

**Forty Years of Activism
Celebrating Sydney MOW**

**Sunday 17 September 2023
Christ Church St Laurence
812 George Street, Haymarket**

Program

9:00 and 10:30 am services: Christ Church St Laurence

Guest Preacher: The Archbishop of Perth
The Most Reverend Kay Goldsworthy AO

12:30 pm: Christ Church St Laurence Hall

Welcome: Ruth Champion, Sydney Convenor

The Dr Patricia Brennan AM Lecture:

The Venerable Dr Colleen O'Reilly AM

Movement for the Ordination of Women

A little history

What follows is drawn from memories, newspapers, newsletters and books and would benefit from any hard evidence you can offer on people, dates and events.

MOW was born during a time of theological and cultural questioning about the role of women in the church and society. In 1968 the Lambeth Conference urged all Anglican churches to study the question of women's ordination. The same year, *Christian Women Concerned* was formed in Sydney, representing Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational and Quaker women. In 1973 the Australian Council of Churches set up the *Commission on the Status of Women* and went on to organise national conferences in Sydney; the 1975 conference featured US feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether.

In 1975, too, *Anglican Women Concerned* was established in Sydney by Colleen O'Reilly and Zandra Wilson – the first Australian group to advocate for the ordination of women in the Anglican church. AWC staged public protests outside General Synod in Sydney in 1977 and 1981. Meantime, New Zealand had voted to ordain women priests and bishops in 1976.

In 1977 General Synod's Commission on Doctrine concluded that there were 'no theological objections to the admission of women to the diaconate' and that 'the theological objections which have been raised do not constitute a barrier to the ordination of women to the priesthood'. Dr Broughton Knox, principal of Moore College, was the only dissenting voice on the Commission. He insisted that the relationship of men to women, one of headship and

subordination, is part of God's created order – a position which still endures in the Diocese of Sydney.

This was the climate in which the *Movement for the Ordination of Women* was founded in July 1983; its initial coordinators were Patricia Brennan, Colleen O'Reilly and Marlene Cohen. Their first public meeting was held on 28 September and their first public action (performed by Colleen O'Reilly and Julia Perry) was the Blu-Tacking of a statement prepared by Susanne Glover to the door of St Andrew's Cathedral on 4 October 1983. Based on Martin Luther's 95 theses, it is known as the Twelve Theses.

Inspired by Monica Furlong's May 1984 tour around Australia, MOW held an informal network meeting in Adelaide in October, bringing together interstate groups who shared similar ideals. Patricia Brennan was elected the founding president of National MOW and the first national conference, 'Telling Tales', was held in Sydney in August 1985, featuring The Rev'd Alison Cheek, one of the Philadelphia Eleven, the first women ordained in the US Episcopalian church in 1974. Alison, an Australian, was a strong supporter of MOW.

The theological and political arguments surrounding the ordination of women as deacons and priests are recalled in *Preachers, Prophets and Heretics: Anglican Women's Ministry* (2012). It might be noted that Archbishop Donald Robison had originally withheld his consent in 1985 when General Synod passed the Ordination of Women to the Office of Deacon Canon and it was not until 1989 that Sydney ordained its first women deacons.

Currently, of 23 Anglican Dioceses, only three refuse to ordain women priests: the Dioceses of Sydney, Armidale and North West Australia. The Anglican Church of Australia *Directory 2022/23* shows there are 154 active women deacons, 410 active women priests and 7 active Episcopal bishops around the country.

Sydney MOW

MOW members are now serviced by MOW Australia rather than local branches. Sydney MOW, however, persists, pursuing its ministry of witness.

There have been many convenors over the last 40 years, including Susanne Glover, Eileen Baldry, Kate Engelbrecht, Monica Dennison, Heather Thomson, Patricia Hayward, Julia Baird, Deb Brown, John Pomeroy, Martha Sear, Elaine Peterson, Christine Middleton, Patricia Brennan, Margaret Lawther, Sue Henry Edwards, Lu Piper, Angela Peverell, Phillip Seale and Ruth Champion. This list may well be incomplete – additions would be most welcome (elindsay@dodo.com.au).

Sydney MOW has produced newsletters (*Balaam's Ass*, of historic repute), events featuring visiting women clergy, conferences, press releases, publications and annual members' meetings. It was heavily involved in the *Unfinished Business Conference* in 2022 and is working with MOW Australia on the November 2024 Brisbane conference celebrating 40 years of MOW as a national organisation. The next meeting of Sydney members will be on Saturday 4 November at St Paul's Burwood, with speaker The Rev'd Elaine Farmer from Canberra.

The Twelve Theses

Statement distributed outside Synod, 4th October 1983

From a burning conviction that a very grievous error was crippling the life of the Church, Martin Luther posted 95 theses concerning the matter on the church door at Wittenberg. On this 500th anniversary of his birth, it is a fitting occasion to place before the Church our contention that another very grievous error is crippling the Church, an error which we believe warrants reformation and total renewal in the life of the Church and its witness to the world.

From a zealous desire to bring to light the truth, the following theses will be maintained at Sydney by the Movement for the Ordination of Women whose members ask that all who are unable to debate with them verbally will do so in writing, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

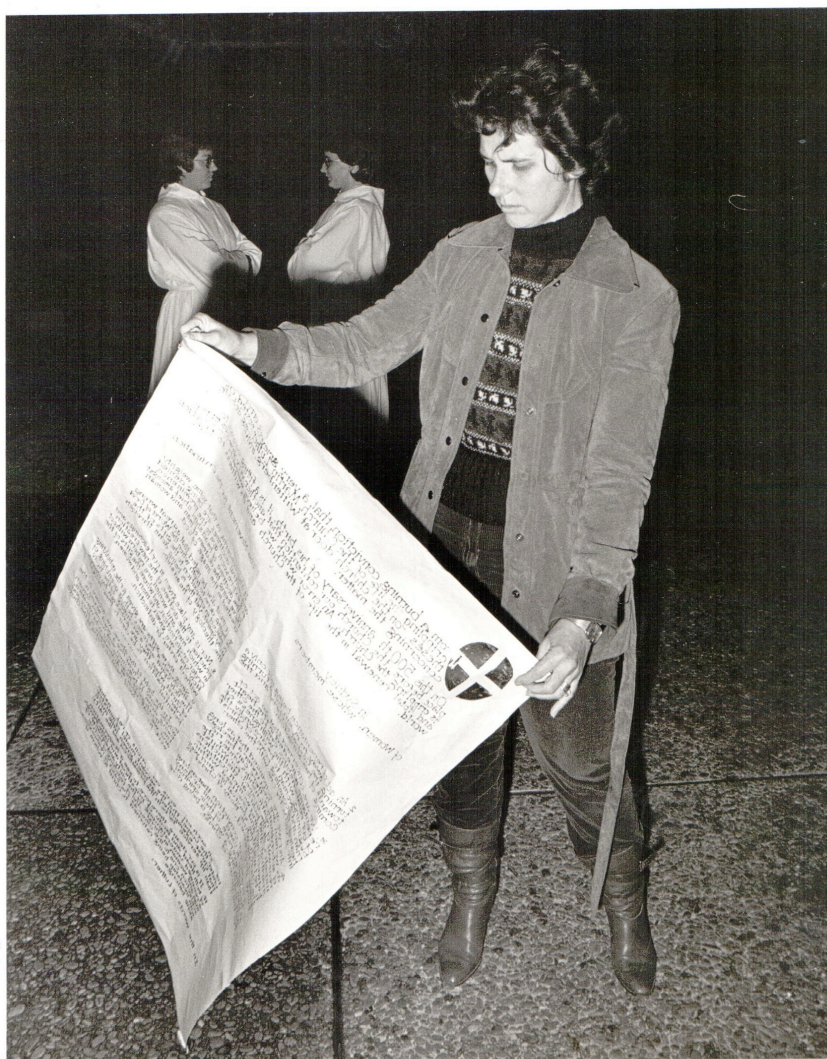
- 1. Our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, in saying "repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand", meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance.*
- 2. An act of repentance being not only a turning away from sin but a turning towards the gospel of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom.*
- 3. We are concerned that such an act of repentance must begin in the heart of our relationships, beginning with the willingness of men and women to be drawn by the reconciling power of Christ into a unit the one with the other.*
- 4. And we are convinced that as long as women are held under a theology of subordination, there can be no renewal of relationships under the impetus of the Gospel. For while spiritual and political distinction between men and women continues to be taught and practised within the Church, the spiritual life of the whole body of Christ is being suppressed.*
- 5. It is also our conviction that as long as the doctrine of headship is used to limit or deny women the exercise of their spiritual gifts and calling, a wrong is being done to the Gospel of Christ.*
- 6. It also concerns us that some weighty and central doctrines are being denied expression and fulfilment, due to the prominence given to the doctrine of headship, chief among these being the doctrine of man and woman created in the image of God.*
- 7. It must also be noted that a great wrong is being done to the truth when the word of God is placed in opposition to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, yet this is being done through the doctrine of headship.*
- 8. Nor is any place given in our teachings on and practice of the doctrine of the new creation, to the fact that men and women are reborn without order or distinction, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to men and women without order or distinction.*
- 9. Since these gifts are given for the upbuilding of the Church, it is both a quenching of the Holy Spirit and a wounding of the body of Christ when they are forbidden by Church order or tradition to be used to their full potential.*
- 10. In the light of the above, we declare to the whole body of Christ that a great wrong is being done to both men and women through the theology of headship and subordination.*
- 11. We also add with great sadness that it has been through such erroneous conceptions of relationships in the Gospel that the servant model of ministry, which Christ exemplified, has been given little more than lip service by both the priesthood and laity.*

12. *It is our desire therefore to see a reformation of both Head and body, of both priesthood and laity, through a renewed understanding of the unity and equality of man and woman in Christ, and a teaching of mutual subjection one to the other as the basis of relationships, with Christ as their only Head.*

Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of scriptures or by manifest reasoning, I stand convicted by the scriptures to which I have appealed and my conscience is taken captive by God's word For to act against our conscience is neither safe for us nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me.

S. Glover, Oct 83

* *Luther's words are underlined.*



Patricia Brennan holding the 12 Theses (statement distributed outside Synod), with Colleen O'Reilly and Julia Perry in the background, outside St Andrew's Cathedral, 4 October 1983

Private collection, photographer unknown

MOW Australia is keen to see its historical documents preserved and available for public use. Currently old newsletters and conference publications are freely available on The University of Divinity site, <https://www.jstor.org/site/university-of-divinity/movement-for-the-ordination-of-women/>

Kerrie Burn, Library Manager at Mannix Library, initiated the *Australian Women in Religion Project*, aimed at creating new Wikipedia articles for women who have made significant contributions to Australian religious and spiritual traditions. You can read more about the project at

<https://divinity.libguides.com/AWR/WikiProject#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20this%20collaborative,and%20to%20improve%20existing%20articles.>

Over 170 new Wikipedia articles have been created, including profiles of many pioneering MOW and ordained women. If you would like to know more, email kerrie.burn@ctc.edu.au.

The most complete record of firsthand accounts of the battle for women's ordination in Australia is *Preachers, Prophets and Heretics: Anglican Women's Ministry*, edited by Elaine Lindsay & Janet Scarfe (UNSW Press, 2012).

If you can assist with more information about the history and key characters in Sydney MOW, please contact elaine.lindsay@dodo.com.au.



To join MOW, visit <https://mowatch.com.au/> or email either president@mowatch.com.au or secretary@mowatch.com.au