

Caroline Pearce Memorial Lecture is 'Imagining Otherwise: Persistence Personified'.

Thank you all for coming this evening to join with me as I remember and wonder about the legacy of our late friend and colleague the Reverend Caroline Pearce. Thank you to the people of St John's and kind others for inviting me to speak. In the event this lecture is maybe more a personal one, one of witness to persistence, of remembering and wondering. Each of you will have many memories which hopefully we shall be able to share over supper.

I offer my witness in four parts, namely,

- 1. Caroline as a person of singular persistence**
- 2. Caroline's contemporaries: Women and Men of persistence**
- 3. Caroline's legacy: Women Clergy and their witness to persistence**
- 4. What Gospel imperative calls for our imagination, courage and persistence today?**

Caroline as a person of singular persistence, indeed we might say persistence personified.

Early in the 1980s I met Caroline at St Oswald's Anglican Church Parkside. Our paths had crossed some years earlier when she as a leader in the Nursing Mothers' Association met with two or three of us on the then Mothers and Babies Health Association Central Committee. The MBHA was offering to assist the Nursing Mothers Committee with administration in a time of transition. I remember

meeting in her someone of determination and purpose. Others here will remember Caroline's compassion and leadership in that capacity.

Caroline was a member of the WHO group, Women in Holy Orders.

In her lovely article published in the February edition of the Guardian this year, Sue Henry-Edwards, later to become a Convenor for the Movement for the Ordination of women wrote of the pre-history of the WHO Group. She wrote "In Australia groups of women and men who supported the ordination of women and full equality of women and men in the Church were formed in dioceses around the country. In Adelaide these were Christians Concerned, an ecumenical feminist group, and Women and Holy Orders? (WHO?), which held its first meeting in May 1980 at the home of Alison Gent."

Caroline, as that woman of imagination and persistence met with these other like-minded women and men later in the Parish of Broadview. Some of you are here tonight. Leslie McLean, Lynne Rokkas, Donald Grey Smith. Others among this pioneer group were the late Alder Hall, Alison Gent, Eve Wurm, Else Grey Smith. There too were Lynne Dehle, Elizabeth Cheetham. [if you would like, please raise your hand if you too were members of WHO.]

In the late 70s I was a member of Synod of the Diocese of Adelaide, and an alternate member for General Synod so I wished to understand better the theological position of these people. I attended several of their meetings as a sympathetic visitor. My perspective was one of justice and inclusion and dearly wanted to know more. To this end I was also beginning my theological education with an associate diploma with the Australian College of Theology.

A critical moment for Caroline and members of the WHO group was the visit to Australia and Adelaide of Monica Furlong, Anglican woman, writer, amateur theologian and advocate for the Ordination of Women. Monica Furlong energised and promoted the notion of strategic planning as an expansion of the work of WHO. Caroline and Alder Hall in particular heard this call and in collaboration with women around Australia forged ahead with the task of establishing a Movement for the Ordination of Women in all states and at the National Level. Amongst these women were Dr Patricia Brennan and Eileen Baldry from Sydney, Diane Heath and Janet Gaden from Melbourne, Gwenneth Roberts and Mavis Rose from Brisbane.

Subsequently when approached to join a meeting here in Adelaide of these women from around the country, here in fact at St John's Halifax Street, I was taken aback. Though by instinct a strong supporter, I saw myself as an enquirer on so many levels. However, Caroline was determined and yes, persistent, that I should join and found myself in the company of these amazing women who became my role models and friends. Janet Gaden to this day.

However, before that was to happen much ground work needed to happen.

I learnt that part of the strategy here in Adelaide was to seek out women and men who though not members of WHO had a profile in the Anglican Church here as well as interstate. I smarted under the realisation much later that I was seen by some at least the token 'acceptable' woman in diocesan circles. Nevertheless, whether because of flattery or otherwise I was thankful for the opportunity to be part of this important movement and supported Caroline and Alder

in their setting up a Steering Committee to be given the task of working towards the establishment of the Movement for the Ordination of Women through calling a public meeting and electing the inaugural committee for MOW(SA). It was an exciting moment.

So it was that 3 members of WHO Caroline Pearce, Alder Hall, and Elizabeth Cheetham took up the challenge and invited the then principles of both St Michael's and St Barnabas, the Reverends Douglas Brown and Edward Randall respectively as well as myself to make up a steering group. Soon after, the Reverend Peter Thompson Dean of St Marks College and Flinders University lecturer was co-opted to this steering committee. Caroline convened this steering committee. There was controversy both within and without. I remember the Advertiser newspaper publishing interviews with both Peter Thompson who strongly supported the case for the ordination of women and John Fleming who strenuously spoke against.

Caroline brought energy, passion, persistence and determined know how to the Steering Committee. At that time, to admit publicly to a calling to priesthood, which Caroline did, met with gratitude from many women and men, respect from a good many though they opposed the ordination of women, but, overwhelmingly it seemed, it drew to say the least an unkind response from some within the church. Many felt free to vent their anger and disrespect for women. Unfortunately, misogyny found expression in our synods and press. It was a turbulent and painful time for many women, particularly so for women who did indeed wish to test their belief that God was calling them to priesthood. Nevertheless, it was a time too in which many deep and lasting friendships were formed.

Caroline's energy, persistence and determination meant she and I were compiling lists of names of her friends, colleagues and contacts, whom she believed would wish to be part of this growing movement towards the ordination of women. It was in the early days of using computers and I remember long hours into the night in their home in Katoomba Road, Burnside, sitting at Bill's computer compiling these lists of names and then losing the lot and having to start again. Nevertheless, letters were sent to these would be members of the Movement for the Ordination of Women.

November 1984 was a significant time for its establishment in SA. The steering committee completed its work, the meeting here at St John's took place with the outcome of launching the notion of forming the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) as a national organisation with branches in each state. The public meeting at St Matthew's Kensington in Adelaide followed and MOW(SA) was established. The first council comprised Dianne Bradley, Douglas Brown SSM, Elizabeth Cheetham, Chris Connors (Diocese of Willochra), the Reverend Kevin Giles, Alder Hall, Irene Jeffreys, Caroline Pearce and Sal Tatchell (also from the Diocese of Willochra). The three Co-convenors elected from the Council were Elizabeth Cheetham from the Parish of Broadview, Caroline and myself. By this time through working so closely in MOW and both being members of the Parish of Parkside, meant that Caroline and I got to know one another well and became more than colleagues but friends right until her untimely death in 2020. I learnt across many mutual interests what persistence meant.

More on Caroline and family

Caroline, with Bill's support made the costly decision to leave Australia and travel to New York where Caroline had been accepted into a Masters of Divinity program at General Theological Seminary. In August 1985, having packed up home in Adelaide and having just finished her Social Work degree, Caroline, with Bill and three of their four daughters, Alison, Kazzia and Joanna flew out of Sydney, farewelled by those gathered for the inaugural MOW National Conference. Bill has reminded me that General Synod had just passed the ordinance to allow for the ordination of women as deacons.

Their eldest daughter Rachel was leave for a life in London. Amongst those farewelling Caroline was the Reverend Alison Cheek, another Adelaide woman who found her calling in the Episcopal Church of USA where she had become resident and was to be amongst the eleven irregularly ordained by retired bishops in New York in 1974. Alison was a staunch supporter of the movement in Australia, visiting Adelaide often, and a mentor to many women and in particular to Caroline. They remained friends till her death at 91 in April 2019.

So began three and a half years in New York. Caroline's correspondence home conveyed that beneath the excitement and stimulation of many new friends and experiences, life was a struggle for herself and the family. Again her courage and persistence meant that Caroline completed her Masters in Divinity as well as qualifications in Clinical Pastoral Education, Spiritual Direction and Supervised Field Education. And so followed her ordination as deacon in May 1988 and priest in December 1988 in the Diocese of Newark, licensed to Bishop John Shelby Spong. I believe, Caroline continued

to hold this licence to her death. The term used in the Episcopal Church in the USA is “Canonically Resident” in a diocese, even if you are not living or working in that place. Her daughter Rachel notified the Diocese of Newark, Bishop Spong, and General Seminary

Meanwhile More on MOW - Caroline’s contemporaries: Women and Men of persistence

Caroline’s friends, colleagues of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, here in Adelaide were continuing their struggle. They were courageously and persistently speaking out both to the Church and Community at large. Meetings of the National Committee were held regularly, meeting most often in Canberra. The plane fares of that time were prohibitive so where practical we were bussing it from all parts of the country, from Adelaide to Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney.

Here in Adelaide MOW(SA) convened the 2nd National Conference at Nunyara in 1986. What a hard working group that convened. Lyn Rokkas, Alder Hall, Janet Gaden, Elizabeth Cheetham and myself. This was a highly successful gathering with guest contributor being the amazing Sister Veronica Brady who drew much media attention both in newspapers and radio interviews. The gently spoken nun became a fiery woman when challenged about her credentials on radio by a well-known then Anglican priest. Janet and the late John Gaden also contributed in dialogue with each other.

These were tough years but exhilarating years. However, the support we gave each other meant a lot as we involved ourselves in banner

making and bearing, Sunday evening Vigils in the Lady Chapel of St Peter’s Cathedral, and along the way supported by the Dominican women of Sophia and the wonderful Sr Roberta Hakendorf BVM.

You might like to seek out the Film Australia documentary about how the debate was going in 1987, the emotions, the highs and the lows. It is called ‘**The Fully Ordained Meat Pie**’ 1987. I truly recommend it.

Some quotes

The name itself is a quote remembered by Alison Gent and repeated to Film Australia when looking for a name for their film about the ordination of women. Fr. Ian Herring once of South Australia said in Alison’s presence. “It is as analogous of consecrating a meat pie as it would be to ordain a woman as priest”.

“As I cannot be a mother (...), God didn’t make me that way, neither can a woman be a priest.” “Should this come about I would resign my priesthood.” He repeated all this to the film makers.

The Reverend Bruce Ballentine-Jones Sydney Diocese. “It is not the teaching of the New Testament” full stop. The wicked but clever interviewers had the camera scan to the ceiling fan rather than engage with the arguments, Which to them must have sounded like a lot of hot air!

A Sydney Bishop speaking at General Synod: “Many will be forced out of the church”

In Adelaide, hissing as one went up to the lectern to speak. Or on another occasion a speaker in reply to me speaking in favour of all

adopting a spirit of generosity, likened me to a siren calling the church to wreck upon the rocks.

Fortunately, there were kind and reasonable and persistent women and men around to support when needed and laugh as Sr Angela of Stroud used to say, "Laugh in the face of the Tiger". Sr Angela eventually was ordained priest.

Caroline's return to Australia.

When Caroline and Bill, with two of their daughters, returned to Australia, it was first to Adelaide in January 1989. They subsequently moved to Melbourne in the middle of that year where at Archbishop David Penman's invitation, extended just before his untimely death, Caroline took up the position of Chaplain to Mount Royal Hospital. However, though ordained priest, Caroline was permitted officially only to function as a deacon. Once again she experienced much frustration and disappointment that her calling and identity were not being recognised by the Australian Church.

[On a personal note, during her time as chaplain, Caroline hosted a visit to Australia by Bishop John Spong. Typical of Caroline's thoughtfulness, Caroline invited me over to Melbourne to meet Bishop Spong and gave me the opportunity to spend a day sightseeing along the Great Ocean Road with him, his wife, Caroline and Bill. One of my most treasured memories is to have walked the beach oblivious to the rain, in passionate conversation with Bishop Spong unpacking Scripture. We all only became aware of being wet and windswept once back in the car. We travelled home minus some of the top layers of wet clothing and sharing rugs to keep warm.]

When General Synod in 1992 made it legally possible for women to be ordained as priests, Caroline's Orders were recognised at last and in 1993 she was appointed as Priest in Charge in the Parish of Flemington where she stayed till returning to Adelaide in 1997.

Caroline took up the position of Associate Priest to the Reverend John Henry Stephenson in the Stirling Parish at his invitation. It is interesting to note that John had been the parish priest of St Oswald's Parkside and referee on her leaving for the USA, despite not agreeing with the ordination of women at that time. I can remember him saying though that if any woman was to be ordained Caroline was one who should be. During his time with ABM in Sydney he changed his mind radically about the ordination of women and became a voice of support. At Aldgate, Caroline had a rich and diverse ministry living in Aldgate. Here she began in earnest her work in Education for Ministry and led a number of groups. I remember her speaking with warmth and enthusiasm about the Confirmation classes there.

In 2002 Caroline moved to the Parish of Broadview as Parish Priest later in 2005 she became Priest in Charge of the Parish of Enfield too. On the occasion of her retirement from full time ministry as a Parish Priest on 6th November 2011, I spoke of how Caroline had exercised her role as Parish Priest with competence, creative flair and pastoral compassion and empathy. From General Theological Seminary New York to Broadview Parish, she found ways to reach out to the homeless and to refugees, to visit the sick, to encourage lay ministries through EFM and to deepen the spiritual life of individuals through her ministry in Spiritual Direction.

In her 'retirement' Caroline continued to minister as a priest wherever she found herself living and worshipping. She was able to give more time to her ministry of spiritual direction, joining the leadership of the St Oswald Centre for Spirituality, retreat giving, continuing as a member of the Ecumenical Spiritual Directors' Association of South Australia' serving on national ecumenical executive committees such as the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction and that of the Centering Prayer movement whilst teaching locally and continuing to mentor those in the process of ordination. She was to act as locum priest in a number of parishes, the last being a lengthy one at her once home of St Oswald's Parkside. She served on Diocesan Council, a number of its committees including that of Professional Standards.

Caroline and Bill were to make their parish home at St John's Halifax St in the past few years. Caroline was a loyal and loving friend to many, both in the Church and outside.

In summary, Caroline's time in full time ordained ministry was:

1989-93	Mount Royal
1993-97	Flemington
1997-2001	Aldgate
2002-11	Broadview

After retiring in 2011 she became locum at Parkside between 2013 -14. During this time she took on the heavy role of overseeing the closing of the Church of the Emanuel, Wayville.

Drawn from my tribute to ANSD)

I mention again her long standing Nursing Mother friends and of those from her days in the Girl Guide movement, and in later years those in the Soroptimist Club, all of whom could tell many other stories Caroline's care, competence and persistence.

Caroline was to make many and diverse contributions the life of the Anglican Church in the Dioceses of Newark, Melbourne and Adelaide. These crossed boundaries of church traditions especially in the ministry of Spiritual Direction, and Spiritual practice. She was devoted to the Centering Prayer Network and passionate about social justice issues especially the call to welcome refugees.

Spiritual Direction

Caroline renewed contact with the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction (ANSD) when in Melbourne and later was to tell me that from that time she attended all the National Conferences and continued to offer spiritual direction. Sadly, she was unable to attend the last 2 of our Conferences.

Caroline was to contribute much leadership to the convening of National Conferences for ANSD in 2005 & 2010 in Adelaide, the latter sponsored by as well as co-host with me through the St Oswald Centre for Spirituality and on behalf of the national spiritual direction community, the Cynthia Bourgeault retreat/conference in 2015. Again it truly was her passion and perseverance that persuaded the Rev'd Cynthia Bourgeault to visit Australia and so make the event possible. Cynthia said so.

Indeed, in all this we can read of her courage and persistence

Caroline's contribution to the spiritual life was vast.

Here in South Australia to the Ecumenical Spiritual Directors Association of SA (ESDA SA) and to The St Oswald Centre for Spirituality

Nationally on Executive as ANSD Secretary and the representative for SA/NT

And much more in particular to the national ecumenical Centering Prayer movement and her own group at St John's.

Caroline's legacy: Women Clergy and their witness to persistence

According to the official figures recorded in the Anglican Church of Australia Directory for 2020/21 published on 17 Feb 2022, Australia now has a total of 3,831 clergy of whom **888 (23 per cent)** are women. This number includes seven bishops, 397 active priests, 171 active deacons, 66 'other clergy' and 247 retired clergy. Further to this record we know that among the bishops is the Archbishop of Perth Kay Goldsworthy, the first woman archbishop in the Anglican Communion. Kay, then a deaconess, was a member of MOW from the beginning and later among the first women ordained deacon in Melbourne.

In Adelaide, the directory records a total of 169 clergy of whom 44 (26 per cent), are women including a bishop (Bishop Denise), 25 active priests, seven active deacons, three other clergy, and eight retired clergy.

Caroline's passion and persistence for the recognition of women in church and in the wider community, whilst playing a significant part in these figures, her legacy is also very much at the personal and pastoral level. We experienced it in her support for women in formation for ministry, formally as a supervisor and spiritual director, but also in her kindness and affection for those individual women and men. I think of Tracey Gracey and Sonya Patterson amongst others. [Again, if you too are among these others please make yourself known.] Likewise, we experienced this in her hospital ministry, and her very personal support for individual people seeking refuge – in Melbourne and in Adelaide. These women witness to likewise.

What lay behind Caroline's persistence was great courage and determination. It was a costly road for herself and no doubt for Bill and for the family. In all this I acknowledge Bill for his constancy and persistence. Bill, thank you.

So what are the Gospel imperatives call for our imagination, courage and persistence today? 30 years on?

In the dioceses of Sydney, Armidale and North West Australia the authorisation of the ordination of women is not exercised. However, at the last session of Synod in the Diocese of the Murray, notice was given to the effect that a Bill to authorise the ordination of women will be presented to its next synod in 2023. Bread for the journey at last. More to do.

So what comes to mind? What is calling us to follow Caroline's witness to life-long persistence?

There are so many issues for women in ministry, but also women generally in our community today.
Family violence, violence against women, women and homelessness.

Matters of exclusion for many in our midst
Indigenous and Torres Strait peoples,
LGBTQ people,
Refugees,

What do you think? What do we recognise as the Gospel imperatives of our time?

Earlier this year when Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy preached in the Cathedral in one of our first occasions marking 30 years of women's ordination, she challenged us to look for our prophets outside the church naming Grace Tame as but one.
Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann teacher and spiritual teacher comes to mind for me.

What would Caroline think, persistence personified woman she was?

Dianne Bradley OAM
7th October 2022