

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

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Methodist Deaconess Order in South Australia

(1942 -)

Born 1 January, 1942, Adelaide South Australia Australia

Summary

The Methodist Order of Deaconesses was established in 1942 as a result of the inability of the Methodist Church in Australia to implement the principle affirmed at the General Conference in 1929 that women who believed that they were called by God to a wider (professional) ministry in the Church than was available to them at that time, could offer as candidates for the ministry under the same regulations as men.

Its establishment led to marked changes in the opportunities available to women in the life of the church. Significantly, it offered structure, support and status for women's ministry by providing a professional pathway. It created opportunities for women's ministry at home, not just in international mission fields. By helping to create a context whereby men and women worked together, it enabled the Methodist Church to come to the view that women had a place in the ordained ministry.

Details

The idea of establishing a Deaconess Order in South Australia was mooted as early as 1922 by the Reverend John Pearce, superintendent of the Home Mission Department. The 1935 General Conference decisions to establish such an order found a most enthusiastic supporter in Kate Cocks, who was well known in South Australia as an advocate on behalf of women and children's rights and welfare. A study trip to New Zealand to investigate the work of Deaconesses in that country convinced her of the need for a similar organisation in South Australia. Her recommendations were endorsed at the Annual Conference in 1937. Although the outbreak of war delayed further decisions, it also highlighted the need for women's ministry and a training institute to support it, as women rushed to fill the gaps left by men who went off to fight. But in 1942, the order was established.

Published resources

Booklet

A History of the Methodist Deaconess Order in South Australia, Hancock, Bethany, 1995

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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