

Womenâ??s ordination celebration, thanksgiving and recollection

By Janet Scarfe

On Sunday evening 4 December, the cathedral bells rang a quarter peal for the special choral evensong marking the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Diocese of Adelaide.

On 5 December 1992, history was made in the diocese when five women deacons were ordained as priests. It was the first ordination after General Synod permitted women to be priests and only the second in the Anglican Church in Australia.

Ordained priest that day were the Reverends Joan Claring-Bould (the dioceseâ??s first woman deacon), Flo Monahan, Susanna Pain, Sister Juliana SI and Susan Straub. Four were present on Sunday evening, Susanna having travelled from Canberra. Flo watched the livestream with family and friends from her home in the country.



Back L-R: Archbishop Geoffrey Smith, Bishop Denise Ferguson, Bishop Chris McLeod, Canon Jenny Wilson (obscured). Front L-R: the Reverends Susan Straub, Juliana SI, Susanna Pain and Joan Claring-Bould

Highlights

There were many highlights in the service that brought together celebration, thanksgiving and recollection. Music was one. Choir conductor Anthony Hunt chose organ music and chant settings by contemporary women composers.

The famous hymn â??Who would true valour seeâ?? was transformed as choir and congregation sang â??sheâ?? in place of â??heâ?? throughout. Other hymns were by the Reverend Dr Elizabeth Smith AM, an early member of the Movement for the Ordination of Women and hymnist whose words are in official collections. Most special was the anthem â??Do not remember the former thingsâ?? by Adelaide composer Rachel Bruerville.



Bishop Denise Ferguson preaches at the Evensong celebration of 30 years of womenâ??s ordination

The beautiful reflective setting sung perfectly by the choir included strains from the gospel song â??We shall overcomeâ??. The anthem was financed by generous donations through the St Peterâ??s Cathedral Music Foundation.

Prayers were led by past convenors and members of the Movement for the Ordination.

Bishop Denise Ferguson in her sermon focussed on Jesusâ??s message to the two Marys on Easter morning: â??Do not be afraid, go and tell, use your voice. She paid tribute to the first women who were ordained, to their courage and the courage of those who had fought for womenâ??s ordination in the face of determined opposition.



Rachel Bruerville, anthem composer, reads the first lesson at the Evensong celebration of womenâ??s ordination

Bishop Keith Rayner

For many the highlight was the talk given by Bishop Keith Rayner during the service. As Primate Bishop Keith chaired the 1992 General Synod that finally made it possible for the ordination of women as priests to go ahead. As Archbishop of Adelaide he ordained Joan Claring-Bould as this dioceseâ??s

first woman deacon. As Archbishop of Melbourne, he ordained thirty-three women priests in 1992 and dozens more subsequently.

Throughout the controversy Bishop Keith was known for his consummate fairness, his capacity to listen respectfully to all sides and his dedication to finding consensus.



Intercessors (Back L-R: Rev Ali Wurm, Sue Henry-Edwards, Rev Deirdre Ragless, Dianne Bradley OAM, Lavinia Gent)

Bishop Keith spoke about the ordination of women struggle as he knew and experienced it. He then launched a photographic exhibition and commemorative publication celebrating pioneers of womenâ??s ministry in the diocese before 1992 and 30 years of womenâ??s leadership and ministry. They were researched and written by Dr Janet Scarfe, president of the Movement for the Ordination of Women from 1989 to 1995 and a professional historian, with the collaboration of diocesan archivist Dr Sarah Black. Both the exhibition and the publication are available on the cathedral website http://www.stpeters-cathedral.org.au

Present at the service were women and men who had supported the ordination of women in many and various ways including prayer, silent protests, banner making, theological argument and as synod members. Among them was David Bleby. The respected jurist was the chief architect of the General Synod canon that allowed individual dioceses to ordain women to the priesthood. On Sunday evening he was a bellringer in the tower ringing the quarter peal that welcomed everyone to the service.

The service was recorded and is available here or on the cathedral YouTube site. The service booklet can be downloaded here. You can download the text of the sermon by The Right Reverend Denise Ferguson, Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Adelaide here.

1992, 2022 and the future

The 30th anniversary year has been marked in various ways. A cathedral service was held on 23 March with six women bishops present. St Peterâ??s Girls honoured their Old Scholars ordained priest (six) and three who led the campaign for womenâ??s ordination. St Johnâ??s in the city hosted a lecture by Dianne Bradley OAM in honour of the Reverend Caroline Pearce, a founder of MOW SA. And as Bishop Denise said in her sermon, the recent Synod â??acknowledged the important contribution ordained women have made and continue to make to worship, ministry and leadership in the Anglican Church, and affirmed that women who are priests or bishops, teach and lead with full spiritual authority in this diocese.â??

As Bishop Denise also said in her sermon, however â??we know there are still areas of the Anglican Church of Australia, and even in this diocese, where women are restricted and excluded from participation. There is still so much more to be accomplished.â??

Date Created
December 13, 2022