

## Sisters of faith gather to celebrate women in leadership



*Around 85 women gathered in the Victor Peters Suite in Hamilton on Tuesday night to celebrate being sisters of faith.*

**Brooke Robinson, *mnews.today*, 22 March 2019**

The Chair of the Diocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Council in the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, and Uniting Church Minister, Christine Shepherd, opened the night stating how poignant it was that we were gathering as women of faith just after the shootings in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The night began with women of three different faiths praying or reading from their holy book in front of the assembled crowd.

Ruth Jacobs from the Jewish tradition prayed a blessing over everyone, followed by the Catholic Diocese's Director of Pastoral Ministries, Teresa Brierley, who read from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Dianna Rah from the Muslim faith read from the Quran, "When afflicted with calamity, to Allah we belong and to him we will return."

The keynote speaker of the event was Anglican Assistant Bishop, Sonia Roulston. Sonia became a priest in 1995 and expressed her gratitude for the many women that have gone before, enabling her to serve God and his church as an ordained woman.

The topic of the talk was *Women of Faith in Leadership*.

"I was intrigued that I was being invited to be the Anglican speaker, at an event run under the umbrella of the Catholic Church, coordinated by a Uniting Church minister, at which women of all faiths were welcome and active in attending!" Sonia said in her opening remarks.

During her address, Sonia posed the following question, "haven't women often been the quiet leaders in ecumenical and interfaith life, because these movements are properly begun in relationships, in things like we are doing tonight?"

Sonia shared an extensive list of women from the bible who were instrumental in moving the history of Israel forward. These women appear in the Old and New Testaments and show great faithfulness to God.

Sonia then spoke of women who have influenced her in her own faith journey both directly and indirectly, including Mary Elizabeth Townsend who began the 'Girls Friendly Society' (GFS) in England in 1875. This movement guided young women into adulthood, and has continued in the Anglican faith. This was the group that deepened Sonia's faith as she grew up.

Sonia went on to share stories of four Anglican women leaders that influenced her directly, including her GFS leader, Kath Reynolds; female priests Beatrice Pate and Audrey Fuller; and the first female Anglican Archbishop, Kay Maree Goldsworthy.

Sonia spoke of the qualities that set these women apart as influential leaders. She observed they were motivated by their faith to make a change in the lives of others, and were responsive to God's call for them to become leaders.

"None were motivated by selfish cause or a need to be noticed," Sonia said.

"In fact, you have probably heard of none of them, which is the point. Faithful Christian leadership involves giving ourselves away."

"These women were also authentic and able to encourage other women in leadership. Not selfishly holding on to power, but giving it away for their own good and the good of others," Sonia said.

"We can all be women of Faith in Leadership, if we are willing to be faithful, to give our lives away for others, to be authentic and build others up in their leadership too."

Macquarie Life Church attendee Jenny Harris, said the night involved "wonderful company and food, a great speaker and sense of sisterhood between women from different faiths. It was inspiring to hear how the Anglican Church has more of a balanced leadership with woman as priests and bishops. The evening finished on a powerful note with everyone joining hands as we re-watched the evocative video 'Prayers for the mothers'."

The event was an initiative of the Diocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Council, which runs frequent events throughout the year. The next gathering is a morning tea at St Patrick's Primary School, Macquarie Street, Wallsend.