

Introductory Talk, Diocese of the Murray Clergy Conference 2022

Kevin. Let me first say how we are both here and speaking with you. Lynley and I and Keith, your Bishop, have been friends for about 40 years. He and his parents, Bob and Avril, and his brother Brian and younger sister Deborah attended St Matthews Kensington where I was rector between 1975 to 1994. In 1992 in his first year at St Barnabas, Keith worked with me as a catechist, in modern language, a student minister, and he was often in our home and often talked with us both about ministry. Over the years we have kept in contact and seen each other periodically.

When Bishop Keith rang me, a few months ago asking me to speak at this conference to deal specifically with the question of the ordination of women, a very contentious matter for many years in the Diocese of the Murray, I told him he should ask someone 20 years younger but he did not change his mind. He said, you know more about this matter in the Aust church than anyone else and I trust you. Eventually, I reluctantly agreed to come, suggesting we include Lynley who has often spoken with me at clergy conferences in Aust and overseas. She is a trained as social worker and has worked for 40 years as a marriage counsellor and still sees the occasional couple. I said to him, her contribution will move the discussion from the academic and theological to how we live out our own lives in our homes as husbands and wives

Lynley has presented with me at conferences in Aust and overseas at least a dozen times. Always gone well. Gives some balance to my more academic input sessions. Besides our joint presentation Lynley on her own will explore the marriage relationship in a couple other sessions.

In this opening session we will both speak but be assured I will give you 4 academic lectures on the theological/biblical grounds for the ordination of women, giving you plenty of time to interact with me.

Now to introductions. First, about us as a couple.

Lynley: We have been married for 54 years, we were in full time parish ministry for forty years and we are still active in our church. We got married the week after Kevin finished his theological studies in 1968 and immediately after we went into a parish ministry.

We have four married grown-up children, one boy and three girls, and eleven grandchildren.

Kevin: I grew up in a nominal Christian home and my mum and dad were like most mums and dads in the 1950's, Dad went out to work, mum stayed at home and did the housework. Dad managed the money, cut the lawns and did the gardening. Mum deferred to dad; dad always drove the car.

At 21 converted and soon after decided to go into ministry. Night study for 2 years needed to get entry.

Lynley: Like Kevin grew up in a typical 1950s Aust family; Dad went out to work etc

Unlike Kevin I grew up in the church and taught SS from the age of 14.

My dad wanted me to leave school at 15 and go to a business College to be a shorthand typist.

I started social work studies while a secretary in the Shell company.

Began work as a probation officer.

Met Kevin at church.

After we were married, I ran the home and was a good clergy wife for 10 years. I then began part time university study, doing half a BA at Armidale Uni and then social work in Adelaide. For one of my placements, I worked with Joan Chataway at Anglicare, Adelaide, who asked me when I finished my studies would I come and work with her in marriage education and counselling.

Kevin: Studied at Moore College for 4 years – very driven student.

All told 40 years in parish ministry. Always worked side by side with Lynley. Lynley my biggest support.

I was a bit different to most clergy as I went on to do post graduate studies and began writing books - about 15 of them. I wrote because I wanted answers to questions facing me and the church and I always had the energy to do this. These questions troubling me included, what the Bible says on speaking in tongues, the church, church leadership, house churches, women in church leadership and the Trinity. When I was 50 awarded a doctorate for my scholarly writings.

I accidentally got in to debate about the ordination of women. I did my research Masters on Luke, the theologian. In this work I discovered Luke had the most positive view of women and their leadership abilities of any NT writer. When the debate on the ordination of women began in Australia in the early 1970s, I soon saw most of the opposition came from quoting St Paul, especially Eph 5:23, “the husband is the head of the wife”, and I Tim 2:11-12 women should not teach or exercise authority over a man.

Noticing how Jesus got little mention, except for noting he had 12 male apostles, I wrote a little article, published in 1977, “Jesus and Women,” pointing out how positive Jesus was about women. I got a very good hearing because parties had not formed – no one was quite sure what the Bible actually taught on the man-woman relationship.

However, things changed later that year when the bishop of Armidale, Clive Kerle, asked me to make a reply to two clergy who were totally opposed to the ordination of women and insisting on male leadership in the home and the church. This split the Synod right down the middle, with some clergy almost asking the Bishop to sack me. I had suddenly become famous.

In response to the enemies I now had I wrote a little book I titled, *Women and their Ministry*, published by the Catholic published Dove Communications in 1977.

This was widely read and soon I was getting invitations to write and speak all around the world. I have been invited to many Aust synods, in the Philippines, India, South Africa, England, and many times to the USA and ended up published 4 books and about 20 articles on this matter, all focusing on what the Bible says about men and women.

Lynley: We have both mentioned how we grew up in typical Australian post Second World War families – dad went out to work and earned the money, our mums stayed at home and did all the housework and child rearing. Dad was in charge.

Soon after we got married in 1968 Australian culture began to change in regard to women and marriage. We call it women’s liberation. There were reasons why this change happened and was so widely accepted.

First women’s education opportunities increased. Women finished high schooling and went to uni – Today 60% of graduates are women.

The Pill. We women could decide when or not to have a baby.

Women free to work, and most do. Most men like this because it brings in two incomes.

Many of the changes I have mentioned have made marriages more equal but none more so than women earning their own income.

In these more equal marriages decision making shared and men do more around the home.

We have lived through this change which has changed us. We like the new model of marriage.

Kevin: Let me now tell you first of all one thing we have learned over 54 years of marriage. The marriage relationship is a dynamic one that must cope with change if it is to thrive and grow.

I began marriage accepting the norms of my parents. I thought Lynley should do all the housework and child care, I would make all the big decisions, and I would manage the money. This caused some conflict and Lynley told me I was selfish. I needed to do more. The home was OUR home, the children were OUR children, the decisions that needed to be made impacted on US both.

Reluctantly I began to change. I realised that being selfish, thinking only of myself was exactly the opposite of what Paul says in 1 Cor 13 is the essence of love. We will talk about 1 Cor 13 later.

We also had a few upsets about money. I said OK, it is OUR money. I will put everything we own in our joint names and I will put all our money and what I earn each week in a joint account and you can take out anything you want.

Another change that occurred in our early years of marriage was that I was often bossy. I told Lynley what she should be doing and sometimes spoke harshly. She did not like this. Sometimes I made her cry. This made me feel bad. She is a strong, educated woman. At a good time one day, she said to me, "We need to work out conflict better. We will not always agree on everything and sometimes you won't think I am doing the right thing and I will think the same of you. We need to graciously talk these things over and listen to one another.

I tried doing this and it worked like magic. I tried hard never to speak sharply or be judgemental because Jesus warns against these very things and it has made our marriage so much better.

With these changes we were so much happier. You know the old saying, “Happy wife, happy life.”

As we were making these changes all the better marriages in Aust were making these changes.

In these comments I have been saying our marriages should be growing relationships. This is just like being a Christian. St Peter tells us that we “should grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18).

Just as we should grow as Christians individually, so we should grow as married Christian couples.

Lynley: When we began our marriage, I wanted to be the “good” clergy wife; to live up to the traditional expectations of the time. I made our home an open home, doing lots of entertaining, ran a Bible study, chaired the mother’s union, was active in the Sunday School and youth groups and sometimes visited with Kevin.

Today, most clergy wives work outside the home. They often have their own career. Our Vicar’s wife in Melbourne manages a woman’s fashion brand. She is a very likable young woman but does very little in the parish and doesn’t think she should. Being a pastor is her husband’s job.

I may be wrong, but I suspect a little bit of both models are present in most of your homes. You can tell in due course whether or not this is true in your marriage. No two couples will have the same story.

Kevin talked about changes in our marriage over the 40 years we were in parish ministry but may I add by saying, our relationship is still changing and has changed a lot since we both gave up full time work when were 66. We now spend more time together, enjoyed each other’s company more each day and our relationship became even more rewarding and equal.

Kevin. Let me finish by acknowledging how tough ministry can be. In my 40 years of ministry was continually involved in managing change in the church

1970’s onwards changed liturgy.

Then change in music, overhead projectors, etc.

Lay involvement.

Change in architecture.

Women in leadership and then ordination.

All caused conflict and conflict always very painful and hard to manage, however most churches were well attended and the churches were respected in the community.

We Australians saw ourselves as Christians, whatever that meant.

It is far more difficult and challenging to be a minister today, but for different reasons. We Christians have been marginalised in Aust society, we are viewed negatively and every year the number of people regularly attending church declines.

We are constantly told Aust is a multicultural society and Christianity is just one religion no better than any other, perhaps the worst!

This is the world in which you find yourself, and you have the challenge proclaim that Jesus is Good News.

I m sure we have given you enough to think about and you would like to make some response. It's over to you.