

Dr Margaret Bakker



Dr. Margaret Bakker is Principal Barrister and Solicitor, Bakker Vagnarelli Lawyers, and for more than 30 years has been Organist and Musical Director of Italian Mass at the Church of the Annunciation, Hectorville. She is equally passionate about all her professions, as a research chemist followed by doctoral research in musicology and finally as a barrister and solicitor. Her qualifications include Ph.D., Master of Laws, Graduate Diploma in Corporate Law, and Diploma in Legal Practice and a Bachelor of Music (Hons).

Early Life

Margaret was born in New South Wales, the middle child in the family of three siblings. Both her engineer father and her mother were significant influences in her life. Margaret was close to her Dutch grandfather who encouraged her learning in music. Her grandfather taught her Dutch and she has since become proficient in French, German and Italian. She says she was very blessed to have such a stable upbringing.

Margaret's strong family connections continued in 1989 when she married Athos Vagnarelli, a commercial and domestic builder and a former Campbelltown Councillor for the 1980s until late 1989.

Studies in Music and Science

Margaret had always wanted to be a musician. She was awarded a scholarship to Alexander Mackie Teachers' College and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. When she decided that teaching was not the career for her, she continued with her music studies and the passion for chemistry that she had had at school. She worked at CSR Ltd and studied chemistry in the evenings, completing a Diploma in Chemistry and Analytical Techniques in 1969. On the evenings that she wasn't at College doing chemistry, she continued her piano, harmony and counterpoint classes at the NSW Conservatorium of Music. She plays both the pipe organ and piano.

At age 20 Margaret moved to London where she worked for 18 months. She remembers sailing for London from Sydney on the *Australis*, not imagining that the voyage to Southampton would include six days in a hurricane in the Atlantic. This was followed by 3 years at Stanford Research Institute in the USA undertaking micro analytical chemotherapy research.

Even in the midst of her successful chemistry career, music was prominent. At the University of Adelaide she completed a Bachelor of Music (Hons) and was won several awards and scholarships including a Fulbright Fellowship at Stanford and Harvard Universities. She was also awarded an Italian government fellowship to research and teach undergraduates and post graduates at Naples University and the Conservatorio Di Musica San Pietro a Maiella.

She performed at the Auditorium Rai di Napoli. Margaret spent several months at the Vatican Library in Rome undertaking research for her PhD where she had access to the Secret Archives. In 1991 she was awarded her PhD on 18th century music: 'The cantatas of Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801)'.

Career Change to Law

In 1995, she changed direction, graduating with a Master of Laws (with distinction) and a Graduate Diploma in Corporate Law. She was admitted to the Supreme Court in 2006, working for several law firms until she opened her own practice in 2012. In 2021 Margaret was admitted by the Supreme Court of South Australia as a Notary Public which also enables her to handle European Notarial Matters, both corporate and personal for people from many different countries.

Margaret was shortlisted in 2021 for the Lawyers Weekly, Australian Law Award, Innovative Lawyer category. Margaret finds a lot of satisfaction in mentoring many younger female lawyers and providing them the opportunity to attend court proceedings where she has been the instructed Counsel. She is committed to giving back to the community through her pro bono work.

Words of Wisdom

Margaret leads an extremely busy life but believes that it is important to make time for regular exercise. She is a participant at ARC activities and can be seen at 10-14 classes a week.

“It is important for females to take advantage of every opportunity; stay focused and be positive; look forward not backward in surmounting hurdles”