

# A PAGE FROM THE LONG AND AMAZING HISTORY OF ST. STEPHEN AND THE INCARNATION EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## Women's Ordination

# "Irregular" Ordinations at St. Stephen's

**Until 1976, women were not allowed to be priests in the Episcopal Church.** But pressure to allow women to be ordained had been growing for a decade. Two events at St. Stephen's Church were key in moving the Episcopal Church to approve women's ordination. One was the "irregular" ordination of four women to the priesthood.

On July 29, 1974, **eleven women were "irregularly" ordained** in



Philadelphia, an event that many people thought was a one-time event. But when four more women were ordained at St. Stephen's one year later, it became clear that the movement was unstoppable.

## 4 WOMEN BECOME EPISCOPAL PRIESTS

Ordained in Unsanctioned  
Service in Washington  
Led by Retired Bishop

By **KENNETH A. BRIGGS**  
Special to The New York Times

**WASHINGTON, Sept. 7 —** Four women were ordained to the Episcopal priesthood today in an unsanctioned service that appeared certain to intensify the protracted conflict over the issue of women's ordination.

The Right Rev. George W. Barrett, retired Bishop of Rochester, officiated at the two-hour rite at St. Stephen's and the Incarnation Parish here. The service was conducted outside the requirements of canon law, lacking the approval of the Bishop of the Washington Diocese.

A jammed sanctuary heard Bishop Barrett read from the liturgy: "I ask you now to declare your will that the ministry be conferred on them. Are they worthy?"

"They are worthy," the congregation shouted, then broke into loud, sustained applause.

Shortly after the 1975 ordination, the House of Bishops banned Bishop Barrett from acting as a minister for a period of time.

"It took the greatest of courage," said the Rev. Lee McGee. "He stood in very small company at that time and **endured censure for years.**"



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WASHINGTON POST

On September 7, 1975, **four women were ordained priest at St. Stephen and the Incarnation:** Lee McGee, Alison Palmer, Betty Rosenberg, and Diane Tickell.

McGee was a member of St. Stephen's. She, Palmer, and Rosenberg met at meetings of women deacons in the Diocese of Washington. The three decided to pursue ordination because **each had jobs that would not be jeopardized by violating church law.** They invited all other women deacons in the U.S. to join in; only Diane Tickell, a deacon in the Diocese of Alaska, accepted.

While he supported women's ordination in principle, the Rt. Rev. William Creighton, Bishop of Washington, was opposed to "irregular" ordinations. He instructed Washington clergy and lay people to not be at the ordination. However, **over 1,000 people attended.**



Bishop George Barrett, Alison Palmer, Betty Rosenberg, Lee McGee, and Diane Tickell, in the church office, prior to the service



Bishop Barrett ordaining Alison Palmer

After the "irregular" ordinations in Philadelphia, an unexploded smoke bomb was found under a pew. Because of **concerns about safety**, the four women made plans to leave St. Stephen's through a back door and complete the ceremony elsewhere should the service be interrupted. The service, however, was peaceful.



The Rev. Lee McGee blesses the congregation at the end of the service.

WIDENING THE CIRCLE THE CAMPAIGN FOR ST. STEPHEN'S