

Women in Ministry and Leadership in the Baptist Churches in New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This article notes the development of women's roles in leadership among New Zealand Baptists since the Second World War. Particular attention is paid to the introduction and development of the Deaconesses scheme. Begun in the 1950s, this can be seen as a forerunner to the training of women in pastoral leadership. Periodic outbursts of public debate of over the role of women are noted.

The 'Women in Leadership' Debate.

The call on women to minister is undisputed. Problems arise over the issues of authority. May a woman preach to the whole congregation? May a woman be a senior or sole charge pastor of an established church? May a woman be an assistant pastor? May a woman be ordained? In the local congregation, may a woman be an elder or deacon?

Leadership in Baptist churches, both paid ministers and lay unpaid deacons, has traditionally been viewed as for men only, based on such scriptures as 1 Cor: 4:34 ('...women should be silent in the churches.') and 1 Tim: 2:12 ('I permit no woman to have authority over a man...').¹ This has always had to be held in tension with another basic Baptist belief, the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Many discussions

¹ All scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), 1997.

about the position of women in leadership have revolved around the interpretation of these and other passages.

At the local level the appointment of women to the diaconate or eldership has often been controversial. In 1891 a woman delegate sent to the Baptist Union assembly was ruled ineligible because the first meeting of the Union had defined a member as an 'adult male'. Women were accepted six years later.² An incident recalled from the late 1920s involved the refusal of the then Union Secretary to speak to the deacons of a church until two female deacons, one the church treasurer, were removed from the group.³ I personally recall heated discussions on whether women could hold such positions.

Local church officers (secretary, treasurer, elders, deacons and deaconesses) are typically elected annually by the church meeting. Until the mid 20th century almost all of these positions (other than deaconesses) were held by men. Women did fill important leadership roles, but these were in areas deemed appropriate for women: Sunday school teachers, women's Bible Class leaders, deaconesses, missionary support and missionaries. These last are an interesting anomaly. From its inception in 1885 until 1970 the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society sent out far more women than men. In 1910 a *NZ Baptist* editorial commented: 'We make [a woman] pastor in all but name of our most difficult charges in India, and shudder at the bare suggestion of the Rev. Mrs Smith being pastor of Hanover St., Dunedin.'⁴

² *NZB*, November, 1982, 14.

³ Personal recollection of Claire Hart, whose father was at the time minister of that church.

⁴ Quoted by Allan Davidson in *Christianity in Aotearoa; a History of Church and Society in New Zealand*, 2nd ed., (Wellington: New Zealand Education for Ministry, 1997), 83.

Nevertheless, the involvement of women in lay leadership at the local level increased rapidly through the second half of the twentieth century. Women began to be elected to positions of secretary, treasurer, deacon and elder. For example the proportion of female secretaries increased from 2.2% in 1965 to 48.3% in 2000.⁵

Female leadership at denominational level has also increased, though less dramatically. In March 1969 a letter to the editor asked why there were no women on the Union Council.⁶ In 1973 Mrs R G Boyd was elected to the council, and second woman, Jan Bowman, was elected in 1977. Since that time there have been a few women on most councils and committees. Women to have held major denominational appointments have included Bev Holt (Youth Director 1973-89), Lorna Jenkins (Director of Christian Education 1990-93) and Julie Belding (Editor of the *NZ Baptist* 1993-2001). These positions had previously been held only by ordained men. Most full-time teaching staff at Carey Baptist College have been men. In October 1998 Nancy Squire began an appointment as Director of Ministry Training, a new position for 'administering and facilitating the development of the pastoral skills of our ministerial students.'⁷

President of the Baptist Union of New Zealand has been an annual appointment which has always been open to both ordained and lay members. Until the early 1920s the majority of presidents were ordained men, and from 1943 ordained and lay have alternated. The first woman president was Dame

⁵ Data extracted from *Year Books of the Baptist Union and Missionary Society of New Zealand*, 1965-1966 to 2000-2001. Information about other local church positions are not available in published documents.

⁶ Patricia Booth, in *NZB* (March 1969): 11.

⁷ Paul Windsor, College Principal, in *NZB* (August 1998): 14.

Vivienne Boyd in 1984. Since then a small number of women have served in this capacity, although not until 2005 will there be an ordained women president.⁸

The question of women in pastoral leadership roles has been particularly contested. In 1952 the *N.Z. Baptist* published an answer from the Baptist Committee on Faith and Order to a question from the NCC regarding ordination. It included the statement, 'Any of the functions carried out by a minister may be carried out by any member of the church at the request of the local church.'⁹ The document had already defined a church member as a 'man or woman' believer, so the implication is that there would be no gender differentiation, although all references to the minister use masculine pronouns. In practice virtually all ministers up to this time had been men.

Debates on women in pastoral ministry have appeared intermittently in the pages of the *N.Z. Baptist*. In 1971 a letter appeared advocating the appointment of women pastors, couched in terms intended to elicit a response. None was forthcoming.¹⁰ In late 1972 an editorial entitled 'Women ministers --- shall we have them?' argued that on practical and biblical grounds, we should. With the first ministerial student now in college, the issue needed to be faced.¹¹ A response was received from Rev Hugh Coutts arguing that only men may be leaders, on the basis of Genesis 2:18, 21-23, Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Timothy 2:12.¹² Miss Patricia Preest was ordained in late 1973, and the *N.Z. Baptist* report commented 'Until a suit-

⁸ Rev. Marjory Gibson takes up the restructured role of President at the 2005 Assembly.

⁹ *NZB* (October 1952): 227.

¹⁰ R M & A M Poulter in *NZB* (May 1971): 6.

¹¹ H E Whitten in *NZB* (October 1972): 4.

¹² Hugh Coutts in *NZB* (December 1972): 5.

able church position becomes available, Miss Preest will be taking up an interim hospital chaplaincy in Dunedin Hospital.¹³ She eventually moved into a church position in 1989, after a long period of hospital chaplaincy in Hawkes Bay, and a short time in retirement.

Another round of discussion followed the publication in June 1976 of the article 'Women in the Pastorate' by Dr G Keith Parker reporting his survey of attitudes to the role of women in Baptist churches in Northern Europe¹⁴ and follow-up responses by a regular panel of three to the question, 'Would you feel at home in a church where the minister was a woman?' Two said 'no' and one 'yes', but all agreed that there was no good reason for not having women pastors.¹⁵ Two letters challenging their position were followed by three letters refuting these arguments before the correspondence ended.¹⁶

Publication of Rev. Ken McCormack's sermon, 'You are a woman... you are young... you are called' at Margaret Motion's ordination in July 1978 set off another round of debate via letters to the editor.¹⁷ Two interesting arguments against the ordination of women came from Marilyn C. Bate, stating the 'pattern (for)...wives is: those who are led are to allow

¹³ *NZB* (December 1973): 13; news item: 'First Woman Minister'.

¹⁴ G Keith Parker, Professor of Practical Theology at Ruschlikon Baptist Seminary, Switzerland, in *NZB* (June 1976): 3.

¹⁵ Joan Wilton, Ray French and Roy Gaskell in *NZB* (September 1976): 4.

¹⁶ Hugh Coutts, Ted Pythian in *NZB* (November 1976): 6; Elaine Bell, E. M. Buggy, Gordon Jones in *NZB* (March 1977): 6.

¹⁷ K. McCormack (Rev) in *NZB* (July 1978): 3; Ted Pythian in *NZB*, (September 1978): 6; Marilyn C. Bate in *NZB* (October 1978): 6; J. & V. Raynor, J. & F. Milne, in *NZB* (November 1978): 6; Stephen Turner in *NZB* (February 1979): 6; Doris Lindstrom, D B F Eyres, V Anne Boyd, Ron Elder, Miriam A Curran, in *NZB* (April 1979): 6; L Wood, Ted Pythian, in *NZB* (June 1979): 7.

themselves to be led', and from Rev. Stephen Turner, who asked 'How can a woman be 'called' by God to something the Word of God opposes?' The editor closed the correspondence in June 1979. An editorial by Tom Cadman in the *Baptist* of August 1982, 'Racism: White Problem or Male Problem', including a section on women's equality with men based on Galatians 3:28, prompted two letters challenging the relevance of the verse to a woman's place in the church. The editor's comment: 'You have not learned to distinguish an abiding principle from the passing practice.'¹⁸

In a refreshing interlude two papers were presented at the 1983 Baptist Assembly by Anna Norrish ('Women in the Ministry')¹⁹ and Harold Pidwell ('Woman in her Place')²⁰ which brought no comment in the *Baptist*. The debate then continued with a brief exchange in August/September 1988,²¹ followed by a longer series between September 1989 and June 1990.²² The latter was more a discussion than a debate, although the last letter sounded a note of challenge. From 1992 to 1995 letters and articles addressed the issue of women graduates having difficulty finding ministry positions, without stirring up controversy. In March 1992 Lynne Tasker wrote, 'How dare we allow women to be accepted to Baptist College as students and then fail to welcome them into full leadership in our local

¹⁸ Tom Cadman in *NZB* (August 1982): 2; J McLean in *NZB* (October 1982): 7; Keith A Wilson in *NZB* (February 1983): 12.

¹⁹ Anna Norrish in *NZB* (February 1984): 13.

²⁰ Harold Pidwell in *NZB* (March 1984): 4.

²¹ Lorraine Van Wyle in *NZB* (August 1988): 2 and Loma Laird in *NZB* (September 1988): 2.

²² Sally Kerr, *NZB* (September 1989): 2; Bev Holt, *NZB* (October 1989): 1; John Diprose, *NZB* (February 1990): 3; Beulah Wood 'Are Women Accountable?', *NZB* (April 1990): 7; C. Griffin, *NZB* (June 1990): 4.

community churches?’²³ Janis Bruges, an unplaced new graduate, warned that ‘our failure to place trained and capable women should be a matter of concern for our denomination.’²⁴

There have been subsequent cycles of debate, in the main with the same arguments as before. In 1996 an advertisement from a church seeking a pastor ended with the words ‘Think you are our man?’, setting off the first round. Two correspondents picked up on the sexist language and fifteen letters arrived in the next four issues.²⁵ A comment in an article by Rob Bellingham, ‘Female subordination is hardly an ‘essential doctrine’,’ elicited four letters, two on each side.²⁶ Finally a letter in October 2000 and a section on ‘Women in Leadership’ in the annual report, followed by side by side articles in February 2001 setting out both sides of the argument, set off another series of twelve letters in the next three months, plus an article, ‘The Biblical Case for Gender equality’ by Rebecca Groothuis in April 2001.²⁷

²³ Lynne Tasker (Senior Social Worker, Auckland Baptist City Mission) in *NZB* (March 1992): 2.

²⁴ Janis Bruges, ‘The priesthood of all believers.’ *NZB* (September 1993): 3.

²⁵ Murray Sheard, Jen Long, in *NZB* (December 1996): 4; Anthony Dennis, Hugh Coutts, Rob & Liz Ward, *NZB* (February 1997): 4; Bruce Murray, Victor Lipski, Digby & Jane Wilkinson, Murray Sheard, *NZB* (March 1997): 4; K.H. Salt, L. Johnston, Irwin Thrower, Walter Button, Moira Jones, O. Trotter, Michael Whaley, *NZB* (April 1997): 4; Simon Lee, *NZB* (May 1997): 4.

²⁶ Rob Bellingham, ‘The Problem with Men’ in *NZB* (July 1998): 11; Ruth Noel, Scott Malcolm, *NZB* (August 1998): 4; Lawrence Sumner, *NZB* (September 1998): 4; David Fraser, *NZB* (November 1998): 4.

²⁷ P.H.C. Lucas, *NZB* (October 2000): 4; B Smith, ‘Women and Slavery’, & Phyl Thomas ‘Women Leaders?’, *NZB* (February 2001): 12; Helen Searle, Roger Beaumont, Avis Scoones, Ken McAllister, Tony Adams, Glyn Thomas, *NZB* (March 2001): 4; Jenni Hurn, Nola E Hatherley, Phyl

As these exchanges demonstrate, the question of the pastoral role of women has remained controversial among Baptist churches. Despite this, denominational initiatives have proceeded which in turn influenced the debate. In the remainder of this article I will examine the history of the deaconess order and briefly outline the progress of the ordination of women as pastors since the 1970s.

Deaconesses

There have been deaconesses in the Christian church since its inception. In Romans 16:1-3 we read of Phoebe, a 'deacon' (NRSV), a translation implying equal status with male deacons. Other translations of the word *διακονος*, such as servant or helper, convey different shades of meaning and status. The first deaconesses in New Zealand Baptist churches were lay women from the congregation elected at the Annual General Meeting to do pastoral visitation on behalf of the church or minister. Minutes from the Hanover Street Baptist Church deaconess group's meetings indicate that although deaconesses were elected annually or later biennially, women were eligible for re-election, resulting in 'considerable continuity of membership'.²⁸ The obituary of Mrs Henry Beckingsale, who was present at the first meeting, notes, 'As a deaconess for many years she ministered to the needy, the sick, and the sad with a tender sympathy which won her gratitude.'²⁹ A short report in the *N.Z. Baptist* in 1982 describes a similar role of visitation and hospitality for deaconesses in a provincial

Thomas, *NZB* (April 2001): 4; Rebecca Groothuis, *NZB* (April 2001): 7; Christopher Willy, Glyn Thomas, M Crawford, *NZB* (May 2001): 4.

²⁸ Comment by Rev. Dr Janet Crawford in her handwritten excerpts from the Hanover Street deaconess minutes.

²⁹ *NZB* (April 1921): 43.

town.³⁰ This type of deaconess ministry continued in Baptist churches until the late 20th century, when churches began to change the name, if not the ministry.

From the 1930s women were occasionally employed as paid pastoral helpers, usually called deaconesses. In the 1950s discussions began which set in motion the development of formal training and accreditation for Baptist deaconesses through the N.Z. Baptist Theological College. A questionnaire circulated in 1953/54 among Baptist churches revealed that thirteen churches had employed a deaconess in some capacity.

Unlike the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in New Zealand, or the Baptist churches in Great Britain, New Zealand Baptist churches until the mid 20th century did not train deaconesses. Until the mid 20th century only men were trained for pastoral ministry at the Baptist Theological College. By this time Baptist women were thinking about their position in paid work in the church. The Auckland Branch of the Baptist Women's Association (BWA)³¹ in 1951 invited a representative of the Presbyterian Deaconesses to speak on their training programme, and later in the same year was looking at the possibility of having Sister Rita Snowden, a Methodist deaconess, address a meeting.³²

In 1952 Mrs M.E. Holland read a paper entitled 'Woman's Place in the Church' at the annual Baptist Assembly.³³ In the context of arguing for the development of a deaconess order or equivalent, she asked, 'are we in this day when women are coming more and more into leadership in the

³⁰ *NZB* (October 1982): 10.

³¹ The BWA became the Baptist Women's League (BWL) in 1952.

³² Minutes of the Committee meetings of the Auckland Branch of the BWA for 1951.

³³ *NZB* (January 1953): 5-6.

world, prepared to recognise her gift and accord her an equivalent place in the church?' She concluded with a statement which in the light of the foregoing sounds strangely ambiguous to modern ears. 'Some talk of equality of the sexes. I do not believe there should be such a belief – not as far as the equality of contribution is concerned... However... men and women should have equal opportunity to be equipped for service and to serve.' A resolution was put to Assembly that the Union Council should 'look into the appointment of trained women' This resolution was acted upon by the Union Council appointing a Committee 'to enquire into the work and training of deaconesses'.³⁴

The Committee obtained information from Baptist deaconess colleges in Victoria (Australia) and England, and from leaders of the Presbyterian and Methodist deaconess work in New Zealand, all of which had been in existence since at least the early 20th century.³⁵ Enquiries among the churches revealed a felt need for suitably trained women pastoral workers, but also possible financial limitations.³⁶ The report envisaged the training of deaconesses to be based in the Baptist Theological College, and calculated that the existing need among the churches could support the training of three deaconesses per year in a three year course.³⁷

An advertisement for young women to undertake deaconess training indicates the range of possible employment:

A Deaconess may serve:

1. As an assistant minister in a church.

³⁴ See the Committee's Report: *Deaconess Training* forwarded to the Secretary of the Baptist Union of NZ, October 27th 1954, 1.

³⁵ *Deaconess Training*, 1.

³⁶ *Deaconess Training*, 2.

³⁷ *Deaconess Training*, 3, 4.

2. In charge of some branch church or fellowship.
3. In pioneering new districts.
4. As a specialist in Christian Education, Women's work or Youth work.
5. In ministry to the Maoris.
6. In overseas missionary service.
7. In social service, homes and hostels for the elderly, children and youth.'³⁸

The influence of the consulted sources is clear. The first four items came from the English Baptist deaconess order.³⁹ Items 5 and 6 reflect New Zealand input.⁴⁰ Item 7 relates to specific interests of the N.Z. Baptist Churches. It appears a deaconess could do anything an ordained man could, except pastor an established Baptist church.

The suggested theoretical course of study was similar to that for ministerial students (male), with, for University graduates, the option of studying for a BD degree. Practical training covered the expected range for the duties envisaged, and included automobile mechanics. Appointments were to be on the same basis as for ministers: freedom to move from one appointment to another by 'call'. 'The essential and vital element in this whole matter is the call of the Holy Spirit to a woman to devote her whole life to deaconess work.' It was anticipated that selection, guidance and supervision of training would be the responsibility of a special Deaconess Committee, which would finally 'act in relation to deaconesses as does the Ministerial Advisory Board to Ministers'. The document ended with

³⁸ NZB (March 1967): inside front cover.

³⁹ NZB (March 1967): 3; Doris Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses*, (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1954), 34.

⁴⁰ J. D. Salmond, *By Love Serve: The Story of the Order of Deaconesses of the Presbyterian Church of N.Z.*, (Christchurch: Presbyterian Book-room, 1962), 23-41.

recommendations that Assembly give general approval to the deaconess proposals, and at a later session appoint an interim Deaconess Committee to prepare to implement them.⁴¹

The deaconess training proposal was accepted at the 1954 Baptist Assembly and a provisional committee on deaconess training was subsequently set up. During 1955 this committee developed draft rules which were accepted by the Baptist Union Council in June, and in late September met to discuss plans for the following year. An application from Patricia Preest for deaconess training had already been received, and the minutes of this meeting give an impression of some hasty preparations being made to enable her to commence training the following year. As well as sending Miss Preest an application form to be returned with appropriate supporting documents, assessing the application and interviewing her current employer, it was necessary to seek nominations for a permanent Deaconess Committee to be put forward at the 1955 Assembly after the motion to approve the rules was passed. Once elected this Committee had to meet to interview Miss Preest and consider her application, then report back to Assembly to present her as a candidate for training. Since Assembly was in November the whole thing looked like a rushed job. Indeed the provisional committee noted in the minutes that it believed 'the whole project had been dealt with inadequately' at the 1954 Assembly. It was critical of the length of time allotted and its scheduling in Assembly proceedings, but conceded that 'probably nothing could be done to alter the situation'.⁴² The

⁴¹ *Deaconess Training*, 4-6.

⁴² Minutes of the Provisional Committee on Deaconess Training, Sept. 28th, 1955.

presentation of Miss Preest to Assembly was reported as 'making history'.⁴³

Two committees were set up to implement and monitor the training of deaconesses. The Deaconess Administrative Committee consisted of Auckland members of the Board of the Baptist Theological College (all male) plus up to four women. (The Deaconess *Board* was the whole College Board plus women.) There was also a Ladies' Sub-Committee to deal with such things as uniforms and practical training assignments. These two committees worked interactively with the College Board and the College Principal. Minutes of an early Sub-Committee meeting indicate the range of practical experience proposed: Bible in Schools, Sunday School and Bible Class including work among Pacific Island communities, Salvation Army social work, Baptist Maori Mission work, the Manurewa Children's Home (Baptist), missionary support groups, observation of Children's Court and Child Welfare Department work, and pastoral visitation.⁴⁴ These same minutes note that, 'The ladies felt that deaconesses should not be tied by a rule regarding length of service.'⁴⁵ In the early days these committees closely monitored the progress of the trainees, and the Ladies' Sub-Committee met with them individually. Practical work assignments were proposed by the Sub-Committee 'after consulting with the young trainees'.⁴⁶

Academic studies were done alongside the College ministerial students. However, the expectations of the academic

⁴³ *NZB* (December 1955): 294.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the 'Deaconess' Administrative Sub-Committee' (ie Ladies' Sub-Committee), February 9th, 1956.

⁴⁵ Compare the expectation of 'whole life' commitment in the original study report.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Deaconess Admin. Committee, 4th February, 1957.

competence of women trainees were lower than for male students, despite the fact that some had 'shown a high aptitude for study and have outstripped most of the male students'.⁴⁷ Diane Miller-Keeley told Elaine Bolitho that 'women were not expected to excel academically'.⁴⁸ In 1964, a letter from the Deaconesses Fellowship (the alumni society for N.Z. Baptist deaconesses) to the Committee requested that study for deaconess students be directed towards a specific Degree or Diploma. In reply, the Committee secretary pointed out that if a woman really wanted such a course, it could be done, and had been done by some.⁴⁹

As deaconess training got under way a variety of problems presented themselves. The first deaconess trainee lived at the Methodist Girls' Hostel, two doors away from the Baptist College. When two more women were accepted the following year there were only two hostel vacancies. Board was found for the third student in a private home a mile away. This was to be room only, with all meals at college. The Ladies' Sub-Committee objected that to travel a mile in wet weather to a 7:30 breakfast was too much, and asked the College Board to give her an allowance to cook her own breakfast.⁵⁰ The question of on-campus accommodation of deaconesses was raised and action taken later.

⁴⁷ S. L. Edgar; *A Handful of Grain. The Centennial History of the Baptist Union of New Zealand*, Volume 4. (Wellington: New Zealand Baptist Historical Society, 1982), 71.

⁴⁸ Elaine Bolitho, 'Women in New Zealand Churches Part II 1940-1993' in *Stimulus* (November 1993): 28-37.

⁴⁹ Letter from the Deaconess Fellowship to the Deaconess Committee, 22nd October, 1964.

⁵⁰ Minutes, Deaconess Administrative Committee, 4th February, and Ladies' Sub-Committee 6th March, 1957.

Towards the end of 1956 the Administrative Committee decided that the deaconesses should have 'a distinctive uniform and the title of Sister'. The uniform design was to be decided by the Ladies' Sub-Committee.⁵¹ The following March the students were reported to be happy with the present uniform but less so with the proposed winter uniform. It seems that the official uniform would not be finalised until Assembly in November 'and in the meantime the girls⁵² were asked to consult with the Committee before buying coats.'⁵³ The uniform was to be worn on official occasions only.

During 1956 Oxford Terrace church advised the Deaconess Board that they were calling a full time deaconess 'subject to her being given probationary deaconess status by the Board, and to her present training being accepted as adequate.' It was felt by the Administrative Committee that 'it would be an unwise precedent for any person to be given Deaconess status without some period at College.' A minimum of one year's residential course was recommended.⁵⁴ In fact such a precedent had already been set. In the same year that the first deaconess trainee was accepted at Assembly, Joan Milner, who had been accepted for work with the Maori Mission the previous year, 'was granted the status of a deaconess in full standing.'⁵⁵

The engagement of a deaconess trainee to a missionary student half way through her second year raised more questions. In his June 1958 report to the committee the College principal described it as a 'very suitable match' but pointed

⁵¹ Minutes, Ladies' Sub-Committee, 6th March, 1957.

⁵² The 'girls' were young women with several years of work experience.

⁵³ Minutes, Ladies' Sub-Committee, 6th March, 1957.

⁵⁴ Minutes, Deaconess Admin Committee, 1st October, 1956.

⁵⁵ *NZB* (December 1955): 294.

out that it raised as yet unconsidered policy issues, including possible automatic exclusion from the training course, the effect of the eventual ministerial status of the fiancé, and the financial implications of the fact that the young woman 'obviously cannot entertain deaconess work'. There appears to have been no further discussion of the issue in Deaconess Committee minutes until the question was raised again by the next principal in 1965 when another deaconess trainee also appeared to be about to become engaged to a fellow theology student.⁵⁶

Within the churches of the denomination there was misunderstanding of both the status of Accredited Deaconesses and the role of the Deaconess Board. In 1958 the Timaru Baptist Church requested Board help in finding a suitable deaconess, possibly BTI trained rather than one currently training in Baptist College. While there was no reason for a church not to employ such a person, the board realised they needed an official policy regarding such requests for help.⁵⁷

A series of letters between a Mrs Roke of Waikato and the Deaconess Board in 1964 regarding her apparent advocacy of an Australian Deaconess training programme relates to training for volunteer deaconesses. The Board replied that local voluntary deaconesses were not their responsibility. The Deaconess Committee was also concerned about this confusion from the point of view of the perceived status of Accredited Deaconesses in the wider Baptist community. A letter to the Union Secretary requested that some consideration be

⁵⁶ Letter addressed to the Chairwoman of the Deaconess Committee, 12th August 1965.

⁵⁷ Principal's report to the Deaconess Board, 31st March, 1958.

given to clarifying the issue.⁵⁸ His reply suggested that he regarded the issue as trivial.⁵⁹ A name change for lay deaconesses was deemed impossible.

Despite their small numbers, the accredited deaconesses made a significant and valuable contribution to the work of the denomination. Joan Milner⁶⁰ worked with the Maori Board until her retirement after twenty-three years of service. Dora Whitehead trained specifically for the Maori Ministry and served for thirteen years until her marriage, first at Pukekohe and later in the Auckland Baptist City Mission as support for young Maori coming to work in the city. Because the Maori Board was a denominational body the work of these ladies was widely known through regular reports in the *N.Z. Baptist*. The same was true for Claire Gilbert and Joyce Wilby, both of whom spent time as matron of the Manurewa Children's Home between pastoral assignments in local churches. The latter also worked for the Auckland Baptist City Mission, as did Diane Miller. Patricia Preest, Joan Tucker, Muriel Ormrod and Isabel Lane worked only in pastoral ministry in local churches. Little has been published within the denomination about their work apart from brief accounts of welcomes and farewells for some of them.⁶¹

Unlike the Presbyterian and Methodist deaconess orders, which were formally ended in 1975 and 1979 respectively,

⁵⁸ Letter from the Deaconess Committee Secretary to the Baptist Union General Secretary, 6th December, 1966.

⁵⁹ Reply from the General Secretary, 21st December, 1966.

⁶⁰ In the interest of word economy I will not use the title 'Sister' which they are entitled to use. I have used maiden names for those who later married.

⁶¹ The outlines of deaconess assignments were gleaned from lists in the *Baptist Year Books*.

with the option of ordination if desired,⁶² Baptist deaconesses simply disappeared.⁶³ The attitude of the Baptist Union to deaconesses who moved into other non-denominational Christian service also differed from that of other denominations. A whole chapter of *By Love Serve* is devoted to Presbyterian deaconesses in such work.⁶⁴ When Joan Tucker began work with the Child Evangelism Fellowship in 1975 the move was noted,⁶⁵ but she was no longer listed as a serving deaconess. This is particularly strange since New Zealand Baptists working overseas with other Mission Societies were recognised in yearbook lists. A reading of the minutes and correspondence of the Deaconess Committee reveals an undercurrent of dissatisfaction among the deaconesses with some aspects of their working conditions. A particular issue was the difficulty in obtaining a new pastoral position if they wished to move.

The position of deaconesses marrying Baptist Ministers was ambiguous. When Claire Hart married she ceased to be listed as an Accredited Deaconess, although she worked pastorally alongside her husband and after his death went back to paid pastoral work.⁶⁶ Joan Wilton, (nee McKee) who married a Baptist minister at the end of her training, remained in the Deaconess Fellowship.

The first phase of deaconess training by the Baptist denomination ended at the 1959 Assembly when three deaconesses were granted Accredited Deaconess status. In his report

⁶² Bolitho, 'Women in New Zealand Churches'.

⁶³ Confirmed in a phone call to Claire Hart (nee Gilbert), for many years secretary of the Deaconess Fellowship, who was unaware of any official closure.

⁶⁴ Salmond, *By Love Serve*, 62-66.

⁶⁵ *NZB* (September 1975): 3.

⁶⁶ Personal communication.

to the Board of the College the principal, E. Roberts-Thompson, pointed out that not one deaconess had so far completed the full three year as initially proposed. The draft proposal had assumed that trainees would be young women in their early twenties, whereas those accepted had been somewhat older, with experience and qualifications 'deemed sufficient to reduce the length of their courses.' He was critical of the fact that neither they nor the college had been told in advance of the reduced requirements. He also suggested that the Ladies' Sub-Committee should now draw back and leave the conduct of the whole course to the College.⁶⁷ Regarding course length, a 1963 letter from the Deaconess Fellowship indicated that they were in favour of all deaconesses doing a full three year course regardless of prior qualifications.⁶⁸

In the first four years of the program seven young women entered the training course and of these five became Accredited Deaconesses, serving the denomination in that capacity for an average of thirteen years. In the next eight years five more commenced training and three qualified, serving for an average of seven years. The first deaconess to train at the College, Patricia Preest, returned to College in 1972 as a ministerial student and was ordained as New Zealand's first female Baptist minister at the end of 1973. The last of these trainees, Diane Miller-Keeley, is now an ordained Anglican priest. After a break of six years two more young women commenced training and completed the course. One withdrew after her probationary year, and the other one year after accreditation. The final trainee was Anna Norrish, who completed her Col-

⁶⁷ College Principal's Annual Report to the Deaconess Board, 28th October, 1959.

⁶⁸ Letter from the Deaconess Association to the secretary of the College Board, 4th November, 1963.

lege course in 1979, was listed as a probationary deaconess for the next two years but in the following year was recorded as an accredited minister.

During the 1960s the Baptist denomination was becoming increasingly involved in Social Service work, and a need for suitable, appropriately trained workers was apparent. Although social work was part of deaconess training, the College principal, J. Ayson Clifford, suggested that the College could possibly offer a shorter course for women specifically interested in this work.⁶⁹ However, he later indicated in his 1967 report his personal preference for women wishing to do Social Service doing a full Deaconess course.⁷⁰ In 1967 Diane Miller began studying at College as an independent student in anticipation of the social work course commencing the following year, but during the year chose to apply for the full deaconess course, despite being under the commencing age of 22. The first Social Service course (open to men as well as women) was taught in the College in 1968. This was a one year course, extended to two in 1974.⁷¹ The 1982 *Centennial History* evaluated the course as 'not very successful', and reported that such workers in churches were often expected to function as fully trained deaconesses, in a number of instances unsuccessfully.⁷² In retrospect this move was the beginning of the end for deaconess training in the Baptist denomination in New Zealand. The last four deaconess trainees, including Diane Miller, began as Social Service trainees.

⁶⁹ Principal's Report to the Admin. Committee, 2nd September, 1966.

⁷⁰ Principal's Annual Deaconess Committee Report, 25th October, 1967.

⁷¹ Edgar, 20.

⁷² Edgar, 21

Ordained Ministers

The first woman ordained in New Zealand to the Baptist ministry was Patricia Preest in 1973.⁷³ In 1993 the College principal, Brian Smith, is quoted as saying that of fifteen women who had graduated from ministerial training since 1974, only two were currently in ministry positions in New Zealand Baptist Churches.⁷⁴ It seems that women ministers shared the problem of deaconesses in moving to a new position. Others have subsequently graduated. Since 1984 it has been possible to become an accredited Baptist minister after training in theology or ministry at another institution and completing any extra requirements of the Accreditation Board.⁷⁵ Some women have come into the Baptist ministry by this route.

At the Baptist Assembly in November 1996 a new system for registering ministers was adopted.⁷⁶ A concomitant change in the way ministers are listed in the year book has made it difficult to find out the present situation of women who completed their ministerial training but are no longer listed. Only one female college graduate is listed as retired, four are in pastoral ministry and one is a hospital chaplain. Of the others, five have held pastoral positions in Baptist Churches, two are ministers in other denominations and one became a university chaplain. By 2000, 3.6% of those listed as accredited Baptist ministers are women. Women make up 6.5% of all registered ministers, 17.9% of those provisionally registered and 24.5%

⁷³ NZB (December 1973): 13 - news item: 'First Woman Minister'.

⁷⁴ Janis Bruges, in NZB (September 1993): 3.

⁷⁵ Andrew Gammon, 'Ministerial Credentialing in the Baptist Churches of New Zealand,' in *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research*, 7 (October 2002), 37-60.

⁷⁶ Andrew Gammon in NZB (July 1997): 3.

of other pastoral staff. These figures indicate a significant increase in the number of women in pastoral ministry, though almost all in subordinate roles.

Conclusion.

The timing of the entry of the Baptist Church in New Zealand into professional deaconess work was unfortunate. The issues of female leadership which prompted its initiation were those which in other denominations prompted women to begin seeking ordination. Methodist Phyllis Guthardt was the first New Zealand woman to be ordained, in 1959.⁷⁷ The likelihood of a long-lasting deaconess order being established within the Baptist denomination was therefore minimal in the existing social climate, as women joined men in as equals in many professions. As in other denominations Baptist women opted for ordination as the best avenue for full time Christian service, although this still did not result in equal opportunities for them in the Baptist ministry.

Arguments about women in leadership have focused on women ordained for ministry. The appointment of women to other leadership positions, including that of training new ministers, has brought no adverse comment. Objections to women in pastoral ministry have mostly appealed to a limited number of 'proof texts,' and while some supporters have taken a similar approach, most have presented a more balanced survey of biblical teaching. Writers opposing ordination of women on the grounds of women not having authority over men seem not to have taken account of the fact that according to the constitution of most Baptist churches the final authority lies not with

⁷⁷ Bolitho in *Stimulus*, November 1993.

the pastor but with the congregation, mediated by the elected lay elders or deacons.

While the number of women in pastoral ministry is increasing, those graduating from theological college can still have difficulty finding positions. It is tempting to compare the situation of women in the Anglican Church in New Zealand, which approved the ordination of women to the priesthood in 1976. Women priests are now commonplace in Anglican pastoral ministry. A fundamental difference in church government between Anglican and Baptist churches is that, in the former, selection for ministry training and appointments to parish ministry occur at diocesan level. In the Baptist congregational system ministry appointments are dependent on local congregations, where the presence of even a minority opposing women in ministry can negatively influence the calling of a woman pastor. Although the involvement of women in leadership in Baptist churches in New Zealand has increased significantly in the past thirty-five years, equal recognition with men still seems some way off.

Margaret Evans