



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY



d March.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, welcomed over 80 female priests to Lambeth Palace today for a special service celebrating 25 years of women's ordination to the priesthood in the Church of England.

The guests included many women who were among the first to be ordained in 1994, some laypeople that were active in the campaign for the ordination of women, as well as ordinands and a range of other female clergy.

The very first woman to be ordained, the Revd Prebendary Angela Berners-Wilson, was in attendance. (The first cohort of women were ordained in alphabetical order.)

Women participating in the service ranged from bishops to ordinands. The Revd Dr Isabelle Hamley, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Chaplain, preached the sermon.

Five bishops attended the service: the Bishop of Derby, the Rt Revd Libby Lane; the Bishop of Sherborne, the Rt Revd Karen Gorham; the Bishop of Ripon, the Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley; the Bishop of Penrith, the Rt Revd Dr Emma Ineson; the Bishop of Dorking, the Rt Revd Dr Jo Bailey Wells, and the Bishop of Aston, the Rt Revd Anne Hollinghurst.

Archbishop Justin Welby welcomed guests to the service and gave the blessing.

The service, which featured music from St Martin's Voices, was recorded by BBC Radio 4 and **will be broadcast at 8:10am** on Sunday 3rd March.

In her sermon, the Revd Dr Isabelle Hamley, reflected on the gift of Jesus that Mary and Joseph were given, and the risks and responsibilities of nurturing it. "Let us cherish this gift where it is public and obvious, and where it is hidden, private and yet equally powerful. Together, may we witness to the gift that lives in us, and the God who has called us to follow him," she said.

Speaking at the service, Archbishop Justin said: "Many of those here today have been pioneers as they work out what it means to be an ordained woman in the Church of England – not just for themselves and their communities, but for the whole of the Body of Christ. Today let us bear witness to those who paved the way in 1994, as well as upholding those whose way into ministry has been opened up since.

The first group of women were ordained to the priesthood in Bristol Cathedral on 12th March 1994. Bishop Barry Rogerson, who presided at the ordination, sent this message today, which was read out at a reception after the service: "Over the last twenty five years I have observed and received the ministry of women in parishes, but also in chaplaincies; hospitals and hospices, schools, universities and prisons and know what an innovative and positive contribution women priests have made. Perhaps today we might give a thought for all those women, worldwide whose vocations to the priesthood have still been neither recognised nor tested."

The Revd Prebendary Angela Berners-Wilson said: "It was an amazing thing to be – by a few seconds – the first woman to be ordained to the

priesthood in the Church of England. Today I've been reflecting with great gratitude on those other women who were priested alongside me, and the many hundreds of others since.

"For 25 years it has been the greatest privilege to finally be able to live out my calling, after a 15-year probationary period first as a Deaconess then as a Deacon. Today has been a day to celebrate all the women priests who have been enabled to grow into the fullness of who God has called them to be as bearers of Christ's good news for the world."

[Download the order of service from today's service at Lambeth Palace](#)

3 min read

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