synod about the ordination of women?
3. Does the Parish support the motion passed at the January vestry meeting regarding the ordination of women?

Agenda item 2 was considered first. Whilst all parishioners were probably in favour of ordination the message to be taken was varied. The majority view was that " St Margaret's message is loud and clear to our Reps that we support the ordination of women. We can't wait for the legalistics of the matter -we need action now". A rare view expressed was that we should not "...rush into it...we need to mark time till then. Equality is fine but in every family Father usually has the final say". A motion that St Margaret's strongly supports the ordination of women was carried 53 for and 1 against.

Agenda item 3 was considered next. Basically it was to ratify a motion that St Margaret's withholding one payment of the 6 months Home Mission Fund as a protest. The funds with interest were to be paid upon the ordination of women. It was argued that such action would be effective in drawing the diocese's attention to the "urgency" of woman's ordination. Others spoke against the motion as "improper" and more strongly as "blackmail". The original motion was slightly amended but in the end the amended motion was lost 36 against, 15 for and 3 abstentions.

It was unanimously agreed that an advertisement be placed in "See" reminding voters for the Synod Meeting to pick an Archbishop who will ordain women quickly. It was also agreed that a Watchdog Committee be established to monitor developments on the priesting of women, to keep the Parish clearly informed and involved, and to make appropriate recommendations to Vestry for action on the matter.

The meeting then turned to agenda item 1. The minutes appear to be inconclusive about any unified parish advice. The congregation at large were invited to talk to the Synod Reps between now and voting time.

### **The Momentous Year 1992**

This timeline is taken from the MOWatch website

[http://www.mowatch.org.au/simplified/women\\_priests.html](http://www.mowatch.org.au/simplified/women_priests.html)

- 23rd December 1991, Bishop Owen Dowling announced his plans to ordain 11 women deacons to the priesthood on 2nd February 1992.
- 17th January 1992, three members of General Synod seek an injunction from the NSW Supreme Court to stop Bishop Dowling ordaining the women. Bishop Dowling said he would proceed unless the injunction was granted.
- 23rd January 1992, Archbishop Peter Carnley of Perth announces he will ordain women as priests on 7th March 1992.
- 24th January 1992, Revd. Dawn Kenyon, a priest ordained in New Zealand is inducted as priest in charge of the parish of Southern Cross, Diocese of Perth.
- 28th January 1992, Justice Rogers of the NSW Supreme Court rejects the application for an injunction. The applicants immediately lodge an appeal.
- 30th January 1992. The NSW Court of Appeal hears the appeal and reserves judgement until 1.00pm the next day. The women and men to be ordained begin their retreat.
- 31st January 1992. An injunction is granted by the NSW Court of Appeal to stop Bishop Dowling ordaining the women until the full case is heard.

- 2nd February 1992. In the morning in most Cathedrals 11 red roses honouring the women who were to be ordained. In the afternoon a rally preceded the ordination service at Goulburn Cathedral. Eleven women processed into the Cathedral as deacons alongside six men. Bishop Dowling examined them and found them fit for the office of priest. In accordance with the injunction, Bishop Dowling then ordained six men as priests, the women processed out as deacons.
- 4th March 1992. The three plaintiffs in the NSW case and another from West Australia seek an injunction in the WA Supreme Court to prevent Archbishop Peter Carnley ordaining women as priests.
- 6th March 1992. The injunction is refused. Application for an appeal is refused.
- 7th March 1992. 10.00am, St George's Cathedral, Perth. Archbishop Peter Carnley ordained Betty Arney, Elizabeth Couche, Kay Goldsworthy, Pam Halbert, Jennifer Hall, Terry Milne, Judy Peterkin, Catherine Pinner, Joyce Polson and Robin Tandy. The first women to be ordained as priests in Australia.

### **Postscript**

Celebrations for the 20 years anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in Australia has paralleled our own 150th anniversary of the opening of Saint Margaret's. Coincidentally, it also the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1662 Prayer Book. The main MOWatch celebratory event for the Diocese of Melbourne is a 2pm service on the 9 December at Saint Paul's Cathedral.

This parish can be proud of its impressive contribution to gender equality in church leadership, both at Eltham and in the wider church.