

# Women in the Anglican Church of Australia

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# My background (in brief)

- I am an Anglican Priest
- I was ordained a Deacon in February 2013 (Diocese of Melbourne)
- I was ordained a Priest in November 2013 (Diocese of Melbourne)
- Since then I've worked in Parishes and in Anglican Schools
- Currently, I'm Associate Priest at CCSY and School Chaplain at CCGS
- Before ordination, I worked in the publishing industry

# This presentation covers ...

- The place of women in scripture (in brief) as a prelude to discussing the journey to ordination for women in the Anglican Church.
- The process through which women were able to be ordained within the Anglican Church, starting as deacons
- The main arguments in favour and in opposition to the ordination of women
- The debate about women's ordination, placing it within the context of the society in which it took place

# Women in Christian Scripture

- The Bible has many significant women who form an important part of the Christian story and the Christian belief system
- From Eve in the book of Genesis through to the women at the empty tomb on Easter Day of the New Testament (who were the first witnesses to the Resurrection) – they're there, and they're significant
- The epistles (letters) of the New Testament also reveal that women had a significant role within the Early Church, and were considered important in the spreading of the Gospel

# Contrast these ...

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well."

Romans 16:1-2

"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."

1 Timothy 2: 11 – 15

# And these ...

“When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb ... As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you’.”

Mark 16: 1 – 2, 5 – 8

“The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

# Women in the Anglican Church

- The Australian history of women's ordination
- The Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW)
- Synod debates and votes for the ordination of women
- The Ordination of Women as Deacons
- The Ordination of Women as Priests
- The Ordination of Women as Bishops
- Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy (Australia's first female Archbishop)

# The arguments against women's ordination

- Male headship as expressed within some of the Epistles of the Bible
- Traditional Church male hierarchies
- Permanent schism between Protestantism and Catholicism
- Societal views about the appropriateness of this work for women

# The arguments for women's ordination

- Women's history within the early Church
- Women's place within Biblical stories as disciples and witnesses
- The priesthood of all believers
- The theology of humanity being made in the image of God
- Equality of all people (Christ as the equaliser)

# Australian society during these debates

- The women's liberation movement
- Increased public condemnation of sexism and discrimination
- Increased liberal thinking about professions and vocations
- Movement towards gender equality and equality of opportunity

# The Church and wider society

- A challenge – remaining relevant to a society from which the Church seemed increasingly distant
- A challenge – maintaining its influence when its message was perceived by some as backwards and repressive
- An opportunity – public displays of progress in the ordination of women and the success of Synod votes for women's ordination
- An opportunity – demonstrating that the Church is for all people by a visibly diverse cohort or ordinands (men and women)

# 30 years later ... where are we now?

## The Bad

- Some Australian diocese still don't ordain women as priests or bishops
- Some Australian parishes won't have women as their priests-in-charge
- Some Australian dioceses refuse to accept women Bishops / Archbishops
- The Church is less relevant to the wider society, and less influential
- People are less familiar with the Church than in previous generations
- The church is struggling against some seriously bad press

# 30 years later ... where are we now?

## The Good

- Women's ordination and ministry is commonplace, not the exception
- We have female bishops (many of them, throughout Australia)
- We have a female Archbishop (Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy)
- We have significant female figures within the Church (both lay/ordained)
- We have considerable numbers of female candidates for ordination
- The Church can continue to be a source for good within the community
- The Church still has the ability to serve the community it exists within

# Why does this still matter?

- Our society is increasingly concerned with issues of gender and equality, and increasingly liberal-minded
- In refusing to ordain women, the Church can be perceived as being behind the times and regressive in its views and values
- Women's ordination (or more pointedly non-ordination) is seen as proof of the Church's sexism and deep-seated issues around gender
- It is a valid reason why people might be reluctant to, or opposed to, the Church as an institution, and proof it is unsafe

# How can this be fixed?

- Through the continued normalisation of women's ministry – I am a priest who is female, I'm not a female priest (the order of those words matters)
- Continued ordination of women and the appointment of women as priests in charge and to positions of leadership in the Church
- Continued consecration of women as archbishops, and the eager consideration of women as candidates for consecration
- Through the Church's embracing its counter-cultural roots which call it to be an institution that challenges authority, rather than affirms it

Over to you ...

*I'm happy to answer any questions  
you may have during the Q&A.*