

**WORSHIP MATERIAL TO MARK THE CENTENARY
OF THE INDUCTION OF GERTRUDE VON PETZOLD
AS ENGLAND'S FIRST WOMAN MINISTER
(29 September 1904)**



The Reverend Gertrude von Petzold (1876-1952) was the first woman to be accepted for training for the ministry in England, then subsequently appointed as minister. This source material has been prepared to encourage Unitarian congregations and others to mark and to celebrate the achievement of this pioneering woman and those who followed in her wake.

*Published by the Worship Panel of the General Assembly of Unitarian
& Free Christian Churches (2004)*

Putting Gertrude von Petzold into context

Unitarians in England often take pride in claiming that theirs was the first denomination to open its ministry to women. The induction of the **Rev. Gertrude von Petzold** into the ministry of Narborough Road Free Christian (Unitarian) Church, Leicester, in 1904, supports this claim. However, this event does need putting into context.

Nearly 25 years earlier **Caroline Soule**, the widow of a Universalist minister, was ordained into the ministry of the Universalist Church in Glasgow. Here as elsewhere the Universalists had close contact with Unitarians, and Caroline Soule preached at the Dundee Unitarian Church and had pastoral oversight there during Henry Williamson's absence in the States.

In the United States, of course, the story of women in the ministry starts even earlier, when the Congregationalists ordained **Antoinette Brown** in 1853, though after a few years she turned Unitarian. She inspired **Olympia Brown**, ten years younger and not related, to persevere in her effort to enter the Universalist ministry which she achieved in 1863. This pioneering work bore fruit in the 1880s and 1890s, especially in the missionizing work of the *Iowa Sisterhood*. Two of the Unitarian ministers centrally involved in this were the **Rev. Florence Buck** and the **Rev. Marion Murdoch**, worth mentioning because they were 'occasional students' at Manchester College, Oxford in 1892.

Before returning to Manchester College, Oxford, mention must be made in this summary account of **Martha Turner's** appointment to the ministry of Melbourne Unitarian Church in 1873. Florence and Rosamund Hill heard her there and were much impressed, and when Martha Turner came to Britain, after she had resigned the Melbourne pulpit in 1883, she preached in many English and Scottish pulpits.

In England from the 1870s, when Frances Power Cobbe and Anna Swanwick had almost forced their way into James Martineau's classes, there was increasing pressure for women to have the right to attend college lectures at Manchester College. It has been suggested that it may have been the dearth of (male) students which helped the progress of women. Be that as it may, in 1892 not only were Florence Buck and Marion Murdoch students, but Mrs Humphrey Ward (sic) was invited and 'kindly consented' to lecture on Priscillian.

No doubt all this helped to prepare the ground for Gertrude von Petzold. Born in Prussia in 1876 she had come to Britain because she believed it offered her as a woman a better opportunity for higher education. Seven years later, having collected degrees from St Andrew's and Edinburgh Universities, she was accepted for full-time theological training at MCO. She was a cause celebre even before her appointment at Leicester and in great demand, being for instance invited to preach at the opening of the Aberystwyth church, probably at the instigation of Frances Power Cobbe.

This didn't open the flood gates for women, and it wasn't until 1915 that another woman – **Margaret Crook** – began her ministerial training at Manchester College.

This summary has been edited from *Growing Together*, the Report of the Unitarian Working Party on Feminist Theology, published by the General Assembly in 1985.

Gertrude von Petzold – a summary biography

She was born in Thorn, East Prussia (now Torun, the birthplace of Copernicus, in Poland), her father being an officer in the Prussian army, while her mother instructed her thoroughly in the Lutheran catechism. After teacher training, she reacted against the limited role of women in Germany and the narrowness of Lutheran dogma. Aged 19, she made her way first to St Andrews University in Scotland (1895-7), then to Edinburgh University, where she spent four years, and then she became the first woman to train and qualify for the ministry of religion in England. Despite the notion that churches would be unlikely to accept a woman as minister, the Free Christian (Unitarian) church in Leicester with no less than seven male candidates in the offing invited her unanimously to be their minister.

Eloquent in the pulpit and challenging on many a suffragist platform, Gertrude von Petzold grew quickly in reputation – even her photo was sold on the streets of Leicester. She visited Berlin in 1906, lecturing on liberal Christianity, and conducted a German service in the American church there, the first woman ever to do so. In 1907 she was the only European woman delegate to attend the Fourth International Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston.

In 1908 she left Leicester for the United States and allied herself to a group of radical Unitarian women ministers working in Iowa and Illinois; she deputized for the Rev. Mary Safford as chaplain in the state legislature in Des Moines. On returning to England in 1910, she became minister at Small Heath in Birmingham attracting large congregations and was much in demand as a speaker, notably at King's Weigh House Church in London, where she lectured on Luther, Calvin, and Wycliffe; and in 1911, on another visit to Germany, when she preached at the Lutheran church in Bremen and at the Swiss Reformed churches in Zurich and Basel, speaking generally on the ministry of women. She freely associated with religious liberals of all denominations, even suggesting that Unitarians could sometimes be too conservative!

By now the First World War was in progress and her application for naturalization had lapsed because of her time in America. Despite the support of civic leaders in Leicester and Birmingham both for her and 'her friend and helper' Rosa Widmann, her application and Rosa's were turned down and, though stating a preference for the USA, they had to return to Germany where they came close to being interned. There, at length (1917), she became pastor of the Free Evangelical, non-credal congregations in Königsberg and Tilsit – the only free churches in East Prussia where she tried also to establish such a church in Memel – before taking a PhD and becoming a lecturer in English at Frankfurt University, the first woman to achieve this status in Germany.

As a committed internationalist she promoted Anglo-German relations whenever possible, even in the first year of the First World War before she was deported, and anti-German feeling resulted in arson at the Small Heath church. Between the wars she made several trips to England, offering to conduct services where invited, being motivated by the desire to promote reconciliation, for which she was well qualified owing to her unique background. And soon after the Second World War she wrote an article for *The Inquirer* (9 Aug 1947) entitled 'English refugees in Germany', having observed among the bombed ruins of Frankfurt the shell of the Weissfrauenkirche, which in the sixteenth century had sheltered a congregation of English refugees of the reformed faith who had fled persecution in the reign of Mary Tudor. They found there 'a large-minded benevolence and understanding which would never be wiped out of the hearts of the English people' (*Christian Register*, Sept 1952), symbolized by a silver goblet presented by the English community in 1558 which still testifies to the fact. Gertrude von Petzold saw it as a significant reminder of the deep-rooted associations between England and Germany.

Her large sympathies remained clear at the time of her death in 1952, when she was devoting her energies to the cause of refugees then flocking into West Germany from eastern Europe. She died at Bad Homburg, near Frankfurt, West Germany, on 14 March 1952. Her involvement as a woman in liberal religious developments in Britain, Germany, and America in the first half of the twentieth century, and in the women's movement, especially with regard to suffrage, earns her a niche of no little significance and interest.

A more detailed account of her life is to be found in the *New Dictionary of National Biography* and in the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* (1997)

Gertrude von Petzold – in the words of others

I was a student at MCO at the same time as Gertrude von Petzold when the other male students refused to have her sitting at the refectory table with them, so I championed her and talked them round so that she was able to eat with the rest of them; I supported the suffragettes as she did. (Fred Hankinson)

We recognize the courage of her who tonight breaks a perverse and mischievous tradition. (R A Armstrong on her acceptance into the Unitarian ministry)

It may be that there is a delicacy and peculiarity in the ethical note struck by women writers (Bronte, Gaskell, Eliot, Ward) and might not women have special qualities for ministry, considering that there are some 100,000 sermons delivered every Sunday by men! (Joseph Wood at her induction)

After Sunday School, she came back to the parsonage for tea and we played in the garden and I pushed her on a swing. A new dimension seemed to have opened up, though I never saw her again. (Catherine Herford after Gertrude's visit to Whitefield for 'Sunday School Sermons')

My mother Grace when she was about 15 was travelling on the top deck of a tramcar in Leicester with a boy acquaintance, when Gertrude von Petzold arrived. Miss Petzold not only upbraided her for travelling with a boy but reported young Grace to her mother. (Barbara Monk)

Miss von Petzold was strikingly beautiful. Every Sunday afternoon she conducted a 'Men's Meeting' and the Narborough Road Church was filled with men sitting out in the vestibule where her clear diction could be heard by all. My mother remembered that the topic of conversation throughout the week would be the address given by Miss Petzold at the Men's Meeting. (Horace Balding)

A curiously fascinating personality, she has slightly aquiline, clear-cut features, a wealth of dark hair rests upon a broad brow and her dark expressive eyes impart earnestness to her oratory. There is something ascetic in her bearing which lends conviction to every word she utters. (Christian Life reporter)

Gertrude von Petzold has done more than anyone to clear away prejudice against Unitarianism in Leicester. At first people came out of curiosity, but it was her earnest spirituality that made them stay. (member of the Leicester congregation, 1908)

Miss von Petzold is one of the most brilliant women speakers of the day, a scholar of repute and – I think – the only ordained minister of her sex in this country. (R J Campbell, 1911)

She caused quite a stir in the town and great interest was taken in the services and many excellent tributes were paid to the first woman minister by the public and the press. She had a beautiful personality and seemed to attract people of all conditions ... and sometimes we wished the crowds would keep away as our own members had difficulty in finding seats at the services. (Clara Barton speaking on the history of the Narborough Road Church, in 1926)

Like Ramsay MacDonald, she was democratic in theory but autocratic in spirit. (in The First Woman Minister by Agnes Clark)

I had anticipated a masculine lady, with masculine manners, in semi-masculine dress. Instead I caught glimpses ... (of) a pale, spiritual, classically-featured face, whose pallor was emphasized by the dark mass of black hair resting above the wide, white brow ... a sad, sweet, serious face; a graceful, gracious presence full of dignity and charm. The voice too was sad – a rich, clear voice, with a plaintive note underlying and running through all its modulations; in this sentence hardly discernible ... in the next dominant. I have not heard better elocution ... Complete absorption in her subject, an utter absence of affectation, consuming earnestness, and a cleaving sincerity marked the preacher's discourse. (from the First Woman Minister by Agnes Clark, a reporter's description for the Daily News)

From Her Own Words

I always loved the Bible. As a child it opened to me a world of dreams and yielded abundant nurture to my imagination ... As a little girl I wrote spiritual songs and through my mother, who had had many sad experiences in life, I learned to concentrate my emotions in the realm of the religious ... By my 18th year, no sooner had I left seminary but I became aware how inadequate my training had been and the burning desire arose in me to improve my intellectual culture – yes, to begin it all over again ... So I decided, briefly and quickly, to proceed to England, which had long recommended itself to me as a land of freedom ... Ever since I had left school I had begun to doubt the traditional forms of Christianity ... I had especially arrived at the conclusion that many of the biblical stories could not possibly be understood literally ... I had therefore to undertake a long period of preparation and I entered upon it with the courage of youth ... The study itself, the free fellowship in life and thought, the manifold incitements of the academic career left me little time to entertain material considerations as to my future ... I sought for truth and the true content and aim of life ... At the same time the determination had arisen within me to dedicate myself, if it were possible, to the practical work of ministry ... Having myself struggled up to perfect freedom in religious matters, I felt that only in such a free atmosphere could I pursue my chosen vocation.

*This prerequisite I found in the Free Christian Church of Leicester, one of the congregations belonging to the Unitarian fellowship, which requires of its ministers and its members alike only the worship of God and the service of man in the spirit of Jesus Christ. I here entered the service of a congregation which has no binding dogmas or creeds, no consisteries, synodal authorities and the like, but is conjoined only through the genuine, intimate relationship of religious feeling and Christian endeavour. (from a Berlin newspaper, in *Forty Portraits & Biographical Sketches* for the International Congress in Boston, 1907)*

The early Church put women on the same spiritual level with men, but asceticism and priestcraft reduced them to quasi-bondage, silenced their prophecy and decried their service. Let the Church of the twentieth century return to them their right to prophesy and minister. (from an address given at the International Congress in Boston, 1907)

There is no work in the world, except perhaps the slaughtering of other people, that a woman cannot do as efficiently as a man, if she is given the same training and opportunity. (interview in 1910)

Ours is a gospel of progress, evolution and spiritual development and the main question is: How do liberal churches stand with regard to the great moral issues of the day? Our members are apt to be conservative with regard to such questions and our ministers need to exercise the freedom to speak their whole minds. (Midland Union meeting, 1911)

George Dawson was a man who fought for freedom and suffered – his prayers were such as to break the heart, prayers that are needed now. He had succeeded in bringing together Trinitarians, Unitarians, Baptists, Methodists, Swedenborgians, Churchmen, Agnostics and avowed Atheists. We must try likewise. (address given at the George Dawson – a predecessor of Gertrude's – anniversary service of 1912)

*I am utterly opposed to Germany when it comes to the war, as a believer in the brotherhood of man, so I would be regarded as an alien there ... I do not want to be interned and I cannot apply for exemption because I do not want exemption. I want naturalization. For this I have applied twice, and as this is denied me, I willingly bow to the powers that be. I am, as I have always been, an enthusiastic supporter of the British Constitution and of British ideals. I intend to be a student – ie. in Germany – only until I can return to my flock. (30 July 1915, appealing for naturalization)**

She belonged to those very special people whose distinguishing character trait was a passionate even fanatical desire for truth and who were always ready to become part of a more highly developed civilization, progressing from one level to a higher one: in the words of Nietzsche – 'only the person who is willing to change is fit to be part of my family'. (from a long and learned paper on Harriet Martineau, 1941)

* In December 1914, she had written to the *Inquirer* appealing on behalf of the 30,000 alien internees in Britain.

BRITISH UNITARIAN WOMEN MINISTERS

A list of Unitarian women ministers. The date given generally indicates when the name first appeared under the category 'minister' in the GA directory (though some were ministers in all but name before this), followed by her principal pulpits and posts in the ministry, and how many years of active service. Most of these women retained their ministerial status, but a few left the ministry or went on to other things.

1. GERTRUDE VON PETZOLD – 1904 – Leicester (Narborough Rd), Birmingham (Waverley Rd) – 10yrs
2. HELEN PHILLIPS – 1916 – Nottingham & Ilkeston, Carlisle, Newbury, Moseley & Tamworth, Dundee, Poole, Postal Mission – 36yrs
3. MARGARET CROOK – 1918 – Norwich – 2yrs
4. ROSALIND LEE – 1919 – Treorchy, Melbourne, Leicester (Narborough Rd), London (Hackney), South Wales (district minister), Stourbridge – 34yrs
5. WILNA CONSTABLE – 1921 – Warwick, Auckland, Vancouver, Cape Town – 20yrs
6. ADA TONKIN – 1924 – Dewsbury, Victoria BC, Vancouver, St Helens – 10yrs
7. GRACE MEWHORT – 1925 – Banbury, Boston, Carlisle, Nantwich & Crewe – 22yrs
8. CONSTANCE HARRIS – 1925 – London (Bethnal Green), Birmingham (Fazely St.), Aberdare, Sidmouth, Derby – 27yrs
9. BARBARA THOMAS – 1926 – Cheltenham, Cirencester, Gloucester – 31yrs
10. JOYCE DAPLYN – 1926 – London (Golders Green) – 5yrs
11. ETHEL KAY – 1927 – Whitby, Warwick, London (Stepney), Richmond & Acton, Dover – 26yrs
12. MARGARET BARR – 1928 – Rotherham, Khasi Hills (Assam) – 45yrs
13. LILIAN PRESTON – 1932 – Choppington, Newcastle upon Tyne, Birkenhead, Horwich – 13yrs
14. ROSAMUND BARKER – 1933 – Malton, Gloucester, Tavistock, London (Stratford), Postal Mission – 28yrs
15. MARJORIE EASTON – 1935 – London (Kilburn), Yeovil – 8yrs
16. MABEL BEAMES – 1936 – Chichester, Guildford, Godalming – 34yrs
17. ELSPETH VALLANCE – 1939 – Salford, Urmston – 9yrs
18. WINIFRED BROWN – 1943 – Ipswich – 3yrs
19. JOYCE HAZELHURST – 1953 – Horwich, Birmingham (Waverley Rd), Tamworth, Birmingham (Kingswood), Oldbury – 24yrs
20. ANNE McCLELLAND – 1962 – Padiham, Accrington, Bury & Ainsworth, London (Bethnal Green), Richmond & Putney – 30yrs
21. VERONA CONWAY – 1963 – Lancaster – 10yrs
22. JUDITH WALKER-RIGGS – 1964 – Warrington, Reading, London (Hampstead) – 10yrs (in UK)
23. JOAN EVANS – 1965 – Leicester (Narborough Rd) – 15yrs
24. MARGARET DICKIN – 1965 – Crewkerne – 3yrs
25. FLORENCE WHITBY – 1968 – Cirencester, Malvern, Cotswold Group – 4yrs
26. DAPHNE ROBERTS – 1971 – Manchester (Failsworth), Liverpool (Hope St), Gateacre – 23 yrs
27. PAT SHAW – 1971 – Manchester (Wythenshawe), Manchester (Gorton), Lincoln Group, Stalybridge, Mossley – 27 yrs (2004)
28. DENISE BOYD – 1975 – Accrington & Padiham, Manchester (Cross St & Manchester District Minister), Evesham, Cheltenham & Gloucester – 22yrs
29. PENNY JOHNSON – 1976 – West Midland Group, Dean Row, Hale & Styal – 22yrs
30. JOY CROFT – 1978 – London (Lewisham), Norwich & Great Yarmouth, Glasgow – 24 yrs (2004)
31. CAROL BURROWS – 1980 – Aberdeen, Cotswold Group, Maidstone & Dover, Gateacre, Horwich, Lytham St Annes – 20 yrs (2004)
32. HELEN CAMPBELL – 1980 – Banbury – 10yrs
33. LENA COCKROFT – 1981 – Cairncastle & Glenarm, Ballymoney, Downpatrick – 23 yrs (2004)
34. ANN LATHAM – 1983 – Todmorden & Oldham, Manchester (Chorlton), Manchester (Failsworth), Manchester District Minister – 17 yrs
35. PAT WOMERSLEY – 1983 – Torquay, Plymouth, Cullompton – 10yrs
36. GABRIELLE BENNETT – 1984 – Ashton-in-Makerfield – 7yrs
37. CELIA MIDGLEY – 1984 – Eccles, Altrincham & Urmston – 20yrs (2004)

BRITISH UNITARIAN WOMEN MINISTERS (continued)

38. ANNE WICKER – 1986 – Shrewsbury & Wolverhampton, Aberdeen – 12yrs (2004)
 39. ANN PEART – 1986 – London (Lewisham), London (Golders Green), Manchester (Gorton), UCM Principal – 18yrs (2004)
 40. BRENDA CATHERALL – 1990 – Eccles – 12yrs (2004)
 41. ELIZABETH BIRTLES – 1992 – Trowbridge, Swindon & Bath, Croydon – 12yrs (2004)
 42. JOHANNA BOEKE – 1994 – London (Kensington), Godalming & Horsham, Worthing – 8yrs
 43. CELIA CARTWRIGHT – 1998 – Rochdale – 6yrs (2004)
 44. MARGARET KIRK – 1998 – York & Whitby – 6yrs (2004)
 45. LINDY LATHAM – 1998 – Lincoln, Boston & Kirkstead – 6yrs (2004)
 46. BERYL ALLERTON – 1999 – Bolton (Chorley New Road) & Whitefield – 5yrs (2004)
 47. JO-ANN LANE – 2000 – Richmond – 4yrs (2004)
 48. JANE BARTON – 2001 – Brighton & Worthing – 3yrs (2004)
 49. KATHY PACKER – 2002 – Crewkerne – 2yrs (2004)
 50. JUNE PETTITT – 2002 – Hull & Sheffield (Fulwood) – 2yrs (2004)
 51. JEAN McNEILE – 2004 – Padiham
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The fifty women listed above who have followed Gertrude von Petzold into the British Unitarian ministry each have their own story and achievement, in most cases well worth the telling. Congregations which have experienced or are experiencing women's ministry – and by now that probably applies to the majority – may like to explore those stories as part of this celebration. About 30 of these ministers are happily still with us and their story is more easily accessible, but about 20 have died and their stories may need to be researched through chapel histories or collective memories. Among these were some remarkable women and below a few suggestive leads are offered.

MARGARET BARR'S extraordinary ministry in the Khasi Hills of India spanned 37 years, up to her death in 1973, and she was the first woman to deliver the GA Anniversary Sermon in 1963; **MABEL BEAMES** ministered for 34 years at Godalming; **WILNA CONSTABLE**, whose career was closely linked with that of her minister husband William, had notable ministries in Auckland, Vancouver and Cape Town, following her first ministry at Warwick; **MARGARET CROOK** became minister at the prestigious Octagon Chapel, Norwich, in 1918, before emigrating to the United States where at Smith College she became a lecturer in Divinity and a scholar of considerable repute, her *Women and Religion* becoming a seminal book in its field; **JOYCE DAPLYN** was a strong and influential advocate of women's ministry and the conference she inspired at Golders Green in 1926 was a very significant and bold initiative to this cause (tragically she died aged 32); **MARGARET DICKIN** of Crewkerne trained at the Slade School of Art and attended the first course for clergy in psychotherapy at the Tavistock Institute; **CONSTANCE HARRIS** was 'Tate Missionary Fellow' at Bethnal Green; **ETHEL KAY** was a pacifist, a strong supporter of the League of Nations, and a keen supporter of adult education; **ROSALIND LEE**, a strong internationalist, became district minister in South Wales, was a notable benefactor to the National Trust (at Kinver Edge and the Gower Peninsula), gave the address at the National Conference in 1923 and was appointed GA President in 1940; **GRACE MEWHORT** was a pacifist, an enthusiastic Esperantist, a vegetarian and an opponent of blood sports; **HELEN PHILLIPS** became 'senior woman minister' in England in 1916, Gertrude von Petzold having returned to Germany; **BARBARA THOMAS**, a JP and a Socialist with strong concerns for the elderly and for children, ministered at Cheltenham for over 30 years; **ADA TONKIN** became 'Inspector of the Women's Protectorate Division of the Vancouver Police' in 1929 during her husband's ministry in that city and just prior to her own.

Readings or Sermon Material

In 1908, three of Gertrude von Petzold's sermons under the title *The Higher Life* were published in Manchester. They are edited here as possible readings or as part of an address.

1. The Servant of Yahweh

Having differentiated the First from the Second Isaiah, the latter prophesying from Babylon to bring comfort to the exiled Jews there, she then focuses on the four 'Servant of Yahweh' passages (perhaps a Third Isaiah), affirming absolute trust in God despite their suffering, persecution and ignominy. She continues:

It is this, the old problem, which exercised the Hebrew mind constantly ... culminating in that agonizing cry: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' But there is an answer to this question ... It is this: that if we suffer in the pursuit of our life-work, of that which we consider good and right; if we suffer for the sake of principle and are prepared to risk everything for that principle, loss of outward goods, of position, influence, taking upon ourselves slander, shame, ignominy, death if need be; then our suffering beareth fruit unto life ... not for ourselves only, but for others also, for the generation that now is, and maybe for untold generations to come. Is it not the good and brave men and women, who, regarding life as a service, as a Divine mission, stake everything on the exercise of that service and the fulfilment of that mission – is it not those men and women whom the world has persecuted and stoned, has reviled, humiliated and hunted to death? ... We will learn from the greatest men and women of history that we can only make our lives sublime and a blessing to others, if we are prepared to risk everything in the pursuit of a righteous principle ... however poor be our station, let us remember that we all live in God's sight, that we must measure ourselves by the standard of Jesus ... that sorrow and suffering, maybe persecution, will come to all of us, but when they do come, may we be able to echo the words of the psalmist: 'Surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God.'

2. The Cross of Christ

Her text is: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.' (Luke) She reflects upon the difficulties of knowing the simplest facts of Jesus' life because the gospels are so interwoven with poetic and legendary elements, yet affirms the ideal humanity revealed in his character; and while acknowledging the intellectual difficulties of belief in God recognizes, in the great natural laws of the universe on the one hand and in human aspiration on the other, evidence of the Divine mind. She goes on:

Study the religions of the world, hearken devoutly to the psalms of the East and to the songs of the West, kneel silently in the temple of the Buddhist, join in the worship of the Jewish synagogue, or listen to the prayers of the Christian Church; in its essence all worship is one, for all religion is one, for all worship, all religion leads to God. In whatever varying forms the pious souls of humanity have sought and found God, what matters it? For as all language is symbolic, is more or less the imperfect expression of our thoughts and feelings, so the names also we give to God ... are at the best symbols only, imperfect human signs by which we know Him and know ourselves in Him ... Yet Jesus was sure that harmony with God can only be obtained through perfect love and that such love can never be free from pain, for it is never free from effort and failure; and the way of perfect love is the way of the cross ... reflecting the deepest law of life, wherein peace comes out of strife, harmony out of disorder and joy out of suffering, the crown after the cross ... what greater devotion, what deeper consecration than in the life of Jesus?

She concludes her sermon by quoting the first two stanzas of Frances Power Cobbe's hymn, see page 9 (*Hymns of Worship Revised* 377, tune: *Manchester College*). She very probably knew and admired Miss Cobbe who may well have influenced her acceptance as a student for the ministry at Manchester College, Oxford. Miss Cobbe died in 1904.

3. The Vision of Paul

First she analyzes the biblical account but soon comes to the conclusion that –

Every spiritual experience is in its essential nature a mystery, every yearning after things Divine, every prayer sent up to the Infinite, every aspiration after eternity ... We can only understand the Divine language if we attune our minds to it; only by looking for the essence and reality of things shall we become aware that there is a Divine Reality in all things ... and only if we listen to its voice in awed silence, review our lives in its light and shape our future in accordance with that Divine Reality ... And the poets – the inspirers and harmonizers of life – have given us moving and lovely pictures of the Divine Vision. We have such pictures in Browning's beautiful poems – especially in 'Abt Vogler' at the organ, pouring out his soul in melody, longing to build a structure of music as Solomon of old erected a palace with the help of ministering spirits, that his music shall touch the very heavens, and spirits come and dwell in the building of sound which he rears ... A poet or painter may be able to fix his inspirations, but the musician cannot. Yet he has the glorious gift of framing out of three sounds 'not a fourth but a star', that is the Divine idea. Only he cannot hold it; the palace of music, as soon as it has reached its highest point, vanishes. Nevertheless he has this assurance that He from whom all inspiration flows is there, ever working in the souls of men, rousing them to new efforts and consoling them over past failures. Therefore, if the artist only turns to Him, he will learn to take both success and failure as being in the great plan of things and working towards some ultimate goal:

Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe;
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear,
The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians know.

'God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear.'

Let us be amongst the few, let us gain the Divine Vision and never lose it; let us shape our lives in harmony with that vision. We may not have revelations like the Apostles of old, we may not have experiences as the Poets sing of, but we all have solemn times and seasons when the grandeur of the universe opens itself to our view, when we seem to be overwhelmed by the majestic harmony of the world in which we live, when the sea and air and sky seem to call forth in us infinite longings after a 'world not realized'.

Yes, and there are those moments when we withdraw within ourselves – in the hush and silence of the night – when we review the past, remembering our successes and failures. When we realize how we have fallen short of the ideals of our youth and aspirations of our manhood.

Ah, friends, here and now let us swear allegiance to the Vision beautiful, through doubt and sorrow, through success and failure – let us look to the Infinite and Eternal whom no one has seen at any time, except through the inspirations of beauty and the intuitions of the heart. Amen

God draws a cloud over each gleaming morn, Would we ask why?
It is because all noblest things are born In agony.

Only upon some cross of pain or woe God's son may lie;
Each soul redeemed from self and sin must know Its Calvary.

Yet we must crave for neither joy nor grief; God chooses best:
He only knows our sick soul's fit relief, And gives us rest.

More than our feeble hearts can ever pine For holiness,
The Father, in his tenderness divine, Yearneth to bless.

What though we fall, and bruised and wounded lie Our lips in dust?
God's arm shall lift us up to victory. In him we trust.

For neither death, nor life, nor things below, Nor things above
Shall ever sever us that we should go From his great love.

Frances Power Cobbe

Ten Suggestions for Creating a Service of Worship

1. Making use of pages 2-3, convey the background to Gertrude von Petzold's ministry, outlining her career and its impact. Use women's voices generally – some lengthy material (eg. page 3) could be photocopied for the congregation.
2. Using up to a dozen voices – male and female as appropriate (R A Armstrong & R J Campbell are male, the reporters and member can be female) – coming perhaps from different parts of the congregation, convey the impressions made on other people by Gertrude (page 4).
3. Gertrude's own words (page 5) should have a woman's voice and perhaps this page might be divided so that the purely autobiographical opening piece is separated from her more topical statements. Here, as elsewhere, *adapt and select the material to suit your situation and tradition.*
4. The list of women ministers (pages 6-7) is we hope comprehensive and accurate and should provide some leads that can be followed up by most congregations, so that something personally relevant can be explored and celebrated. There are numerous possibilities of course, but one idea would be simply to read out the names quite slowly putting a flower in a vase for each minister – you would need to prepare 51 flowers beforehand; this might come at the very beginning of the service. Another possibility would be to name the women ministers who have died and see if members of the congregation had any brief memories of them to be shared – this might come late in the service. Some leads are given on page 7.
5. The three edited sermons (pages 8-9) can be used in different ways: to provide a reading or two; one to be expanded perhaps and presented as a sermon; or to explore some of Gertrude's spiritual and theological beliefs and ideas and how relevant these may be for many of us today. Though inevitably dated to an extent, the sermons still come across powerfully and demonstrate the eloquence and conviction widely attributed to her.
6. Frances Power Cobbe was almost certainly an inspirational figure for Gertrude and the hymn reproduced on page 9 with its remarkable 10 4. 10 4. metre tune, Manchester College, by the late Harold Spicer, is surely worth the challenge for any congregation.
7. This would be an occasion, if hymns are to be sung, to choose from those written by women. Look up the indices in *Hymns for Living* and *Let Us Sing* where you are likely to find several that are suitable, including the four in *Hymns for Living* under 'Women's Rights and Awareness' – 216, 217, 218, 224, or elsewhere No.6. Is yours one of the congregations who have *never* enjoyed the challenge of singing these? Do you have anyone who could write a hymn or song for this occasion?
8. Women writers (ministers and lay) are not too badly under-represented in the productions of the worship panel – and its predecessors – since 1979 when *Reflections* was published. A good skim through these is likely to yield many suitable readings, prayers and meditations – *Crying Out Loud* may be especially good for this service.
9. Refer perhaps to one or two misogynistic statements:
Let your women keep silence in the church for it is not permitted unto them to speak. And if they are to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for women to speak in church. (Paul) A woman preaching is like a dog standing on its hind legs. It's not that it does it well but that it does it at all which is the wonder. (Johnson).
10. By happy coincidence, 2004 is also the bicentenary of Joseph Priestley's death, and he it is who might provide a sermon text or service title on this occasion: *The minds of women are capable of the same improvement and the same furniture as those of men.*

PRAYER OF CELEBRATION AND DEDICATION .

Celia Midgley

God of healing and of justice
we gather this day to give thanks for the ministry of women
which has enriched our witness for a century and more.

Today as we celebrate those whose names we have recorded
small in number still yet large in service
we honour also those who went before
who struggled for acceptance in seminar and at table.

God of justice and of wholeness
we set before you now our vision of a wider church
which generously fosters all its members' gifts.

Help us to hasten the day when women's ministry
nurtured and named, respected and recognized
stands equal with men's in every place
where your name is hallowed and your work is done.

Amen.

A HOSPITABLE TABLE

Tune: Cruger (76.76. D)

The table set before us
In hospitality
Leaves room for all conditions
Of people who'd be free
For those who seek a better way
Some call – perhaps divine –
Across divides of faith and kind
To enter, sit and dine.

In meeting-house and chapel
This freedom celebrate
In service and in ministry
Together we create
Community embracing
All those who enter there
Not crumbs from some high table
But ample food to share.

So now we would remember
And honour Gertrude's name
At first denied her table place
By men's consuming shame*
She broke perverse tradition
In England's staid domain
Alone a woman minister
A hundred thousand men.

And many since inspired by
Her courage and her tears
Brought special gifts of ministry
To grace this hundred years
And set a bounteous table
In hospitality
With room for all conditions
Of people who'd be free.

**Her fellow (male) students at college refused to have her sitting with them at the refectory table (see page 4)*



***Believe in your calling and believe it all the more
because you are a woman and in a sense a pioneer.***

(words addressed to Joyce Daplyn at her induction in 1926)

This material has been put together by *Keith Gilley* – who also composed the hymn (page 11) –
at the invitation of the GA Worship Panel.