

**The 50th anniversary of first woman,
ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in
the Presbyterian Church**



Rev Margaret Reid

*At ordination, May 13th 1965
at St Andrews on The Terrace, Wellington*

So, how did Margaret come to be the first woman ordained to ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ?

It goes something like this:

In 1920s, a proposal was made at General Assembly to recognize and accept women in ministry. It was sent to Presbyteries but the majority failed to accept it. Again in the 1930s, the same proposal was brought to General Assembly, but again, at Presbytery level, it failed to progress further. Then, in 1946, the same proposal was brought to General Assembly which decided to send to Presbyteries for consideration. Even though it failed again to gain majority, General Assembly decided that a group of people would get together to study the proposal.

Rev Ian Fraser set up a committee to study the topic, and the study concentrated on women in Eldership, both here and overseas. This was a well organised and thorough study.



Around the same time Margaret studied in the full theological course and became a Deaconess.

In 1955, General Assembly decided that women will be admitted to Eldership. Once women were admitted to Eldership, Rev Ian Fraser again, worked with the same committee, to study the topic of women in ordained ministry, both here and abroad. They presented their findings to the 1961 General Assembly in Dunedin.

It was approved in principle, that women be accepted to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. To progress further, another committee was set up to look at the practical details of having women ordained to ministry. This took another three years.

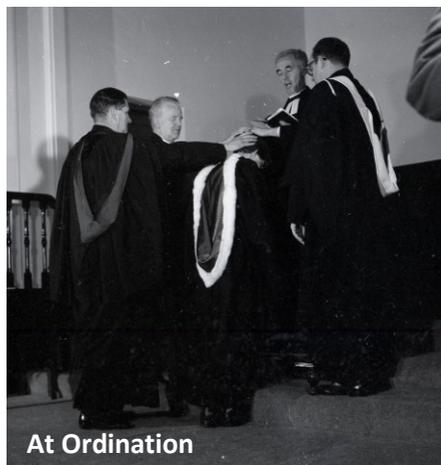
In November 1964, The General Assembly, held at St David's Church, Khyber Pass, Auckland, passed the final regulations required for women to be ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church. Rev Arch Kirkwood who sat behind Margaret and her mother, said to Margaret, 'You'll be the first', but Margaret replied that she hadn't thought of it. Driving back home, her mother asked Margaret, 'Why not?' This got Margaret thinking.

Three weeks later, Margaret applied through her minister at St Andrews, Wellington, to be accepted as a candidate for ordained ministry. Three weeks later, Margaret was invited to meet the Wellington Presbytery for the application to be considered. It was moved, seconded and opened for discussion. They voted, and Margaret was accepted as a candidate for ordained ministry. This all happened in December and Margaret, being considerate of the coming Christmas and holidays, asked that the decision not be made public until the holiday season was over. But one replied and said "but this is news, and we have to announce it".

The news made the Dominion Newspaper and hit the headlines. Margaret was working as secretary for NZ Council for Christian Education at the time, and it was amusing at work. Margaret shared an office with the typist and the phone was not by her desk. So, as the news made the headline, the phone was busy, and every time the phone rang, she had to get up, walk to the other side to receive the messages of good wishes and congratulations. When the typist left for the day, Margaret, realising the interruptions of the phone calls, apologised, but the typist was pleased to be part of this historic event.

At the NZ Council for Christian Education, her boss, an Anglican priest, agreed to support her ordination and accept her in a different role. Now, that was something because there were no women in ministry, in the Anglican Church.

Margaret was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ, on 13th May 1965, at St Andrews on the Terrace, Wellington. Interestingly, the Moderator of Wellington Presbytery was booked to attend a dinner at Government House, so he couldn't be there for the ordination. Rev Crawford Madill was therefore the moderator for this special event. His family lived in Mt Albert and his sister was a key member of Mt Albert Presbyterian Guild after she retired. This was an early link to Mt Albert Presbyterian, where she served and supported ministry decades later.



The decision to ordain women to ministry in the Presbyterian Church came from thorough study carried out by the committee tasked with the responsibility. It did not come from any pressure from society or from women themselves, rather, from the study itself.

In 1975, Margaret became Moderator for Wellington Presbytery. Margaret accepted invitations to preach in most of the parishes in the Wellington region.

In 1978 she married Rev David Martin, and started worshipping at Mt Albert Presbyterian Church, Auckland, where David served as a minister.

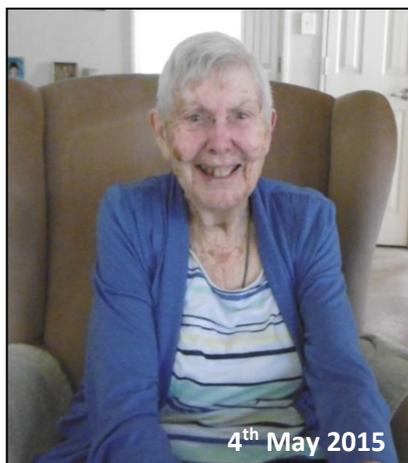
Rev Margaret Martin carried out ministries here and abroad, with a stint in Fiji in 1981 with her late husband, Rev David Martin. They also carried out stated supply ministries at St Giles Mt Roskill and St Johns Mt Roskill.

In 1987, Rev Margaret Martin became moderator of General Assembly. She reintroduced her maiden name at this point, because very few people outside Auckland knew her as Martin. As a moderator, she again, used her wisdom and experience to serve the national Church.

Other churches called on her for stated supply roles, and she willingly carried out those ministries, until recently, when physically, she is no longer able to do so.

After serving as moderator, the Very Rev Margaret Martin then used her wisdom and expertise to assist ministry at Mt Albert Presbyterian Church, as Honorary Assistant Minister, both when there was a minister, and when the parish was vacant.

There is no doubt that her story will continue to inspire and encourage women considering a move to ministry, and those already in ordained ministry.



Rev Tani Haunga,

Mt Albert Presbyterian Church, 4 May, 2015.

Black n white photos: Presbyterian Research Centre-Archives.