

WOMEN MINISTERS BEFORE 1977: AN UPDATE

Julia Pitman and Peter Bentley

In 1998, Peter Bentley published his ground-breaking article that sought “to provide a definitive listing” of women ordained as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament prior to the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia on 22 June 1977.¹ More than twenty years have passed since that article was published and it now stands in need of revision. Though the original list was incomplete, it was helpful to publish it given that seventy years had passed since the first woman, Winifred Kiek, was ordained in the Congregational Church in Australia, in Colonel Light Gardens Congregational Church in South Australia on 13 June 1927. Moreover, with the growth in the history profession of women’s history and the history of minorities, interest was being stimulated nationally and internationally in the history of the ordination of women as ministers and basic data was required.

Peter estimated that thirty-five women had been ordained as ministers before church union and issued an invitation to revise this number. In the intervening years, Julia Pitman completed her PhD at the University of Adelaide on the history, theology and career paths of the women ordained as ministers in the Congregational Church and in 2016 published her findings as a book.² This work significantly updated that of G. Lindsay Lockley, whose biographical card index of Congregational Ministers in Australia, 1798-1977, found in the Uniting Church Archives in Sydney, formed the basis for Peter Bentley’s tally of women ministers in Congregationalism. Julia

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Peter Bentley is a widely published commentator on church affairs in Australia and within the Uniting Church is the National Director for the Assembly of Confessing Congregations.

Julia and Peter are members of the *Church Heritage* Editorial Board.

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confirmed that at least three other women had been ordained as ministers, which took the total number to thirty-eight, being comprised of fifteen Congregationalists, fifteen Methodists and eight Presbyterians. This revised article seeks to update the record for the Congregational women ministers in particular. The records for Methodist and Presbyterian women ministers have not yet been updated thoroughly (although the name of Thelma Holmes and some details have been added here and there); the details of their ministries are reprinted here in a briefer format than the original article, with reference to their settlement at union.

Many of the first Methodist and Presbyterian women ministers had served in their respective churches as deaconesses. While, over a fifty-year period from the late 1920s to the 1970s, Congregationalists gradually ordained women as ministers every few years and, in 1960, commissioned one woman, Sylvia Parry, as a deaconess at Augustine Congregational Church, Hawthorn, a suburb of Melbourne. The Methodist and Presbyterian Churches did not ordain women as ministers until 1969 and 1974 respectively.

Presbyterians in the 1890s and the Methodists after the Second World War established deaconess orders that attracted many candidates who latterly sometimes progressed to be ordained as ministers in their church or later, in the Uniting Church. The deaconess orders were established partly as a concession to the movement for the ordination of women in their respective churches and partly as a particular ministry. In the Presbyterian Church, the emphasis tended to be on ministry to the poor and disadvantaged, in the Methodist Church, the focus was as an assistant to local ordained ministers in areas such as Christian education, children's and youth work, and pastoral care. Over the course of the last forty years since church union in 1977, the number of women ordained as ministers steadily increased to the current estimate of the National Church Life Survey of about thirty per cent of the ministry. The Uniting Church's renewal of the diaconate in the early 1990s led to many former Presbyterian deaconesses being ordained as Deacons, the first being C.M. Elizabeth Matthews in Western Australia in 1991.



A group of Methodist Deaconesses in the 1950s

**Norah Norris as a Presbyterian Deaconess,
at Mt Waverley Church Victoria in 1962-64.
She was ordained as a Minister in SA in 1976.**



CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Congregational Church was the first Christian denomination in the world to ordain women as ministers: in America in 1853, in Britain in 1917 and in Australia, the first country in the British Empire, in 1927. The ordination of women was possible in Congregationalism because of the Reformed concept of the priesthood of all believers, the local autonomy of each church, liberalism in Biblical interpretation, financially independent women's guilds, and the entry of women into missionary service and as students in the universities. The subsequent opportunities the churches provided allowed some of the most able Congregational women to develop the self-confidence to be ordained as ministers in a Reformed Church. Once a call was received from a congregation – not all women who studied theology received a call – ordinations were conducted in the local congregation under the oversight of the state-based Congregational Union. Gradually, every few years, fifteen Congregational women were ordained as ministers in various

parts of Australia: South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland; and one, Jillian Wilkins, who eventually settled in Western Australia, was ordained in the United States of America.

In two-thirds of cases of women ministers in Australian Congregationalism, the missionary movement played an important role in promoting women's ordination. Seven of the fifteen women – or just less than half – of those ordained as ministers in Australian Congregationalism became ministers as their first choice (Kiek, Merry, Abba, Murray, Svenson, Wilkins, and Loader). Eight women ministers entered local congregational ministry after having served as a missionary with the London Missionary Society (hereafter, LMS) (Hore, Hutley, Hewett, McChesney-Clark), or having applied for missionary service, but then withdrawing or enduring rejection for medical or other reasons (Hore, Livingstone, Stanfield, Wacker, Murray). Two women (Hutley and Ferris) were ordained explicitly as ministers for missionary service with the LMS.

The involvement of Congregational women in international travel and migration from Britain to Australia was also an important element in promoting women's ordination in Australian Congregationalism. Five of the women who were ordained in Australia as Congregational ministers were migrants from Britain (Kiek, Hore, Hutley, Abba and McChesney-Clark); of these five, two (Hutley and McChesney-Clark) had been missionaries with the LMS. Three Congregational women ministers (Stanfield, Abba and Wilkins) travelled for personal and professional reasons between Australia, Britain and the United States, with Stanfield travelling to England to study youth work at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, and settling permanently in England.

Marriage also significantly affected women's ordination in Australian Congregationalism, with marriage to church leaders mostly encouraging rather than hindering the service of a woman minister. Six women ministers were married to ministers or lay pastors (Kiek, Abba, Hayman, McChesney-Clark, Wilkins and Loader); two women ministers were married to theologians (E.S. Kiek and Raymond Abba)

and one woman missionary married a former lay missionary before ordination (Kate Keen married Walter Hutley). On the other hand, a significant minority, six women ministers, remained single for various reasons (Hore, Merry, Hewett, Stanfield, Wacker, Svenson). One woman minister (Jeavons, née Ferris,) married a salesman and thereafter did not obtain a pastorate, but worked as a teacher.

Alphabetical listing

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

Born: 30 May 1918, Birmingham, England.

Trained: Camden College, Sydney.

Ordained: 8 October 1951 at Pitt Street, Sydney. Ministry: Tutor, Camden College, 1948-55; Balmain, 1953-55; UK, 1955-76; Hampton, Vic., 1977-80; Essendon, 1981; Phillip Island-San Remo, 1982-87.

Retired: 1987. Died: 1 September 2005, Sydney.

Husband, Raymond Abba (1910-1987), was also a minister and theologian, ordained in 1940.

HAYMAN (née Livingstone), Lillian Ethel BA (Syd), DipSoc (UNSW).

Born: 22 May 1914, Paddington, NSW.

Trained: Camden College, Sydney.

Ordained: 1 July 1943 at Allawah, NSW. Ministry: Allawah, 1943-51; Nursing, Methodist Hospital, Waverley, 1952-53; Warden, Methodist Girls' Hostel, Waverley, 1954-63; Warden of Women Students and Goldstein College, University of New South Wales, 1964-74; Mosman, 1975-81.

Retired: 1973. Died: 8 July 2002, Gerringong, NSW.

Husband, Charles V. Hayman (1908-1989), was also a minister, ordained in 1934.

HEWETT, Gwendoline Estelle LTh

Born: 24 January 1903, Rosewater, Adelaide.

Trained: Parkin College, Adelaide.

Ordained: 10 June 1943 at Devon Park, SA. Ministry: London Missionary Society, Amoy, China, 1931-40; Hindmarsh, SA, 1941-43; Devon Park, SA, 1943-44; Bunbury-Brunswick Junction, WA, 1946-48; Loxton, SA, 1950; Salisbury, SA, 1950-52; Superintendent, South Australian Spastic Paralysis Welfare Association, 1952-54; Encounter Bay District, SA, 1954-62.

Retired: 1962. Died: 26 March 1983, Torrens Park, Adelaide.

HORE, Joan Mary BA (Tas)

Born: 12 August 1890, Bedford, England.

Trained: Camden College, extra-mural (distance education) course.

Ordained: 28 May 1931 at Speers Point, NSW.

Ministry: London Missionary Society, India, 1924; Speers Point, NSW, 1928-32; Islington and Beresfield, Newcastle, 1931-35; Mayfield West, Newcastle, 1934-36; West Epping, Sydney, 1936-40; Huonville, Tas., 1941; Devonport, Tas., 1942-46.

Retired: 1946. Died: 20 July 1955, Devonport, Tasmania.

HUTLEY, Kate Hilda Louise (née Keen) LTh (MCD)

Born: 28 November 1887, Maidenhead, Berkshire, England.

Trained: St Colm's Missionary Training College, Edinburgh, and Parkin College, Adelaide.

Ordained: 31 March 1932 at Port Adelaide. Ministry: London Missionary Society, Amoy, China, 1913-29 and 1932-48; Devon Park, SA, 1952-55 (part-time).

Retired: 1955. Died: 17 May 1976, Rose Park, Adelaide.

Married former missionary Walter Hutley JP (1858-1931) on 22 April 1929.

JEAVONS, Alice Elizabeth Cochrane (née Ferris). LTh (MCD)

Born: 24 February 1911, Glanville, Adelaide.

Trained: Parkin College, Adelaide.

Ordained: 25 November 1937 at North Adelaide.

Ministry: London Missionary Society, South India, 1937-40.

Died: 28 April 2010, Victoria.

KIEK, Winifred (née Jackson). BA, MA (Adel), BD (MCD)
 Born: 27 July 1884, Chorlton upon Medlock, Lancaster, England.
 Trained: Parkin College, Adelaide.
 Ordained: 13 June 1927 at Colonel Light Gardens, South Australia.
 Ministry: Colonel Light Gardens, SA, 1926-33; Knoxville, SA, 1938-46.
 Died: 30 May 1975, Victor Harbor, SA. Husband, Edward Sydney Kiek (1883-1959) was also a minister and theologian, ordained in 1909.



The Rev. Winifred Kiek, 1935.



Isabella Merry

LOADER, Linda May (née Smith). LTh (MCD), DipRE.
 Born: 29 November 1921, Hampton, Melbourne.
 Trained: Victorian Congregational College, Melbourne.
 Ordained: 7 February 1975, at Church of all Nations, Carlton.
 Ministry: Youth Leadership Training Officer, Congregational Union of Victoria, 1967-72; teacher and counsellor, Congregational Union of Victoria, 1973-75; Heathcote Joint Parish, 1975-76; without settlement, 1977; Wynyard, Tas., 1978-80.
 Retired: 1980. Died: 25 September 1982, Royal Adelaide Hospital.
 Husband, Gordon Keith Loader (b. 1910), was also active in 1967-77

as a lay pastor.

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

Born: 21 November 1918, Swinton, Scotland.

Trained: Newnham College, Cambridge, Carey Hall, Birmingham and the Queensland Congregational College.

Ordained: 8 March 1973 at Eagle Junction, Queensland.

Ministry: LMS, Papua New Guinea, 1946-68; Eagle Junction, Qld, 1969-75; Redcliffe, Qld, 1976-81; Rockhampton, 1981-83.

Retired: 1984.

Died: 26 November 2006, Chermside, Brisbane.

Husband, (Joseph) Arthur McChesney-Clark (1912-1969), was also a minister and missionary, ordained in 1940.

MERRY, Isabella (Belle) Elizabeth. OBE; BA, DipSoc (Melb).

Born: 20 February 1907, Scarsdale, Victoria.

Ordained: 19 December 1937.

Ministry: Croydon and Croydon North, Vic., 1937-45; without supply, 1945-50; Medical Social Work, Victorian Society for Crippled Children and Adults, 1947-49, Hospital Chaplain, Royal Worcester Infirmary, UK, 1949-50; North Balwyn, Vic., 1951-53; Hospital Chaplain, Queen Victoria Memorial, 1954-70; Chaplain and Social Worker, After-Care Hospital, Collingwood, 1971-73; Chaplain and Social Worker, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Kooyong, 1973-75; Croydon North, 1975-77.

Retired: 1977. Died: 16 May 2000, Melbourne.

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

Born: 18 August 1907, Carlton, Melbourne.

Training: Cromwell College, Brisbane.

Ordained: 22 March 1963 at City Church, Brisbane.

Deaconess, Presbyterian Church of Australia: Park Church, South Brisbane, 1931-36; Home Missionary, Maleny, 1940-44; St Stephen's, Toowoomba, 1945-47. Married after 1947.

Minister, Congregational Church of Australia and New Zealand: Mt Gravatt, 1959-61; Mt Gravatt-Manly, 1961-66.

Retired: 1966. Died: 8 September 1993, Princess Alexandra Hospital,

Brisbane.

STANFIELD, Lorna May LTh (MCD), DCE (Birm).

Born: 21 May 1916, Hobart, Tasmania.

Trained: Parkin College, Adelaide.

Ordained: 25 October 1945, Memorial, Hobart.

Ministry: Sorell-Tasman Peninsula, Tasmania, 1944-46; Central Churches Group, Birmingham, England, 1948-51; Bournebrook, Birmingham, 1952-53; Wycliffe, Leicester, 1958-60; Bude, Cornwall, 1964-67.

Retired: 1967. Died: 11 June 2007, Exmouth, England.

SVENSON, Corin Nyree BCom (Qld), BD (Qld), AEd, LTh

Born: 8 September 1924, Stanthorpe, Queensland.

Trained: Cromwell College, Brisbane.

Ordained: 2 January 1970 at Yeronga, Queensland.

Ministry: Yeronga, Qld, 1970-71 Yeronga-Coopers Plains, 1971-73; Toowoomba, Qld, 1973; Clinical Pastoral Education, Melbourne, 1974; Dandenong High School Chaplain, Vic., 1975-78; Maryborough, Qld, 1978-83; Capricorn Coast, Qld, 1983-89.

Retired: 31 December 1989. Died: 26 February 2014, Rockhampton.

WACKER, Dorothy Ivy BA (Qld)

Born: 9 February 1931, Gatton, Queensland.

Trained: Cromwell College, Brisbane.

Ordained: 17 April 1959, Broadway, Woolloongabba, Queensland.

Ministry: Mt Gravatt, 1958; Broadway-Belmont, 1959-64; Department of Christian Education, Queensland Congregational Union, 1964-68; Chermside, 1964-69; Acting Secretary, Queensland Congregational Union, 1966-67; Applecross-Mount Pleasant, WA, 1969-75, St Stephen's, WA, 1975-77; Union Church in the City (later Pilgrim), Adelaide, 1977-80. Resigned from UCA 1980.

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

Upon leaving the ministry, Dorothy changed her name to *Thea Rainbow* and later to *thea Gaia* [sic]. In Canberra in the 1990s, she set up a women's spirituality centre, which became Gaia Womanspace at

Manuka and with other women ran spirituality workshops and seasonal rituals. Died: 15 May 2016, Canberra.

WILKINS, Jillian Irene LTh (MCD), DipRE

Born: 5 January 1940, Mitcham, Adelaide.

Trained: Parkin-Wesley College, Adelaide.

Ordained: 28 April 1974, Bingham Congregational Church, Maine, United States of America.

Ministry: Bingham, Maine, 1973-76; without supply, 1977-78 (Area Director, YMCA, Perth); Freeport, Maine, 1979-80; Nedlands, WA, 1981-84; Maine, USA: Wicasset, 1985, Wilton, 1986-94, Bangor, 1994-96; Chaplain, Uniting Church Homes, 1996-98; East Millinocket, Maine, 1999-2000; Mount Hawthorn, WA, 2001-02; Melville, WA, 2004.

Retired: 6 January 2005, Perth.

Husband, from whom Jillian later divorced, Robert Arthur Wilkins, is also a minister, including at Henley Beach SA.

List according to ordination date

1. Winifred Kiek (1927)
2. Joan Mary Hore (1931)
3. Kate Hilda Louise Hutley (née Keen) (1932)
4. Alice Elizabeth Cochrane Ferris (1937)
5. Isabella (Belle) Elizabeth Merry (1937)
6. Gwendoline (Gwen) Estelle Hewett (1943)
7. Lillian Ethel Hayman (née Livingstone) (1943)
8. Lorna May Stanfield (1945)
9. Hilda May Abba (1951)
10. Dorothy Ivy Wacker (1959)
11. Thelma Osborne Murray (1963)
12. Corin Nyree Svenson (1970)
13. Elizabeth Craigie McChesney-Clark (1973)
14. Jillian Irene Wilkins (in the United States, 1974)
15. Linda May Loader (1975)

List according to state in order of ordination date

South Australia

Winifred Kiek (1927)

Kate Hilda Louise Hutley (1932)

Alice Elizabeth Cochrane Ferris (1937)

Gwendoline Estelle Hewett (1943)

Jillian Irene Wilkins (educated in South Australia, ordained in the United States in 1974)

New South Wales

Joan Mary Hore (1931)

Lillian Ethel Livingstone (1943)

Hilda May Abba (1951)

Victoria

Isabella Elizabeth Merry (1937)

Linda May Loader (1975)

Queensland

Dorothy Ivy Wacker (1959)

Thelma Osborne Murray (1963)

Corin Nyree Svenson (1970)

Elizabeth Craigie McChesney-Clark (1973)

Tasmania

Lorna May Stanfield (1945)

METHODIST CHURCH

In May 1966, the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia resolved to ordain women by a vote of 132-18, which was confirmed at the General Conference of 1968. Two thirds of the first women ministers came from the deaconess order (Couch, Davey, Fechner, Holmes, Ling, Oliver, Reid, Sanders, Spear, and Widdicombe); the other third (Lynnette and Valerie Johnson, Margaret Polkinghorne, Rosalind Terry and Margaret Zayan) were prepared directly for ordained ministry. All candidates, male and

female, were ordained at the annual state Conference, usually held in October. Margaret Sanders was the first woman ordained by the Methodist Church on Sunday 19 October 1969 in Western Australia, but she later migrated to the United States of America and became a Lutheran minister. No women were ordained in New South Wales, the Northern Territory or Tasmania before union, although the first person to be ordained in the Uniting Church in New South Wales was Janet Wade (now Wade-Main) on 18 September 1977.

Alphabetical Listing

COUCH, Marian Joan DipRE, DipTheol, DipPS.

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; Ordained: 20 October 1972, Wesley Church, Melbourne; Swan Hill 1972-76. Settlement at union: Woomelang, Vic., 1977-84, Horsham 1985-1990; Corlo-Noriane 1990-.

DAVEY, Laurel Grace

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; Ordained: 21 October 1971, Wesley Church, Melbourne. Settlement at union: Eastern Mallee, Vic., 1974-81. Donald 1982-1988; Heytesbury Regional Parish (1989 - 1992). Retired 1993.

FECHNER, Violet Merle.

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; Ordained: 21 October 1971, Wesley Church, Melbourne. Ministry: Merrigum, Vic., 1971-75; settlement at union: Boort-Minmindie, Vic., 1975-79. Pascoe Vale (1980-84); Retired: January 1985.

HOLMES, Thelma F. ACLM.

Ordained: 22 October 1972, Maughan Church, Franklin Street,

Adelaide. Ministry: Flinders, SA, 1972-75; settlement at union: Mt Gambier, SA, 1976-80.

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

Ordained: 18 October 1973, Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Ministry: Preston, Vic., 1973-75; without supply, 1976; settlement at union: Cato (Elsternwick), Vic., 1977-85, Bellarine, Vic 1986 – March 1993; Private arrangement East Geelong (May-Dec. 1993); Yarram 1994 - .

JOHNSON, Valerie Christine ALIA, DipTheol, DipInfoMan, MBus (InfoTech)

Ordained: 16 October 1975, Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Settlement at union: Kyabram, Vic., 1975-78, Hume Highway, Vic. 1979-82; without settlement 1983 -.



The Rev. Coralie Ling, 1969



The Rev. Norma Spear

LING, Coralie Naida BA, BD, BEd.

Deaconess Ministry: North Melbourne 1966-67; Ballarat 1968;

Horsham 1969; Ordained: 23 October 1969, Wesley Church, Melbourne. Ministry: Ballarat East, Vic., 1970-75; settlement at union: Essendon, Vic., 1975-79, Wangaratta 1980-May 1986; Malvern June 1986 -?; Fitzroy July 1991 -?.

OLIVER, Elaine LTh, DipRE.

Deaconess ministry: 1966-74. Sunshine, Vic. 1966- 73; Ordained: 17 October 1974, Wesley Church, Melbourne. Settlement at union: Mersey, Tas., 1974-78. Keilor, Vic. 1979 - 89, Seymour, Vic. 1989 - 95; Cobden, Vic. 1995 - ?.

POLKINGHORNE, Margaret

Ordained: 21 October 1976.

Settlement at union: Plympton, SA, 1976-82. Plympton 1976-82; Julia Faff Centre (Co-ordinating Chaplain) 1983 -?; Moderator of the Synod of South Australia 1995-97.

REID, Christina

Dept of Christian Education 1945-60; Joint Board of Christian Education 1961-70; Ordained: 21 October 1971, Wesley Church, Melbourne. Ministry: Ormond and Carnegie, Vic., 1971-74; settlement at union: Rosanna, Vic., 1975-80, Strathmore 1981-84.

SANDERS (KRYCH from 1971), Margaret BA, BD (Hons), DipRE, DipEd.

Former Deaconess (Trained from 1962). In 1968 worked for the Department of Christian Education in WA 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 WA, they attempted to negotiate a joint/near ministry within the Methodist Church, but this did not work out. Ordained: 19 October 1969, in Western Australia. "Voluntarily retired" and recognition as a Minister was withdrawn by the WA Methodist Conference. In the USA, taught at the Lutheran Seminary in Germantown PA and was subsequently ordained by the Lutheran Church.

SPEAR, Norma LTh, DipRE, BD, DMin (Fuller)

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); Ordained: 21 October 1971, Albert Street, Brisbane. Settlement at union: Indooroopilly/Kenmore, Qld, 1971-80.

(See Kaye Ronalds & Julia Pitman, "Triumph over Isolation: the Rev. Norma Spear, the only woman Minister in the Methodist Church in Queensland," *Church Heritage*, 20, 3 (March 2018), pp. 173-188.)

TERRY, Rosalind BPharm., BD.

Training: Otira 1970, transferred to United Faculty of Theology 1971-72. Ordained: 18 October 1973, Wesley Church, Melbourne.

Ministry: Somerset, Tas., 1973-75; settlement at union: Kyneton, Vic., 1976-80, Bacchus Marsh, Vic. 1981-86; Stirling Presbytery, WA 1987-89; Noble Park, Vic. Dec 1989 - April 1996; Warragul, Vic. May 1996 -.

WIDDICOMBE, Sylvia May

Deaconess ministry: Training 1951-55; Warrnambool 1953-56; Sunshine North 1956-58; North Melbourne 1958-65; Broadmeadows-Glenroy 1966-73; Probationary Minister 1971, Minister 1971; Ordained: 21 October 1971, Wesley Church, Melbourne. Ministry: Broadmeadows-Glenroy, Vic., 1966-73; settlement at union: Sherbrooke, Vic., 1974-77, Loch-Poowong 1978-Feb. 1985; Western Heights March 1985 – 1992. Retired: 28 February 1993.

ZAYAN (née DAWSON), Margaret LTh, DipRE, GradDipRE.

Ordained: 17 October 1975, Wesley Church, Perth.

Ministry: Chaplain, Methodist Ladies College, Western Australia, 1975; settlement at union: without supply, 1976-83, PLC (WA) Chaplain 1984-.

List according to ordination date

1. Margaret Sanders (1969)
2. Coralie Ling (1969)

3. Laurel Davey, Violet Fechner, Christina Reid, Norma Spear, Sylvia Widdicombe (1971)
4. Marian Couch and Thelma Holmes (1972)
5. Lynnette Johnson and Rosalind Terry (1973)
6. Elaine Oliver (1974)
7. Valerie Johnson (1975)
8. Margaret Zayan (1975)
9. Margaret Polkinghorne (1976)

State conference listing in order of ordination

Western Australia

Margaret Sanders (1969)

Margaret Zayan (1975)

Victoria (and Tasmania - joint conference)

Coralie Ling (1969)

Laurel Davey (1971)

Violet Merle Fechner (1971)

Christina Reid (1971)

Sylvia Widdicombe (1971)

Marian Couch (1972)

Lynnette Johnson (1973)

Rosalind Terry (1973)

Elaine Oliver (1974)

Valerie Johnson (1975)

Queensland

Norma Spear (1971)

South Australia

Thelma Holmes (1972)

Margaret Polkinghorne (1976)

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In 1967, the Presbyterian Church of Australia approved the election of women to the office of Elder. The recommendation “that women

should be eligible for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments” arose from the presentation in 1970 of a third and final report by the Rev. Alan Smart to the General Assembly of Australia of the Presbyterian Church. Following Presbyterian polity (the Barrier Act), the report was sent down to state General Assemblies and Presbyteries for (in this case) concurrence and brought back to the 1974 General Assembly of Australia, which resolved 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.”

The church then considered the applications of three women, Marlene Thalheimer, Alison Grant and Geraldine Wheeler and, as they had met all academic requirements, issued exit certificates in July 1974. Marlene Thalheimer and Geraldine Wheeler were licensed to preach in August, and, later that year, in Victoria, Marlene Thalheimer was ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Five of the eight Presbyterian women ordained before church union were from the deaconess order (Johanson, Kerr, Norris, and Wheeler) or home missionary service (Bartholomew); the remaining three were prepared directly for ordained ministry (Grant, Russell and Thalheimer).

Alphabetical Listing

BARTHOLOMEW (née Morrow), Joy Florence BA, BD, DipRE.

Ordained: 2 July 1976, Epping Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

Ministry: Home Missionary Wagga Wagga 1972-75, Home Missionary-Student Assistant and Ordained Assistant, Epping, NSW, 1975-78; continued as a Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia; without charge, Presbytery of Young 1978-79, Western Newcastle 1979–1984 (and chaplain of University of Newcastle); Asst Corowa 1984-1999; St Andrew’s Canberra 1999-2013. Retired, Minister Emeritus.

Married to a Minister, the Rev. Arnold Sidney Bartholomew, daughter of the Rev. George Morrow and sister of the Rev. William Morrow. The only woman minister not to enter the Uniting Church.

GRANT, Alison MSc, BD, DipEd

Ordained: 28 January 1975. Settlement at union: Robinvale, Vic. 1975-80, Balmoral Vic. 1980 - 1984. Died 15 April 1984.

JOHANSON, Joan Helena DipRE

Deaconess ministry: Training Ormond College 1961-63; West Toowoomba, Qld 1965-69; Redcliffe 1970-74; 1975 studies at Joint Faculty Brisbane; Ordained: 21 May 1976 at Millmerran, Queensland. Settlement at union: Millmerran, Qld, 1976-81; Allora - Clifton 1982 -1990; Toowoomba West 1991 – 2000? Retired to Stanthorpe.

KERR, Pamela BA, BD, Dip Ed, DipPS

Deaconess Ministry: Chaplain Mildura High School (1970-71); Principal Rolland House (1973-77): Ordained: March 1976, South Hawthorn, Melbourne. Settlement at union: South Hawthorn, 1975-77; without settlement 1977-Jan 1985; Chaplain Footscray Girls High School Feb. 1985 - 1988; Box Hill-Mont Albert 1988-93; Werribee Parish 1994-? Moderator of the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church 1997 – 2000.

NORRIS, Norah Aileen

Deaconess Ministry: Training Rolland House 1953-55, Commissioned Jan 1956; Hamilton 1956-57, Horsham 1958-61, Burwood/PLC, Burwood/Mt Waverley; Shepparton 1966; PCSA Dept of Christian Education Field Officer 1967; Part-time Clerk of Assembly 1972-77; Ordained: 24 October 1976, Scotch College Chapel, Adelaide. Settlement at union: Clerk of Assembly, part-time, 1972-77; Ardrossan, SA, 1978; Giles 1979-83; Port Pirie 1984-89; Assembly Commission on Liturgy/Interim Chaplain Modbury Hospital (1989), Interim Minister Lower Murray Parish 1990; Retired: 1991.

RUSSELL, Pamela Gayle BSc, BD, DipEd

Ordained: 1 April 1977.

Settlement at union: Maryborough, Qld, 1977-78; without settlement, 1978-.

THALHEIMER, Marlene (Polly) J. (née Pritchard) BEd, BD, SRN, SRM

Born Marlene Pritchard, married “Dunera Boy”, Roy Thalheimer in 1961. Pastoral Assistant at Essendon 1973, Ordained: October 1974, at St John’s, Essendon, Victoria. Settlement at union: Romsey-Lancefield, Vic., 1974-81, Loddon-East 1983. She resigned in 1985 after being attracted to Pentecostalism. Died 1991.



The Rev. Joy Bartholomew



The Rev. Dr Geraldine Wheeler

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

Deaconess Ministry: Queensland: Chaplain Clayfield College 1970-72; Dept of Christian Education 1972); without settlement 1972-73; Mount Gravatt 1973-74; without settlement 1974-76; Ordained: 25 May 1976, Iona Presbyterian Church, West Mackay, Qld. Settlement at union: Iona Mackay (Pioneer Valley from 1977), 1976-83, Wilston 1984-89, Nambour 1990-96; Merthyr Road New Farm/Secretary, Assembly Commission on Liturgy (p/t) 1997 – 23 January 2015.

List according to ordination date

1. Marlene Thalheimer (1974)
2. Alison Grant (1975)
3. Pamela Kerr (1976)

4. Joan Johanson (1976)
5. Geraldine Wheeler (1976)
6. Joy Bartholomew (1976)
7. Norah Norris (1976)
8. Pamela Russell (1977)

List according to state in order of ordination date

Victoria

Marlene Thalheimer (1974)
Alison Grant (1975)
Pamela Kerr (1976)

NSW

Joy Bartholomew (1976)

Queensland

Geraldine Wheeler (1976)
Joan Johanson (1976)
Pamela Russell (1977)

South Australia

Norah Norris (1976)

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Peter Bentley, “Women Ministers Before 1977”, *Church Heritage*, 10, 3 (September 1998), pp. 161-74.
- 2 Julia Pitman, *‘Our principle of sex equality’: the Ordination of Women in the Congregational Church in Australia, 1927-1977* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2016).