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## The Journey So Far..

By Lady Beverley Reeves

*In June last year, the Anglican Women's Studies Centre invited Lady Beverley Reeves to be one of the "Golden Girls" along with Ngahinu Tricklebank and Annette Gilchrist at the 'Treasuring Women in Ministry' hui held at St John's Theological College. It was a wonderful opportunity to recognize those who have contributed to the life of our church. Each Golden Girl had an interesting story to tell about their Christian journey full of trials and triumphs and this is Bev's story to date....*

Greetings to the assembled Women's Hui participants—some words from the baby of the trio...

These are not really the Golden Years. You have to determine that they will be actively and work towards that. There is also a lot of luck or chance in how we approach these final years—health, financial position and family support or maybe the onset of dementia or depression can make a huge difference.

Now two or three moments in my life which have been pivotal in my church life and faith journey... It's not been like that for me. There has been a continuum with some signposts. It has been evolution but there have been markers along the way.

As a teenager, I wandered the hills surrounding Karori in Wellington. I was somewhat of a solitary individual and needed time away from people and my parents must have realised this and made no fuss about it. What is wonderful when I look back—it was safe then. They knew where I was and I told them when I would be back. I was aware then of God as Creator although I probably wouldn't have put it like when I was 12 or 13. I marvelled at the beauty and wildness of those landscapes. The rounded hills were once covered with coastal bush but foxgloves as tall as I have ever seen grew in profusion. I was a child who



found the mysteries of belief interesting and challenging. Confirmation made a big impact. I took it very seriously and my parents gradually returned to regular worship again. They never once commented on my interest in church activities at all in any derisive way. Music was a big thing for me—choirs and singing to the Lord and early on I enjoyed the drama and beauty of liturgy although we didn't have too much of that. The parish of Karori was 'low church' as it used to be described then. In fact flat to the boards!

We move on... Bible class, university, SCM which was busy fun and serious organisation which ran lovely big conferences in the long vacation. And then the final year of the science degree and I met Paul who was even then diffident, shy, a man of mystery and gorgeous looking. He made no secret of the fact that he was a theological student with years of study still and marriage was

not even a minute speck on the horizon. But he was my man, and from that moment my goals for my part to play in the Kingdom of God on earth were aligned with his. I have spoken to several other clergy wives who had similar histories of long waits and remember—no living together, no sex before marriage. I was not aware then that I was jettisoning my independent journey of faith. I changed from planning to be a bacteriologist to a teacher because school holidays allowed for employment when you knew there was an impecunious life ahead, and children and marriage went together. I wonder now how all this was accomplished but we were young and idealistic. This was also 57 years ago and most of you cannot imagine the social set up women functioned in then. It produces disbelief. The women's movement in New Zealand was a way off and it was Bishops who drove this agenda.

We move on again... Extraordinary years with three people in the marriage—God, Paul and me and guess who won? I was fully involved in supporting Paul and his work, releasing him to be available and I doing meetings, greetings, feeding and child rearing etc. I wanted to be the very best wife I could be. It was a roled marriage and remember my life and church life were inextricably joined. But what great moments there were, even though it was all lived in tandem. My status was assumed and depended on Paul's. I had however, some space which I organised when the youngest daughter went to school. I began

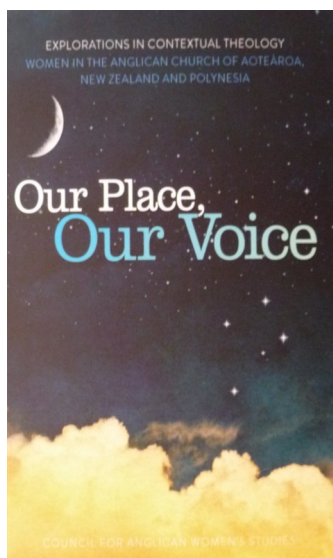
teaching at a convent in Napier and then later in Auckland even when Paul was Archbishop. If women or men raised their eyebrows to the hair line, it was not commented on in my presence. I had to do it for my sanity. I had colleagues and I was using my professional skills. It was precious time but squeezed in with everything else in an over full and exhausting life.

I move on again... The moment when Paul said he would be Governor General—it was a shared decision. I thought he would do it superbly but the Anglican Church and especially this Diocese was devastated, outraged, disappointed and felt abandoned and of course, in a way they were and that affected me too because I was part and parcel of his work. The depth of my grief startled me but it was the inevitable wake up for someone who had been living vicariously through another. In a way, married women can be a bit lazy and this was my moment of truth. Friends, organisations, social networks of all kinds all going and I had nothing to replace them. The excitement of the move and preparation of Government House took over and for a while this problem was shelved.

Once installed at Government House, I began to think. What about a Spiritual Director? The priest I asked was lost for words. What about the 30 Order of Franciscans? I went to a meeting but was treated as 'other', I felt I was a freak. In those days the office of Governor General was a bit separate. There needed to, in the opinion of those who knew, a certain separateness for the Office to function. People could not treat me as ordinary. But Paul all through the years, celebrated the Eucharist in the Franciscan chapel at Neligan House and in Wellington in the chapel of the Cathedral every Wednesday morning when we weren't travelling and I began to heal and I think he did too. As Paul said "God was alive and well outside the Church". Our church contacts informed some of our programmes and I had the continuum of my garden high above the house on the hill where I replanted bush, lay on the grass with my arms outspread (when it was dry or warm enough). Remember I liked solitude sometimes. I needed to get away from people. God in creation, imminent as well as transcendent and my garden gave me space and peace. Sir Tipene O'Regan said there were gardens there many years ago.

And so the years rolled by and we returned to church life completely in New York but I worked at my own things now in a poor parish near by that had a group of homeless people who used the parish buildings several times a week and also did some more study.

Remember, I spoke earlier of loving the outdoors, God in all of nature. We both did a series of pilgrimages to sites of saintly people of the past—Cuthbert, Bridget, Hilda of Whitby and Columba. Paul indulged me but I think enjoyed them too. After all he wore a copy of St Cuthbert's ring for over 40 years. I planned



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the pilgrimages for often when leisure arrived he was too tired. There was a wonderful moment when four of us waded in 'wellingtons' across slippery seaweed at low tide to an island in Portree Harbour with the ruins of a tiny chapel where St Columba had preached to the crowds who waded across also at low tide. That was on the Isle of Skye. But Iona was the jewel in the crown. People working in community and simple prayers, and music a bit like Taizé. That place spoke to me.

I move on again and I had the opportunity to go to a retreat which taught about Celtic spirituality. Again, the feeling of coming home. My Welsh and Scottish molecules were dancing inside me. I move on again to my husband's death and the gift of the tangi. Maori spirituality has never seemed out of place or strange to me with the spirit in all God's creation and the God-like very close to people. The veil between tipuna and the living quite thin at times. Part of that gift of tangi to me and my close family is also in the kawē mate—two for Paul. One has been and one to come at the end of this week in Waitara. The completion is the unveiling of the headstone close by. Maori allow for grieving and moving on very well.

Now the things that are very important to me are the simple prayers that can be learnt. The walking in the presence of God all through the day. The sense of pilgrimage, the value of work well done, social justice. The emphasis on the Trinity which

brings the Holy Spirit into prominence and the sense of blessing. Celtic spirituality has been a sort of buzz word and it became a bit fashionable but there is nothing magical, just a way of approaching my spiritual journey. I love the simple prayers with their emphasis on the Trinity. The special place of hospitality. Of journeying along a road with creation all around. The importance of community. I think Paul once said that the God of Creation is perhaps easier to believe in than the God of Community. We have to believe in and be part of a redeemed community and that takes the leap of faith. That makes the blessing so important to me. It is like a reinforcement each time. Celts had a special place for blessing. Not just done by priests but by any person in the name of God if there is a time of significance.

I visit a very elderly, frail couple from time to time. After one such visit, I got up to go, the man asked if he could walk me out to the gate and made our very slow way. At the gate he stopped, raised his hand and said, "God bless you Beverley", I felt warmed and privileged.

So that is my journey. No great moments but just steady evolution with the three components— the love and respect for God in Creation, the journey in the community of the redeemed with Paul beside me and the realization that every person must take responsibility for his or her own faith journey whatever form that takes.

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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the **Women's Studies Centre** was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.

**LEADERS LIKE LYDIA:**  
Theological Discourse in  
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**EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER:** *The Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general the WSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.*