

# Twenty years of women as priests

**WITHIN the Church of England, the role of women in ordained ministry has been a big issue for over 50 years.**

It used to be about women as priests, but more recently has been about women as bishops. Li Tim Oi was ordained an Anglican priest in 1944 and the conversation about women's ordained ministry still continues.

This year will be the 20th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in England; the first took place on 12th March 1994, in Bristol. Here in Portsmouth, 19 women were ordained in May (in two groups – Ascension Day and Pentecost) by Bishop Timothy Bavin.

They have been serving God faithfully for many years, aware that their calling had been to priestly ministry; many having been deaconesses before the legislation allowed them to be ordained deacon, and then priest.

As one of that 1994 group,

## the big issue



**Twenty years after the first women were ordained as priests, we're still debating their ministry. The Rev Karina Green, vicar of St Alban's, West Leigh previews a celebration of their ministry.**



**The women ordained as priests in our diocese in 1994**

I give thanks to God for the growing number of women in Holy Orders across the church: serving as incumbents, diocesan officers, curates, associate priests, chaplains, canons, archdeacons and deans. Women now work in a wide range of ministries and

settings, often in new and creative ways. In 2011, 31 per cent of all clergy were women. Now half of those being ordained are women and nearly 40 per cent of these to stipendiary ministry.

Women alongside their male colleagues serve, teach, nurture

and care for all amongst whom they live and work. They offer people the opportunity to engage and encounter the loving God in baptisms, weddings, funerals, at the Eucharist and at many other occasions both public and private; being an integral part in people's lives at the moments of great need, pain, joy and celebration.

It has been an extraordinary journey for many of us. Serving as a priest is a wonderful and rich experience; we are aware that it is an amazing ministry to be called to, a real privilege.

Most people have welcomed the ministry of women as priests, and value the new insights and gifts that women bring to the role and to the institution of the Church.

The church now offers a much more rounded and wholesome witness to the love of God. We need to find ways of appreciating the gifts that we all bring, we need to celebrate the diversity of leadership rather than seeing this as a problem.

Women in the Episcopate will

bring a new and fresh dimension into the leadership of the church which will be exciting and life enhancing. We need to consider different ways of doing things, different forms of leadership, different ways of being church, different models of ministry.

It needs all of us to think what it is we want from our clergy and from one another and then make space for these in new ways.

On Sunday May 18th at 6pm there will be a service at Portsmouth Cathedral to celebrate the Ministry of all God's People on the 20th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood. The preacher will be the Very Rev Dr Frances Ward, Dean of St Edmundsbury.

All who were ordained in Portsmouth in 1994 have been invited, along with the women who have now moved to Portsmouth to take up a post or enjoy retirement but were ordained elsewhere in 1994.

We hope to be able to have a small exhibition of photographs from the ordinations. The Bishop and Dean of Portsmouth offer everyone the invitation to attend this celebration.

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There is none like you, O Lord,  
 and there is no God besides you,  
 according to all that we have  
 heard with our ears.

1Ch 17:20 (ESV)

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