

## **Beatrice Emma Foster Gerdes BEM**

1902 – 1991

Beatrice Gerdes was a member of GFS for over 71 years.

Beatrice's family were very active members of St Bede's Church Drummoyne where she worshipped all her life. She was the Superintendent of the Senior Sunday School and a Sunday school teacher and auditor of the church. Beatrice was part of the church choir and thus was practically at every service in Church, both morning and evening.



She was a gifted student at Sydney Girls High School and was awarded a bursary (one in 300 awarded in the state) for her academic potential. She was highly achieved in Mathematics and Latin. After school she started her business career on 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan 1918 at the AMP Society (Australian Mutual Provident) - a life insurance company and mutual society. After 6 years she was the first woman in Australia to qualify as an Associate of the Incorporated Insurance Institute. This entailed passing six examinations in six subjects with honours in at least two. She eventually headed the Actuarial Department in the AMP Society's Head Office for just on 30 years and retired on 31 August 1966.

Beatrice worked tirelessly in GFS Sydney for many decades.

Beatrice became a member of GFS in August 1920 and remained a member until her death. She became the General Secretary of St Bede's GFS from 1922 and was Vice Chairman of the branch in 1943.

She served as Vice Chairman of GFS Sydney for 21 years between 1945 and 1965 as well as on numerous committees. She has been in more roles in GFS than most GFS members.

She attended her first GFS Commonwealth Conference at Gilbulla, Menangle NSW where she was elected Commonwealth Vice Chairman for 3 years, at the end of which time she was commissioned as the Commonwealth Chairman.

While she was the GFS Vice Chairman of the Commonwealth, she led the Australian delegation of 14 associates and members to tour Britain and Europe and attend the first GFS World Assembly on the Isle of Wight in 1955. Six GFS countries attended this meeting. They were England & Wales, Scotland, Ireland, United States, Australia and Newfoundland. It was Beatrice who suggested to the World Assembly that GFS should set aside one day each year for a World Day of Prayer, when all who belong to GFS would pray together. The day chosen was St Michael's and All Angel's Day on 29<sup>th</sup> September and this has remained a tradition in GFS ever since. At one time, she was also the Treasurer of GFS Australia too.

Between 1963 and 1966 she was the NSW Provincial Chairman and in 1965 was an observer at the GFS World Council held in Japan.

Besides all this Beatrice represented GFS on the National Council of Women, the Youth Department in the Anglican Church in the Sydney diocese. She was on the Hostel committee for the Sydney GFS Hostel and the leader training committee. She was the leader of the first Townsend Fellowship in the diocese of Sydney. This was a very special part of Beatrice's association with GFS. Throughout her whole GFS life, Beatrice was a very active member of the Townsend group in Sydney. The last time she met with this group was in 1990 aged 88 when she traveled by bus to the city from Drummoyne to attend a Townsend luncheon.

Beatrice's talents were many. She was blessed with a beautiful singing voice and organized many music and drama performances for GFS. Under her direction the GFS choir gained first place in the City of Sydney Eisteddfod, a number of times, over the years. She was clever with handiwork and crafts too.

On 1 Jan 1980 Beatrice was made a member of the British Empire and received the award of the British Empire Medal for 50 years service to the Anglican Church particularly the GFS, St Bede's Church Drummoyne Parish Council and Sunday School.

GFS Sydney honoured Beatrice with Life Membership in 1986 and she was later made a life Vice Chairman.

Beatrice had a sharp mind and her skills with finances and Constitutional matters were greatly valued at all levels. Her keen interest in GFS and her prayer support did not diminish until she suffered a stroke 4 months prior to her death. She had GFS friends not only throughout Australia but throughout the world. Those who knew her would count it a privilege to have known this vital and lively servant of God.