

## **Revd Barbara Thatcher, 1925-2012**

"I am a natural Franciscan". Barbara Thatcher said this to me, with a tortoise on her lap, as I groaned to her about the difficulties of simple living, sharing, and so on. It was no rebuke, but a modest statement of fact, a confession.

Barbara was a bank manager's daughter from Bristol. The family later moved to Cardiff, where Barbara took a degree in banking and economics, obtaining first class honours. The head of her department then moved to Glasgow to what is now the Department of Economic History at Strathclyde University, and soon, in 1949, asked Barbara to join her as a Temporary Lecturer. She stayed there till she retired. She was a brilliant teacher, much admired by students and staff alike.

In 1967 Barbara and her mother together moved to Helensburgh, joining St Michael and All Angels' Church, at which she became a lay reader. She was one of the first women to fill such a post. Her sermons were electrically clear and often radical: her congregations of the 1980s were often startled by ideas of "Mother God" or were warned not to leave their brains in the car before entering the church. Many of those who heeded the warning were signing up for Barbara's classes for the Certificate of Christian Education ("Bishop's Certificate"); in these classes Barbara was inspirational, also ensuring that her quietest pupils could get a hearing.

In 1990 Barbara became one of the first women deacons, and in 1994, at the age of 69, she was ordained priest – the first ordination of women priests in Scotland. Barbara's ministry went well beyond Helensburgh and indeed the Anglican church. Before she was ordained Barbara was Convener of Helensburgh Christian Council, and served on ARCIC and in the Multilateral Conversations. She was in numerous committees in Glasgow Diocese covering faith, education and training for ministry, often as "the statutory woman" as she put it.

And of course the Third Order SSF. Barbara was professed, "blaming" Br Edward, in about 1978. Others who knew her were to follow her example. Indeed Helensburgh soon became a recognised local area of SSF. Barbara became Convener of Scotland Area, and later a Chaplain.

After the millennium, when she turned 75, Barbara decided to let go much of her church ministry. A few years later she fractured her hip, was taken to hospital, contracted MRSA which attacked her eyes, and within a few months became totally blind. She stayed in her home, uncannily navigating furniture, doors and garden paths while feeding the birds or picking dandelions for the tortoises. Despite such a dreadful misfortune Barbara was never bitter. She even managed to conduct a small group meeting after writing the main topics on a card and giving it to one of us as a prompt; she never needed the card.

Barbara gave away her beloved tortoises. Her surrounding Franciscan family whom she had supported were now able to support her. She died peacefully after a short illness. Her memory will continue to inspire us for many years to come.

Michael Blake