

WOMEN MINISTERS BEFORE 1977

Peter Bentley

Introduction

This article is an attempt to provide a definitive listing of women ordained as Ministers of the Word prior to the formation of the Uniting Church. The period examined is 1927 - 1977. A few details have still not been confirmed, but it was thought that it would be helpful to publish this list at this stage noting that it is seventy years since the first women was ordained. Readers are invited to submit new information to the editor which may alter the final number of ordinations, but the most likely number of women ordained prior to union is 35, being made up of Congregationalists (13), Methodist (14) and Presbyterian (8). Three died and two left their church before Church union. Only one of those ministers alive at the time of union declined to enter the Uniting Church. Six more have died since union and one has left the church. Of the remaining 22, one half are in settlements, nine are retired and two are not in settlements.

Congregational Churches

Congregationalists were the first religious body to ordain women as ministers in Australia, with the first person being the well-known figure Winifred Kiek, just over 50 years before church union. Ordinations were conducted within the local church or congregation under the oversight of the Congregational Union of Australia and four states ordained women: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. At least thirteen women were ordained in Australia, (see note below). Several Congregational women who had been ordained outside Australia also

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ministered in Australia or worked as missionaries in the Pacific. The number ordained is about the same as the Methodists who started ordaining women some forty years later, but this mainly reflects their respective numerical starting points.

Alphabetical Listing

ABBA, Hilda May. BA (Sheff), BD (MCD), MACE, DHum.

Ordained: 8 October 1951 at Pitt Street, Sydney. Tutor Camden College. Balmain 1953-55; UK (1955-76); Hamptons, Vic. (1977-80); Essendon (1981); Phillip Island-San Remo (1982-87); Retired: 1987.

Note: Husband was also a minister: Raymond Abba (1910 - 1987. Ordained: 1940)

HAYMAN (formerly Livingstone), Lilian Ethel. BA (Syd), Dip. Soc.

Born: 22 May 1914 (Paddington, NSW)

Ordained: 1 July 1943 at Allawah NSW.

Allawah 1943-51, Nursing Kogarah and Waverley 1952-53; M.G. Hostel 1954-63; Warden Goldstein College 1964-74; Mosman 1975-81. Retired: 1981

Note: Husband also a minister: Charles V. Hayman (1908 - 1989. Ordained 1934).

HEWETT, Gwendoline Estelle. LTh

Born: 24 January 1903. Death: 26 March 1983

Trained: Parkin College.

Ordained: 10 June 1943 at Devon Park, S.A.

London Missionary Society - Amoy, China 1931 - 1940; Hindmarsh, S.A. 1941-43; Devon Park; Bunbury WA 1946-48; Loxton 1950; Salisbury 1950-52; Encounter Bay 1954-62. Retired: 1962

HORE, Joan Mary

Ordained: 28 May 1931 at Speers Point, NSW.

London Missionary Society 1928-32; Islington 1931-35; Mayfield West 1934-36; West Epping 1936-40; Devonport Tas. 1942-46. Death: 20 July 1955.

HUTLEY, Kate Hilda Louise (nee Keen)

Born: 28 November 1887, England. Death: 17 May 1976.

Ordained: 31 March 1932 at Port Adelaide.

London Missionary Society Amoy, China 1913-29; 1932-48; Devon Park SA 1952-55.

KIEK, Winifred. BA, MA (Adel), BD (MCD)

Born: March 1884 Died: 30 May 1975

Ordained: 13 June 1927 at Colonel Light Gardens, S.A.

Colonel Light Gardens 1921-33; Knoxville 1938-46;

Note: Husband also a minister. Edward Sydney Kiek (1883- 1959. Ordained 1909)

LOADER, Linda. LTh, Dip. R. E.

Born: 29 November 1921 Death: 25 September 1982 (in South Australia)

Ordained: 1975.

Youth Leadership Training Officer Victoria (1967-72); Teaching and counselling (1973-75); Heathcote (1975-76); Without settlement (1977); Wynyard Tas. (1978);

Retired: 1980

McCHESNEY-CLARK, Elizabeth C. MA (Cant.)

Ordained 8 March 1973 at Eagle Junction, Qld.

Served in PNG (1946 - 1968). Eagle Junction (1969 - 1975); Redcliffe (1976 -80); Rockhampton (1981- 83); Retired: 1984.

Note: Husband also a minister. Joseph Arthur McChesney (1912 - 1969. Ordained 1940).

MERRY, Isabelle. OBE, BA (Melb), Dip. Soc.

Ordained: 19 December, 1937 at Croydon, Vic..

Croydon, Vic. (1937-45); W/S (1945-50), including Medical Social Work Victorian Society for Crippled Children and Adults (1947-49) and Hospital Chaplain Royal Worcester Infirmary UK (1949-50); North Balywn (1951-53); Hospital Chaplain, Queen Victoria Memorial (1954-70); Chaplain, Social Worker Association for the

Blind (1971-73); Chaplain and Social Worker After Care Hospital, Collingwood (1973-75); Croydon North, Vic. (1975-77); Retired: 1977.

MURRAY, Thelma Osborne. BA (Qld), BD (MCD).

Born: 18 August 1907. Death: 8 September 1993

Ordained: 22 March 1963 at City Church, Brisbane.

Note: Thelma was a Presbyterian Deaconess from 1931: Park, South Brisbane (1931-36); Home Missionary Maleny (1940-44); Toowoomba, St Stephens (1945-47); She sought ordination in the Presbyterian Church before training at Cromwell College and being ordained by the Congregational Union.

Mt Gravatt 1959-61; Mt Gravatt-Manly 1961-66. Retired: 1966

SVENSON, Corin Nyree. BCom, BD, AEd, LTh

Trained: Cromwell College.

Ordained: 2 January 1970 at Yeronga, Queensland.

Yeronga 1970-71; + Coopers Plains 1971-73; Toowoomba 1973; CPE in Melbourne in 1974; Dandenong H. S. Chaplain 1975-78; Maryborough, Qld 1978-82; Capricorn Coast 1983-89.

Retired: 31 December 1989

WACKER, Dorothy. BA

Born: 9 February 1931 (Gatton, Qld)

Trained: Cromwell College. Ordained: 17 April 1959, Broadway Woolloongabba. Mt Gravatt (1958), Broadway-Belmont 1959-64, plus C.E; Chermside 1965-69; Applecross, WA 1970-75, plus St Stephens 1975-77; Pilgrim Church Adelaide 1977-80. Resigned 1980.

Also President of the Congregational Union of WA 1973; President-elect of the Congregational Union of Australia 1975-77.

Note: upon leaving the ministry she changed her name to Thea Rainbow, later to Thea Gaia.

WILKINS, Jillian Irene. LTh (MCD), Dip. R. E.

Trained: Parkin-Wesley College. Ordained: 1974

Without Settlement 1977-78, Maine USA 1979-80; Nedlands, WA. Then to USA.
 Note: Husband also a minister: Robert Arthur Wilkins, Henley Beach.

ALSO

JEAVONS(nee Ferris), Alice Elizabeth Cochrane

Trained Parkin College.

Ordained ?;

London Missionary Society South India 1937-40.

Reference: LMS Chronicle, 1937, p. 206.

STANFIELD, Lorna May

Born: 21 May 1916

Ordained: ?

Sorell-Tasman Peninsula, Tasmania 1944-46, then to Birmingham, England 1948.

In order of ordination (date)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Winifred Kiek | 8. Dorothy Wacker |
| 2. Joan Mary Hore | 9. Thelma Murray |
| 3. Kate Hilda Louise Hutley | 10. Corin Nyree Svenson |
| 4. Isabelle Merry | 11. Elizabeth C. McChesney-Clark |
| 5. Gwendoline Estelle Hewett | 12. Jillian Wilkins |
| 6. Lilian (Livingstone) Hayman | 13. Linda Loader |
| 7. Hilda May Abba | |

Also noted in Lindsay Lockley's Listing of Congregational ministers are the following, but the ordination dates are not indicated.

Alice Elizabeth Cochrane (Ferris) Jeavons, Lorna May Stanfield

List according to State

New South Wales

Hilda May Abba
Lilian (Livingstone) Hayman
Joan Hore

South Australia

Gwendoline Estelle Hewett
Kate Hutley
Winifred Kiek
Jillian Wilkins

Queensland

Elizabeth C. McChesney-Clark
Thelma Murray
Corin Nyree Svenson
Dorothy Wacker

Victoria

Linda Loader
Isabelle Merry

The Methodist Church of Australasia

Background

The Methodist Church General Conference held in May 1966 resolved to proceed with the ordination of women by a formal vote: 132 for - 18 against. This decision was confirmed at the 1968 General Conference and the avenue for the ordination of women was open. Many of the early ministerial candidates came from the deaconess order. All candidates were ordained at the annual state conference usually held in October. Margaret Sanders was the first woman to be ordained by the Methodist Church, at a service held on Sunday 19th October 1969 (by the Methodist Conference in WA). The Victorian conference ordained 10 of the 14 women ordained by the Methodist Church, with Coralie Ling's ordination coming just a few days after Margaret Sanders. No women were ordained as Methodists in NSW, the Northern Territory or in Tasmania (through the joint conference), though the first person to be ordained in the Uniting Church in NSW was ex-Methodist Janet Wade (now Wade-Main) on the 18 September 1977.

Alphabetical Listing

COUCH, Marian Joan. Dip. R. E., Dip. Theol., Dip. Pas. Stud.

Ordained: 20 October 1972. Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Deaconess ministry: Trained at Kew Institute 1960-61; Hamilton (1962-63); Preston (1963-68: Ordained as a Deaconess in 1964); trained at United Faculty 1969-71; Swan Hill (1972-76); Woomelang (1977-84); Horsham (1985-1990); Corio-Norlane (1990 -)

DAVEY, Laurel Grace.

Ordained: 21 October 1971. Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Deaconess ministry: Geelong (1956-62); Dedicated as deaconess 25 February 1958 and ordained as deaconess in 1963; Newport-Williamstown (1963-64), Yallourn (1956-66); Essendon (1967-73); Eastern Mallee (1974-81); Donald (1982- 1988); Heytebury Regional Parish (1989 - 1992). Retired 1993.

FECHNER, Violet Merle.

Ordained: 21 October 1971. Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Deaconess ministry: Deaconess College 1951-52; Hobart (1953-54); Portland, Vic. (1955-57); Darwin (1958-61); Traralgon, Vic. (1962-66); NZ Maori Mission (1967-69); Wendouree, Vic. (1970); Merrigum (1971-75); Boort-Minmindie (1975-79); Pascoe Vale (1980-84); Retired: January 1985.

JOHNSON, Lynnette Rosemary (nee Lancaster). BSc, BD, BEd.

Ordained: 18 October, 1973. Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Preston, Vic (1973-75); W/S (1976); Cato (Elsternwick), Vic (1977- 85); Bellarine, Vic (1986 - 3/93); Private arrangement East Geelong (May-Dec. 93); Yarram (1994 -)

JOHNSON, Valerie Christine. ALIA, Dip. Theol., Dip. Info. Man., MBus (Info. Tech)

Ordained: 16 October, 1975. Wesley Church, Melbourne

Kyabram, Vic. (1975-78); Hume Highway, Vic. (1979-82); W/S (1983 -)

LING, Coralie Naida. BA, BD, BEd

Ordained: 23 October 1969. Wesley Church, Melbourne

Deaconess Ministry: North Melbourne (1966-67); Ballarat (1968); Horsham (1969); Ballarat East (1970-75); Essendon (1975-79); Wangaratta (1980-May 86); Malvern (June 86 -)
Fitzroy (July 1991 -)

OLIVER, Elaine. LTh, Dip.R.E.

Ordained: 17 October, 1974. Wesley Church, Melbourne

Deaconess ministry: 1966-74. Sunshine, Vic. (1966- 73); Mersey, Tas. (1974-78); Keilor, Vic. (1979 - 1989), Seymour, Vic. (1989 - 1995); Cobden, Vic. (1995 -).

POLKINGHORNE, Margaret.

Ordained: 21 October, 1976

Plympton (1976-82); Julia Farr Centre (Co-ordinating Chaplain) (1983 -); Moderator of the Synod of South Australia 1995-97.

REID, Christina

Born: 1919. Death: 1985

Ordained: 21 October 1971. Wesley Church, Melbourne

D.C.E (1945-60); JBCE (1961-70); Ormond and Carnegie (1971-74); Rosanna (1975-80); Strathmore (1981-4).

SANDERS (KRYCH from 1971), Margaret. BA, BD (H), Dip. R. E., Dip. Ed.

Ordained: 19 October 1969.

Former Deaconess (Trained from 1962). In 1968 worked for the Department of Christian Education in W.A. as the Youth Director. Accepted for the ministry in 1968 and admitted into full connexion in 1969 with status dated from 1966. Went to Princeton Seminary, USA for further study, where she met and married a Lutheran minister. On returning to W.A., they attempted to negotiate a joint/near ministry within the Methodist Church, but this did not work out. It was noted in the 1973 W.A. Conference record that she had resigned ("Voluntarily retired") and consequently recognition as a Minister was withdrawn by the WA Methodist

Conference. In the United States Margaret taught at the Lutheran Seminary in Germantown, near Philadelphia and was subsequently ordained by the Lutheran Church.

SPEAR, Norma. LTh, Dip. R. E., BD, DMin (Fuller)

Ordained: 21 October 1971, Albert Street Methodist (Queensland Methodist Conference)

Trained for Deaconess Ministry (Haberfield College, Deaconess House, Leichhardt, George Brown Training College: 1958-9). Note: Dedicated as a deaconess: 14 October 1962;

Nundah (1960-61); Townsville (1962-63); Bundaberg (1964-68); Boonah (1969); Indooroopilly/Kenmore (1971-80); Ipswich East (1981-1986); South East Ipswich (1986 -)

TERRY, Rosalind. BPharm., BD

Ordained: 18 October, 1973. Wesley Church, Melbourne

Training: Otira 1970, transferred to United Faculty of Theology 1971-72.

Somerset, Tas. (probationary year 1973, 1974-75); Kyneton, Vic. (1976-80); Bacchus Marsh, Vic. (1981-86); Stirling Presbytery, WA (1987-89); Noble Park, Vic. (December 1989 - April 1996); Warragul, Vic. (May 1996 -)

WIDDICOMBE, Sylvia May

Ordained: 21 October 1971: Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Deaconess ministry: Training 1951-55; Warmambool (1953-56); Sunshine North (1956-58); North Melbourne (1958-65); Broadmeadows-Glenroy (1966-73); Probationary Minister 1971, Minister 1971; Sherbrooke (1974-77); Loch-Poowong (1978-Feb.85); Western Heights (March 1985 - 1992); Retired: 28 February 1993.

ZAYAN (nee DAWSON), Margaret. LTh, Dip. R. E., Grad. Dip. R. E.

Ordained: 17 October, 1975. Wesley Church, Perth

MLC (WA) Chaplain (1975); W/S (1976-83); PLC (WA) Chaplain (1984 -)

In order of ordination date

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|-----------------------|
| 1. | Margaret Sanders | | |
| 2. | Coralie Ling | | |
| 3 | Laurel Davey, Violet Fechner, Christina Reid, Norma Spear and Sylvia Widdicombe | | |
| 8. | Marian Couch | 12. | Elaine Oliver |
| 9. | Valerie Johnson | 13. | Margaret Zayan |
| 10. | Lynnette Johnson and Rosalind Terry | 14. | Margaret Polkinghorne |

State conference (Listing in order of ordination)

Victoria (and Tasmania - joint conference)	Queensland
Coralie Ling (1969)	Norma Spear (1971)
Laurel Davey (1971)	
Violet Merle Fechner (1971)	
Christina Reid (1971)	South Australia
Sylvia Widdicombe (1971)	Margaret Polkinghorne (1976)
Marian Couch (1972)	
Lynette Johnson (1973)	
Rosalind Terry (1973)	Western Australia
Elaine Oliver (1974)	Margaret Sanders (1969)
Valerie Johnson (1975)	Margaret Zayan (1975)

The Presbyterian Church of Australia

Background

The Presbyterian Church approved the possible ordination of women to the office of elder in 1967. The next step was to consider the ordination of women as ministers of the Word and Sacraments. The move to ordain women ministers in the Presbyterian Church arose from the presentation of a final (and third) report by the Reverend Alan Smart (appointed in 1967) to the General Assembly of the

Presbyterian Church in Australia in 1970. The recommendations included the plain statement "that women should be eligible for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments". Following Presbyterian polity, the report was commended to state assemblies and presbyteries for consideration and brought back to the 1974 General Assembly, where the Assembly declared that "women shall be eligible for admission to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments in the Presbyterian Church of Australia on the same terms and conditions as are applicable to men." (See Arthur Patrick reference below). After the Assembly the applications of three women (Marlene Thalheimer, Alison Grant and Geraldine Wheeler) were processed, and with all academic requirements met, exit certificates were issued in July 1974. Marlene Thalheimer and Geraldine Wheeler were licensed to preach in August, with Marlene Thalheimer being the first woman to be ordained by the Presbyterian Church in Australia, in Victoria in October 1974. Geraldine Wheeler went overseas for eighteen months and was ordained on return in Queensland. Seven of the eight ordained - Queensland (3), Victoria (3) and South Australia (1) - entered the Uniting Church.

Alphabetical Listing

BARTHOLOMEW (nee Morrow), Joy Florence. BA, BD, Dip. R. E.

Born: 15 April 1944, Khartoum, Sudan.

Ordained 2 July 1976, Epping Presbyterian Church.

Home Missionary, Wagga Wagga 1972-75, Home Missionary-Student Assistant-Ordained Assistant, Epping 1975-77, without charge 1978-84. Chaplain, University of Newcastle ca.1980-84. Assistant Minister, Corowa 1984-present.

Married to a minister, the Rev. Arnold Sidney Bartholomew; daughter of the Rev. George Morrow and sister of the Rev. William Morrow. Did not enter the Uniting Church.

GRANT, Alison. MSc, BD, Dip. Ed.

Born: 18 March 1925. Death: 15 April 1984

Ordained: 28 January 1975.

Robinvale (1975 - 1980); Balmoral (1980 - 1984)

JOHANSON, Joan Helena. Dip. R. E.

Ordained: 21 May 1976 at Millmerran, Queensland.

Deaconess ministry: Training Ormond College 1961-63; West Toowoomba, Qld (1965-69); Redcliffe (1970-74); 1975 studies at Joint Faculty Brisbane); Millmerran (1976-81); Allora-Clifton (1982-90); Toowoomba West Parish (1991 -)

KERR, Pamela. BA, BD, Dip. Ed., DPast. Stud.

Ordained: March 1976, South Hawthorn Presbyterian Church.

Deaconess Ministry: Chaplain Mildura High School (1970-71); Principal Rolland House (1973-77); South Hawthorn (1975-77); W/S (1977-January 1985); Chaplain Footscray Girls High School (Feb. 1985 -88); Box Hill-Mont Albert (1988-93); Werribee Parish (1994-).

Note: Moderator of the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church 1997 - 2000.

NORRIS, Norah Aliene

Ordained: 24 October 1976, Scotch College Chapel, Adelaide.

Deaconess Ministry: Training Rolland House 1953-55, Commissioned January 1956; Hamilton (1956-57), Horsham (1958-61), Burwood/PLC, Burwood/Mt Waverley; Shepparton (1966); P.C.S.A. Dept of Christian Education Field Officer 19. Part-time Clerk of Assembly (1972-77); Ardrossan (1978); Giles (1979-83); Port Pirie (1984-1989); Assembly Commission on Liturgy/Interim Chaplain Modbury Hospital (1989), Interim Minister Lower Murray Parish (1990); Retired: 1991.

RUSSELL, Pamela Gayle. BSc, BD, Dip. Ed.

Ordained: 1 April 1977.

Maryborough, Qld (1977); W/S (1978-).

THALHEIMER, Marlene J. BEd, BD, SRN, SRM

Ordained: October 1974. St John's Essendon, Victoria.

Victoria: Pastoral Assistant at Essendon (1973), then ordained in 1974, Romsey-Lancefield (1974-81); Loddon-East (1983); Resigned: 1984. Died: 1990.

WHEELER, Geraldine Jean. BA, BD, MTh, MEd

Ordained: 25 May 1976, Iona Presbyterian Church, West Mackay, Qld.

Deaconess Ministry: Queensland: Chaplain Clayfield College (1970-72); Dept of Christian Education (1972); W/S (1972-73); Mount Gravatt (1973-74); W/S (1974-76); Iona, Mackay (Pioneer Valley from 1977) (1976-83); Wilston (1984 - 1989), Nambour (1990 - 1996); New Farm and 1/4 Commission on Liturgy (1997-)

In Order of Ordination

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1. | Marlene Thalheimer | 5. | Geraldine Wheeler |
| 2. | Alison Grant | 6. | Joy Bartholomew |
| 3. | Pamela Kerr | 7. | Norah Norris |
| 4. | Joan Johanson | 8. | Pamela Russell |

List according to State

NSW

Joy Florence Bartholomew (1976)

Queensland

Gerry Wheeler (1976)

Joan Johanson (1976)

Pamela Russell (1977)

South Australia

Norah Norris (1976)

Victoria

Marlene Thalheimer (1974)

Alison Grant (1975)

Pamela Kerr (1976)

References and Acknowledgments

G. Lindsay Lockley, a biographical card index of Congregational Ministers in Australia 1798 - 1977, held at the NSW Uniting Church Archives.

Arthur N. Patrick, 'The Ordination of Women in Australia: An "Enduring Problem" in Historical Perspective', *Church Heritage*, 5, 4 (September 1988), pp. 247-272.

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