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## WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

Daphne's name is well known as one of the principal pioneers for the ordination of women in the Church of Ireland. She was one of the first woman Lay Readers commissioned in 1975.

By the early 1970s, Daphne was known by those in the Church of Ireland as an academic participant, who wrote balanced articles on a number of topics of interest to clergy and laity alike. Daphne said, 'George Simms, who was by now Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, had a publication going, and he asked me to write an article about 'Women in the Church.' I sat down one day when I had a quiet hour and I began to think of some people who might be interested, some women I knew. And it suddenly came to me that not one of them would go into a job in the Church unless they could be ordained. No use being a second-class citizen. They wouldn't be interested. If they were going to give their life to this job, they would have to be allowed to do it fully. I stood up, and I never changed my mind. The nearest thing I had to a revelation. I never changed my mind one half minute after that.'

'Women and the Church'<sup>9</sup> was published by 'New Divinity – a Church of Ireland Journal', in the November 1970 issue, Volume 1, No. 2. In this, one of her strongest statements about women's involvement, Daphne forcefully

<sup>9</sup> The full text of the essay is given in Appendix 1

made her point to the Church of Ireland community. There was no need to spell it out again. It was now known how she felt.

The final paragraph reads:

I believe the Church is facing another crisis of direction at the moment. I see its urgent immediate task to be the fostering of Christian community. All of us, men and women, need to gather together in a depth not reached in most parish worship so that we may scatter as more effective Christians. This should be familiar ground for the church: the building of Koinonia 'where there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female.' But you cannot proclaim community and practise exclusiveness. What is needed is the same spirit which inspired the actions of the second-class Jewish citizen when he allowed himself to be drawn into public discussion at the well with someone who was not only a Samaritan, but also a woman. Women much appreciate the help of those who are following in his footsteps and taking up our cause with vision and courage. There are indeed signs that the countryside is opening up before us; perhaps along one of the new highways, bishops may yet be bringing their husbands to Lambeth.

Daphne said, 'It was curious how everything fell into place. I was teaching History of Art at the High School every Friday morning. It had become more and more unsatisfactory, as they didn't have any equipment, and I used to have to bring it in from home. Eventually, early one Friday I woke up, and said to Donald, 'I've done this long enough. It's not very satisfactory.' Don replied, 'Well, you'd better tell the headmaster.' So I did, and the headmaster understood.

'Strangely, on the following Monday morning I received a letter from Archbishop Buchanan asking me to be a Lay Reader. Just like that. What a coincidence! He said he would be offering a training course himself, a course in Theology. The goal was to increase the participation of women in the life of the Church. It was a renewal of a similar request made earlier, which had not materialised successfully. This time, there would be a total of five women who would train together.'

The Archbishop had asked the Diocesan Synods 'Is it right to limit the possibility of ordination to one half of the Church? Our House of Bishops has recently echoed the view of Lambeth that there is no theological reason against the ordination of women. The Church in Canada has already decided in favour... the Church of Ireland should at least declare its mind on the subject.'

In June, 1975, Daphne delivered a 'small talk' on 'Religious Education of the Child' to a seminar of teachers and clergy in Tralee, organized by Revd William Pike, Rector of Tralee. It wasn't long before Daphne was giving an address in Christ Church Cathedral in Waterford, as follows:

'Thank you, Mr Dean, for your introduction, which was very kind, and for your invitation to speak here tonight, which I accept as an honour paid to women in general by the Church.

We need all the encouragement we can get from men and women, as this rôle is very new to us. It is so new that we do not even know how we should dress for it. A man speaking in church wears no hat and a white collar; it is only a question of which way the collar is turned. But with us, it is not so straightforward. I looked at a little black hat that I have, and then remembered that the last time I spoke in church I had worn that hat, and my husband had said, as I left the house, 'So you have your biretta on tonight. Are you going to hear confessions?' Well, it has not come to that, and I don't want it to.

I was thinking as I drove down, here I am in 1974 at the same stage of my life as was my grandmother in 1900. What a century of change it has been, with our cars and domestic gadgets, TV and radio communication, telephones and flying the Atlantic. But none of these inventions mark my life off from my grandmother's, as does the emancipation of women. What really makes the difference between her life and mine is that, in spite of having a husband and four children, from within my own home I am able to have a life of my own, make my own contacts, do my own thing. And almost as remarkable, when I think of my grandfathers, is that in all this I have the encouragement and active co-operation of my husband. In spite of subterranean grumblings, women continue to expand their activities, but not much in the Church. Only *there* is there very little new opening, a sort of stalemate instead of an expansion.

Have you ever thought where do women *not* work, side by side, on equal terms with men? The armed forces, monasteries – even the stock exchange, all have now opened their doors. But not the Church.

I am very privileged to be speaking here during your renewal week. My theme tonight is that the Church is facing a crisis, and while we have faith that the new life will emerge, it cannot be achieved without a full contribution from both men and women. 'He that will not apply new

remedies must expect new evils,' said Francis Bacon. I see very clearly that the Church needs all the help from women that we are prepared to give. For centuries we have done much for the physical beauty of the Church and for the comfort of its members. Long may this continue. But when, apart from nunneries, have we been involved spiritually, have we been consulted about vital church matters, have we been in on important policy decisions? I suggest that the practice should be to ask women what they would like to do for the Church, and, then, that they should be given the opportunity to do it. I suggest that clergy delegate some real responsibility to us, and that the Church provide fit training and preparation for that responsibility. And which responsibilities? There will be different answers from different women, and here is the crunch. If a woman believes she has a vocation to be ordained, she should, in my opinion, be listened to as if she were a man. She should be allowed to be ordained, if she is considered suitable, as a man would be.

In one of her weekly letters to me, in Canada, dated 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1975, Daphne wrote:

Tomorrow evening those of us who are to be commissioned as Lay Readers in Christ Church Cathedral on 16<sup>th</sup> November are meeting to make some kind of a decision about what we shall *wear*. Not easy but the Archbishop has left it to us; the only thing he suggested we try to look as pretty and feminine as possible. So far, the unanimous choice seems to be for a long pale luminous grey pinafore with bright green silk blouse. Three of us would like to go further and use the liturgical colours for a blouse change during the seasons of the Christian year. And if you are wondering what the liturgical colours are, you know no more than I did until ten days ago. Roughly, they are violet for Lent, white for Whitsuntide, possibly yellow for Easter and green for all the Sundays between Trinity Sunday and Advent (green being the colour for growth). At least, by deciding on green we are in keeping with the present season, and I have hopes that we might gradually introduce the other colours. So many of my friends are repelled by the dreariness of the Church of Ireland ... and what a visual aid for children it would be if you could use your clothes as an introduction. The opposition comes from those who would think we were setting ourselves up by being gimmicky and so we might antagonise the person in the pew. *Oh Dear!* At least we don't have to look like half-frocked curates with things

hung around our necks, and big awkward sleeves that would get caught in the eagle's wings!

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1975, she wrote:

Trying to get ready for our commissioning, our recent concern has been – of all things – with what we are to wear. We took the decision too lightly, not allowing for the difficulties which would arise. At first we were given an entirely free choice ... so with much discussion the consensus was for the grey pinafore with a deep apple green blouse. Not acceptable to the establishment. So we chose a cherry red long gown with fluted skirt. Then we were told it was too bright and that it might be best for our authority if we had a preaching scarf which had to be blue (Lay Readers' colour.) Mrs Buchanan, the Archbishop's wife, was in the choosing by this time, and we were under the impression for several days that we would be clothed in *grey* with this dull blue thing hung round our necks, and we were all very upset and dispirited (phone calls galore, no swearing but near to it.) However, when we went to the Archbishop's house for the absolutely final decision last Thursday, Mrs B. had a lovely magenta shade for our gown (we all liked the style) and she had had the bright idea of a pale blue (in fact, St Patrick's blue) preaching scarf, each one to be made individually and put on us in the cathedral at the time of the commissioning. I'm to go tomorrow for my fitting for a strange garment. I hope everything will be all right. We also are thinking of exams in Ecclesiastical History, Old and New Testament, too; the men Lay Readers do an exam and the Arch does not want us to appear to be less well trained. He is setting the papers, marking them and also, I believe, going to tell us what will be on them! He has no great reverence for exams, and apparently is very impressed with our dedication and interest, so I gather we have passed already. But, as I say to Don, I don't want to make it too embarrassing for the poor man, though I must admit I find it very hard to learn anything *off* at the moment. But lay reading is not really about these things. I am afraid that lately my thoughts have lacked focus. Let's hope I can get a little quieter and more withdrawn in the next few weeks.

There was a postal strike in Canada from the end of October through to early December, 1975, so the next letter was not written until 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1975:

The big event for me this autumn has, of course, been my commissioning;

it took place as scheduled on 16<sup>th</sup> November in Christ Church Cathedral. Both the Archbishop and the Dean went to immense trouble to plan a meaningful service and to take it with sincerity and enthusiasm. The cathedral was nearly full which gave us much needed support and encouragement. Many of our friends kindly turned up, even Betty Cole (*née* Harman) from Cavan ('for your ordination' she wrote). She came to stay here for three days afterwards and we had some good chats.

Possibly, when I last wrote we were having intense consultation over the garment we were to be decked in; miraculously, that's the word when you consider the difficulties we got into over it, but anyway it was all harmoniously resolved in the end. We chose a long fitted gown of deep magenta with a mandarin collar and for the badge of our office we had a preaching scarf/stole of St Patrick's pale blue. Really very effective. It was the Archbishop who finally suggested the deep red. He said, 'If they like to think I am commissioning five lady bishops, let them think it!' His text for his sermon was 'I have chosen you, you have not chosen me.' After the ceremony we were asked, as a congregation of about 300, down to the crypt for tea; a substantial one with really good sandwiches and cakes.

The very next Sunday after the commissioning the Archbishop had arranged to come to our home parish, Taney, for his annual visit and the Rector, Canon Walter Burrows, asked Patricia Hastings-Hardy, another Lay Reader, and me to give a little help with the service. My job was to read the epistle. I have done this before so that was no great step forward. But it was satisfactory to robe and sit up in the stall with the choir, in the place where the curate, Horace McKinley, usually sits. You feel so much more involved if you are where the action is; it is an altogether different sensation. Since then I have had no duties but I have been asked to preach in College Chapel on St Brigid's Day (1st February) and in Stillorgan on March 28<sup>th</sup> (Mothering Sunday.) I asked the question 'When is Fathering Sunday?' and got no answer. I have also been asked to do an Outlook (3½ minute talk on Radio Telefís Éireann late each night) at the end of March. The producer for the program wrote congratulating me 'on taking the silk.' I replied that I 'had taken the cotton.'

That will be enough preaching for the present. I shall refuse anything further, but I would be ready to read the service, if asked. Preaching is just one huge nightmare. It fills me with solid terror.