

## STORIES OF FAITH

Presented on our communion table today is a grand old book that holds the names of the members of the Collins Street Baptist Church. Dating all the way back to 1851, just eight years after the church was formally constituted, the book contains thousands of names, each one representing a story of faith that forms a part of our story today. This morning we will hear just six of those stories. We have not chosen them because they are the most important or impressive; simply because they represent the much larger story that we honour today. And recounting these stories today are six of our newest members.

**PETER VIRTUE**, a strong, tall, athletic Scot, was among the first Baptists to arrive in the settlement of Melbourne in 1839. He was widely respected as “a kind and loving Christian, solemn and dignified in manner.” He also had a dim view of frivolity, believing that laughter for an adult was sinful. Regardless, Virtue was an ardent evangelist, sharing Jesus with everyone he could. He was also a man of compassion. Not long after arriving in Melbourne, he witnessed a policeman savagely beating an indigenous man down near the river. Virtue feared for the man’s life and intervened. For his trouble he was arrested, convicted of interfering with the law and fined five pounds, at the time a considerable sum of money. It was Virtue who loaned the tent for the first Baptist service in Melbourne just across the road where the Regent Theatre now stands. He remained an influential leader in the church for decades to come. Indeed, Virtue was a light in this church and this city through some very tumultuous years.

(Read by Peter Rademaker)

**MARGARET McLEAN**, born in 1845, was married to an influential deacon of Collins Street, but her influence as a person of faith was significant in her own right. In 1887 Margaret co-founded the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Victoria and was a key player in the establishment of the Victorian National Council of Women in 1902. This body pressed for woman's rights, the establishment of juvenile courts, and the appointment of police matrons to respond to the needs of women and children in relation to the law. Margaret's widely circulated pamphlets on *Womanhood Suffrage* were extraordinarily influential in the development of the suffrage movement in Australia. Her commitment to the full participation of women in society grew directly out of her Christian faith. Margaret McLean was a refreshing light in dark and excluding places.

(Read by Carol Geyer)

**JEANINE TAYLOR** was the granddaughter of James Taylor, the much maligned second pastor of the church. She married here in 1901 and moved with her husband to a remote community in the Northern Territory. Tragically, just three years later her husband died. She returned to Melbourne to live with her father and to Collins Street. It was here, under her married name of Jeanine Gunn, she wrote two books that would become classics of Australian literature, *The Little Black Princess* in 1905 and *We of the Never Never* in 1908. Successive generations of young Australians would acquire their first ideas of what it meant to live in remote Australia from these books. In her writing and in her life, Jeanine brought light and understanding to many.

(Read by Abigail Chenoweth)

**SAMUEL PEARCE-CAREY** became pastor of Collins Street in 1900. He was the great grandson of the Baptist linguist and missionary William Carey and came to Melbourne from England to take up the role. But just as he was getting a grip on his new pulpit, the new suburbs were booming. Residents were leaving the city in droves. Despite huge efforts on the part of the church, membership sank by more than 200 people in a few short years. Despite this, Samuel remained a passionate preacher and person of deep conviction. On the first Sunday in July 1906, Samuel welcomed a procession of 150 working men down Collins Street led by the two leading left-wing socialists of the state. Once gathered, he preached a strident sermon condemning the wider church that assumed its agenda was entirely 'spiritual'. He called the church to proclaim a gospel that was good news for the poor, the landless and the downtrodden. Despite adversity and considerable opposition from Baptists across the state, Samuel Pearce-Carey remained a courageous light for the gospel.

(Read by Bruce Tudball)

**MURIELLE GRACE HEARNE** was born in 1907. Her father George Thurgood was a travelling salesman in the textile industry of Flinders Lane. Her mother Emily Martin was part of an established family at Collins Street dating back to 1871. When Murielle was just 16, her mother died of breast cancer. Murielle became the woman of the house and therefore, although academically gifted, was kept from further education. Instead Murielle channelled her intelligence into the theatre becoming a celebrated identity in Melbourne's theatre world. Her acting career would span forty years. In 1957 the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of 'All for Mary' so impressed the J.C. Williamson company that they bought the rights to the show subject to the condition that Murielle would

play one of the lead roles. In the late 1920s Murielle met William Beaumont Weston Hearne at a party associated with the theatre. They were married here in 1930 and had three children. Murielle, a gifted soloist, sang in the church choir for more than 50 years, and staged a major missionary pageant for the Baptist Union of Victoria at the Melbourne Town Hall in which two of her children had key acting parts. Murielle Hearne's light burned brightly and creatively for more than 89 years, and it still burns with us in her dear son Peter.

(Read by Jessica Holt)

**MAIDA THOMAS**, born in 1908, was the oldest of seven children born to Sir John and Lady Sound. Her funeral was conducted here in 1987 by Pastor Ron Ham. Maida graduated in Arts from the University of Tasmania and became a state education teacher. She taught for two years in England—History and English—before returning to Australia to become a social worker with the YWCA, an organisation she served and supported her entire adult life. Married with daughters of her own, Maida received the AM (Member of the Order of Australia) for her tireless work on the Committee for Commonwealth Education for Migrants. She travelled the country listening to the stories of migrants and advocating for their full inclusion in society. She was active in the church and the community through voluntary roles of leadership and in support of theological education. What's more, Maida cared deeply about peace and spoke courageously against war and armaments at public rallies, often attracting criticism for her views. Maida was a light that burned consistently and brightly for 79 years.

(Read by Pauline Tudball)

