

### Elizabeth Ferard 1825-1883

First deaconess in the Church of England



Born in February 1825, Elizabeth Catherine Ferard was a deaconess credited with

revitalising the deaconess order in the Anglican Communion at a time when women had very little influence in the church.

After her mother's death in 1858 she travelled to Germany to stay at Kaiserwerth where a new order of Deaconesses had been established in 1836 for nursing and teaching, and although the trip was unsatisfactory in many ways she was determined that something similar could and should be done in London. She had caught the zeitgeist: the idea of creating an order of Deaconesses in the Church of England was being discussed in the same year at the Convocation of Canterbury. Upon her return to England Elizabeth evidently secured the support of the Bishop of London and, perhaps equally importantly, managed to get funding from a relative the Revd. Thomas P. Dale.

In 1861 Elizabeth was able to open the North London Deaconess Institution at North London Deaconess House in Burton Crescent

near King's Cross - and on 18 July 1862 she became, by the laying on of hands by Bishop Tait, the Bishop of London (and later Archbishop of Canterbury), the first deaconess in the Church of England. She is reported to have been very unwilling to take a leading role in this way but her determination and faith enabled her to overcome her shyness.

Because of ill health Elizabeth had to retire in 1870, but she later ran a convalescent home for children in Redhill. She died at 16 Fitzroy Square in London on 18 April 1883. Her legacy remains to this day; through her efforts were founded two Church of England institutions: the Community of St. Andrew (the final name (1943) of the North London Deaconess Institution, which in 1868 had become the London Diocesan Deaconess Institution), and Order of Deaconesses. Although the Order was closed to new entrants in 1987, this was because women were then admitted to the order of deacon, and subsequently priest (1994) and bishop (2015). One wonders what Elizabeth would have made of these developments for which she blazed an early trail. In some branches of the Anglican communion other than the Church of England, the Order of Deaconesses remains open to women.

## St Cross Newsletter

July 2025

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### *The Vicar writes.....*

I write this letter having been to our Mother Church of Chester Cathedral this morning for the ordination service for deacons at which, of course, our new curate Revd Mike Duncombe was ordained to the diaconate. Mike will continue his ministry, formation and training with us and, God-willing, will be ordained as a priest next year.

It does seem to me in the structure of the ministry of the church that there are so many blurred boundaries or overlaps between the various ministerial roles of pastoral worker, reader, deacon and priest, but at the heart of it all it is about telling the story of God's love for the world in Jesus, in word and action.

Deacons were first ordained into the ministry of the church when the apostles were unable to cope with the demands being placed upon them (Acts 6). In a rapidly growing church seven were chosen to support the apostles in their ministry of teaching and preaching. Seven men of good standing full of the spirit and wisdom were selected. Having been chosen, they stood before the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. Many of us would struggle to name these seven deacons but the most well-known is surely Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen, we are told, was full of grace and power doing great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6.8).

This year at Chester saw a small intake of deacons to be ordained, and by coincidence seven in number. This is perhaps a consequence of a smaller number of people being available to respond to God's call in Christ to this ministry currently. Nonetheless these seven people have all responded with faithfulness to that heavenly call to serve Christ in the church.

After the service someone said to me 'it's a bit like re-living your wedding day'. And that is true. I've had the joy and privilege in recent years of overseeing Simon Gowler's training and formation and now Mike Duncombe is here with us. The feeling I experienced today walking down in the silence of the cloister and then waiting to enter the church was the same feeling I experienced twelve years ago at my own deaconing service. One might say those feelings were in fact a spiritual experience, feelings which left me with a sense of wonder and joy. Despite what we may perceive, see or feel, is happening in the church, the Spirit of God is still at work calling people to the Lord's service.

Ordination and licensed ministry is not for everyone, in fact it is for a relatively small number of people, but God has a purpose for each and every person in their lives to fulfil. I am hugely grateful for the great number of people who have helped me along life's way, be that my family, the church at all levels, those who taught and encouraged me in my formative years, and for those who helped me overcome physical challenges in recent years through the gift of medicine.

For our parish of St Cross to be one of just seven from Chester Diocese to be chosen this year as the training parish for one of the deacons is an honour. Alongside that comes the responsibility for us all to enable Mike to fulfil his calling to the priesthood, and together with him in mutual flourishing to play our part in the mission and outreach of the church.

Yours, in Christ

*Paul*



*Revd Mike receives the  
Laying on of Hands by  
Bishop Mark*



*Revd Mike with Revd Paul and Revd  
Clair Jaquiss from All Saints', Hale  
Barns*

## [Diary for July](#)

### **Mondays**

**2-4pm Monday Together in the Parish Room**

Fellowship, refreshments and activities supporting the work of the church.

### **Sunday 6 July**

After the 10am service of Morning Worship refreshments and a special cake will be served to welcome our new curate, Revd Mike Duncombe.

### **Tuesday 8 July**

**7.30pm Lectio Divina (on Teams)**

### **Thursday 24 July**

**2pm Mothers' Union**

*There were no Occasional Offices in June*