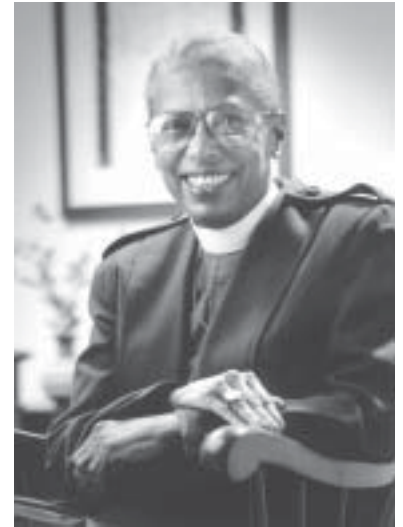


The Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris

Honoring a ministry that changed the church

It has been said that God's time and ours met on Feb. 11, 1989, when Barbara C. Harris became the first woman to be ordained a bishop in the worldwide Anglican Communion. On that day, while the world watched, a woman donned the symbolic regalia of the church's highest order for the first time—and an African-American woman at that, one who had not followed the traditional path to the episcopacy. As God declares in Isaiah: "Behold, I am doing a new thing."

By being the first, Bishop Harris belongs, in a sense, to the whole church, and her story is inspirational to women and men everywhere. With great grace, she has honored her symbolic role while tirelessly serving the people of the Diocese of Massachusetts as their bishop suffragan for 13 years, all the while striving to be faithful to her calling, her church and her God. Her years of episcopal leadership have been filled with traveling and witnessing, preaching and teaching and administering the sacraments. A gifted storyteller known for her quick wit, she is a spirited preacher and an outspoken advocate for, in her words, "the least, the lost and the left out."



Wrote the Rev. Cynthia Black, former president of the Episcopal Women's Caucus: "From the moment of her election as bishop her whole being has proclaimed that the church is, and can be, a new creation. ...Bishop Harris is, understandably, a hero for women and persons of color in the church. But because of who she is as a justice-seeking, critical-thinking, humor-loving, African-American woman, she is much more than someone to be idolized or put up on a pedestal—she is a symbol of the church at its best."

Born in 1930 in Philadelphia, Bishop Harris was an activist during the Civil Rights Movement and, always holding a great love for her church, she had an active lay ministry in Christian education, prison chaplaincy and leadership at parish, diocesan and national church levels before her call to ordained ministry. She attended Villanova University and studied at the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, England, as well as the Pennsylvania Foundation for Pastoral Counseling. She was ordained a priest in 1980, at a time when, she has said, "It was still difficult for a number of people to see women in the role of their parish priest." She served as priest-in-charge of St. Augustine of Hippo Church in Norristown, Penn., from 1980-1984, and was a chaplain to the Philadelphia County prisons. She also served as counsel to industrial corporations for public policy issues and social concerns. In 1984, she was named executive director of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company and publisher of *The Witness* magazine. In 1988, she served as interim rector of Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate.

Bishop Harris has been active in professional and community organizations, as well as in national church service. A member of the Union of Black Episcopalians and a past president of the Episcopal Urban Caucus, she has represented the Episcopal Church on the board of the Prisoner Visitation and Support Committee. She has been a member of the church's Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns and is a member of the Board of Trustees of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. Bishop Harris is the recipient of honorary degrees from numerous universities and theological schools, including Yale University and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific.

She retired as bishop suffragan of the Diocese of Massachusetts on Nov. 1, 2002, and began serving in the summer of 2003 as assisting bishop to Bishop John B. Chane in the Diocese of Washington (D.C.).

Bishop Harris says that the best moments of her episcopacy have been those spent baptizing, confirming and receiving people into the Episcopal Church. She has said that youth give her hope: "I think that young people will not accept easy answers and will demand an accountability of the church and a relevance to the issues with which they wrestle in their daily lives."

The Rt. Rev. Jane Holmes Dixon, retired as bishop suffragan of the Diocese of Washington (D.C.), has written of Bishop Harris: "I never cease to be in awe of her faith in the risen Christ, her courage in proclaiming the Gospel, her devotion to the church and her outrageous sense of humor. ...Barbara Harris through her life, her ministry, her preaching and her laughter does make the Gospel come alive. Thanks be to God."

—Tracy J. Sukraw