

# WOMEN WHO FORMED THE CHURCH

PRISCA, PHOEBE,  
ELIZABETH I,  
THE PHILADELPHIA  
ELEVEN



## Women of the Early Church



# Women of the Early Church

Paul's letters are filled with greetings and mentions of women who were active in churches and who were part of his ministry. His inclusion of these women in his writings tells us that women in the early decades of the church held important roles and served as leaders whose ministries helped to shape the early church.

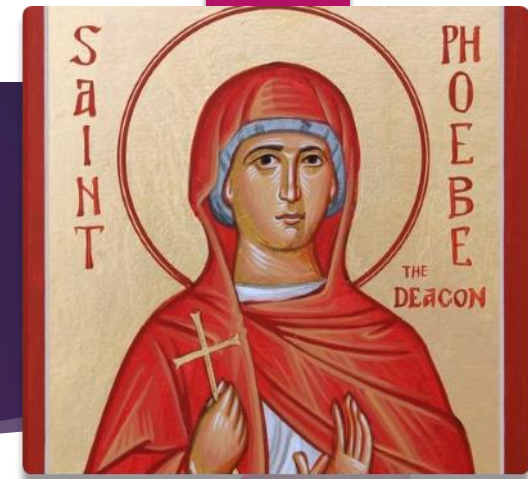
- ▶ Chapter 16 of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of **Lydia**: <sup>14</sup>A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup>When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.
- ▶ In chapter 16 of Paul's letter to the Church in Rome Paul "commends our sister **Phoebe**, asks the church to greet **Prisca** and her husband Aquila, **Mary**, Andronicus and his wife **Junia**, **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**, beloved **Persis**, **Rufus' mother**, **Julia**, and Nereus and **his sister**.
- ▶ In chapter 1 of Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth he writes "For it has been reported to me by **Chloe's** people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters." Chloe was a prominent woman of Corinth.
- ▶ In chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus he writes "I urge **Euodia** and I urge **Syntycha** to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion,\* help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

# Prisca or Priscilla



- ▶ Prisca, also known as Priscilla, is often mentioned with her husband Aquila
- ▶ They were tent makers like Paul
- ▶ In 49 CE they were among the Jews expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius and moved to Corinth.
- ▶ In Corinth Paul lived with them for 18 months while he founded the church.
- ▶ It is believed that Prisca and Aquila helped Paul establish the church.
- ▶ Once the church was established Prisca and Aquila went with Paul to Ephesus and Syria.
- ▶ Paul passes on their greetings to the church in Corinth in his first letter to the Corinthians as (1 Cor 16:19)
- ▶ At some point before 54 CE Prisca and Aquila return to Corinth and after the death of Emperor Claudius returned to Rome between 54-56 CE where Paul sends them his greeting in the Letter to the Romans.
- ▶ Tradition has it that Prisca and Aquila were martyred

# Phoebe, a deacon of the church



- ▶ In the Letter to the Romans which Paul wrote between 56-58 when he was in Corinth he introduced Phoebe to the Romans writing: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.
- ▶ Paul gives Phoebe three titles: deacon, sister, and benefactor.
- ▶ Identifying Phoebe as a deacon, the same title Paul gives to Timothy tells us that in the early church there were no gender roles for deacons.
- ▶ Following in Phoebe's footsteps many women would serve as deacons in the early centuries of the church. with liturgical and pastoral roles; particularly offering pastoral care to women, preparing women for and baptized them, and going with women when they addresses bishops.
- ▶ In the Eastern Church the role of deacons and of women deacons began to decline in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and by the 12<sup>th</sup> century women were no longer deacons. In the Western Church the role of women became more restricted once the church became institutionalized under Constantine in 325. The diaconate for women was eventually eliminated beginning with the councils of Orange in 441 and Orléans in 533 which forbade ordain women as deacons. In the Episcopal Church women would not be permitted to serve as deacons until the 1960s.



# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

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# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

## The religion of the Church of England in Tudor England

Roman Catholic 1485-1534	Semi-Lutheran 1534-1548	Calvinist 1548-1553	R Catholic 1553-1558	Anglicanism 1558-
Henry VII & Henry VIII	Henry VIII	Edward VI	Mary I	Elizabeth I

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ Elizabeth was born September 7, 1533, to King Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn.
- ▶ At the time of her birth, Henry VIII, a devout Catholic, had repudiated the authority of the Pope and declared himself the Head of the Church of England which began following a somewhat Protestant form of worship similar to Lutheranism.
- ▶ Following Henry's death, Elizabeth's younger half-brother Edward VI became king. Under Edward's reign the Church of England became followed a Calvinistic form of Protestantism. During Edward's reign the first 2 versions of the Book of Common Prayer were written in 1549 and 1552.
- ▶ Following Edward's death at age 15 in 1553, Edward and Elizabeth's older half-sister Mary, the daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon became Queen.
- ▶ Within months Mary restored the Church of England to a more Catholic state and by the end of 1554 had returned the English church to the authority of the Pope. Many Protestants in England fled the country and others who publicly maintained their Protestant beliefs were declared heretics and executed earning Mary the name Bloody Mary.



# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ Mary died in 1558 and Elizabeth became queen. She would immediately need to address the religious turmoil that had raged in England since the 1520s.
- ▶ Elizabeth's solution to the religious upheaval in her country was to establish the Elizabethan Religious Settlement which established Anglicanism and the Church of England as the Via Media or Middle Way.
- ▶ Elizabeth's personal religious beliefs can be described as conservatively Protestant. They were influenced by the Protestant Anne Boleyn and Anne's family who desired for Elizabeth to be raised as a Protestant. Her Protestant upbringing continued after her father died when Elizabeth lived with Henry's last wife Katherine Parr, a Protestant.
- ▶ Elizabeth also had been influenced by her father's beliefs including that the monarch was the Supreme Head of the Church.

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ What we know of Elizabeth's personal religious beliefs comes from a few letters and descriptions of her personal practices.

Elizabeth's Protestant-leaning beliefs were

- ▶ In having a prayer book. She preferred the 1549 Book of Common Prayer which closely reflected the church under her father, rather than the Calvinist 1552 BCP.
- ▶ That the prayer book and Bible should be written in English
- ▶ Rejection of the authority of the Pope
- ▶ She as queen was the Supreme Governor of the Church

Elizabeth's Catholic-leaning beliefs

- ▶ Kept candles and crucifixes in the royal chapel
- ▶ Disliked the idea of clergy being married, but allowed it to satisfy her Protestant clergy
- ▶ Had a love for the music and artwork of the Catholic Church and did not agree with the Protestant belief that they were idolatrous practices.

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ In 1559 she wrote this to pro-Catholic English Bishops who wanted her to maintain Catholicism in England: As to your entreaty for us to listen to you we waive it; yet do return you this our answer. Our realm and subjects have been long wanderers, walking astray, whilst they were under the tuition of Romish pastors, who advised them to own a wolf for their head (in lieu of a careful shepherd) whose inventions, heresies and schisms be so numerous, that the flock of Christ have fed on poisonous shrubs for want of wholesome pastures. And whereas you hit us and our subjects in the teeth that the Romish Church first planted the Catholic within our realm, the records and chronicles of our realm testify the contrary; and your own Romish idolatry maketh you liars; witness the ancient monument of Gildas unto which both foreign and domestic have gone in pilgrimage there to offer. This author testifieth Joseph of Arimathea to be the first preacher of the word of God within our realms. Long after that, when Austin came from Rome, this our realm had bishops and priests therein, as is well known to the learned of our realm by woeful experience, how your church entered therein by blood; they being martyrs for Christ and put to death because they denied Rome's usurped authority.
- ▶ In a speech to Parliament in 1583 she addressed the issue of religion and the many Roman factions and Protestant sects in England saying: I see many overbold with God Almighty making too many subtle scannings of His blessed will, as lawyers do with human testaments. The presumption is so great, as I may not suffer it. Yet mind I not hereby to animate Romanists (which what adversaries they be to mine estate is sufficiently well known) nor tolerate newfangledness. I mean to guide them both by God's holy true rule. In both parts be perils.



# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ In February 1558 the House of Commons passed the Reform Bill to restore Royal Supremacy, the 1550 Ordinal, and the 1552 BCP. The clergy largely rejected it and the Convocation of Canterbury affirmed papal supremacy, and the House of Lords altered the bill and Elizabeth refused to give her royal assent.
- ▶ Trying again in April the Act of Supremacy of 1558 was introduced and passed. It again made the Church of England separate from the Rome and Parliament gave Elizabeth the title Supreme Governor of the Church of England.
- ▶ The Act of Uniformity was passed in 1559 which brought back the Book of Common Prayer with changes that were made to appeal Catholics and Lutherans including allowing various beliefs in the real presence of Christ in Eucharist and permission to use traditional vestments.

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ The Thirty-Nine Articles were issued in 1571. The Thirty-nine Articles formed the doctrines and practices of the Church of England and eventually the Anglican Communion, including the Episcopal Church.
- ▶ The articles created the distinctive English reformed doctrine that was not Reformed (Calvinist), Lutheran, or Catholic.
- ▶ Elizabeth wanted to firmly establish the Church of England as separate from Roman Catholicism and as a church which incorporated some reformed ideas yet was a church which maintained apostolic succession and provided a balance of doctrine and theology.
- ▶ The Subscription Act required all new ministers to affirm their agreement with the articles.
- ▶ You can find the Thirty-nine Articles as put forward in 1801 in the Historical Documents in our Book of Common Prayer on page 867.

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

## The 39 Articles

- ▶ Articles 1-5 articulate the Doctrine of God, the Holy Trinity, and the incarnation of Jesus Christ
- ▶ Articles 6-8 state scripture contains everything necessary for salvation and acknowledge the authority of the Apostles' Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds because they express Scriptural teaching.
- ▶ Articles 9-18 focus on original sin and justification by faith while rejecting medieval Catholic teachings on supererogation and performing good works to become worthy of salvations.
- ▶ Articles 19-21 state that the church has authority over matters of faith, that general councils can only be called by civil authority.
- ▶ Articles 22-24 condemn as erroneous Catholic teachings on purgatory, indulgences, and the use of images and invocation of saints. These articles also require services to be said in English rather than Latin. And that only authorized people could preach and administer sacraments, something which some Protestants aid all Christians could do.



# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

## The 39 Articles

- ▶ Articles 25-31 explain the Church of England's theology of the sacraments. The articles recognized only baptism and Eucharist as sacraments counter to Catholicism which recognized seven. The articles state sacraments are signs of divine grace which God works invisibly in people's lives and that through the sacraments God creates and strengthens faith counter to Protestant belief that sacraments are only outward signs of a person's faith. Infant baptism is allowed and baptism conveys membership in the church and forgiveness of sins.
- ▶ Articles 32- 36 allow for clergy to marry and the church to excommunicate and confirm the ordination rites in the 1549 and 1552 ordinals.
- ▶ Articles 37-39 affirm the role of the monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church of England and rejects all claims of the Pope. It defends capital punishment, declares Christians can serve in the military, rejects Anabaptists teaching the property should be held in common, explains that Christians should give to the needy and poor, and allows oath taking for civic purposes.

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ Elizabeth's efforts encountered difficulties on both sides of the religious divide.
- ▶ Although most bishops were Protestant leaning, most parish clergy were Catholics as were most of the laity. Clergy and laity resisted using the new prayer book and removing crucifixes, images, and candles.
- ▶ Some priests used the prayer book while still offering a Catholic mass in secret. Others refused to conform and lost their positions and around 300 fled the country.
- ▶ The revolt of the Northern Earls in 1569 was a failed attempt to overthrow Elizabeth. It hardened the view that many Protestants had of Catholics.
- ▶ In 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth and issued the papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* which released English Catholics from any allegiance to Elizabeth.
- ▶ In 1574 the Ridolfi plot planned to overthrow Elizabeth and place her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne. Following the plot, the Oath of Supremacy and fines for missing services were more strictly enforced.
- ▶ In 1581 a new fine of £20 per month was imposed on anyone who was actively Catholic.
- ▶ In 1585 it became treason for Catholic priests to come to England and for anyone to aid such priests. From 1581-1592 Catholic priests were persecuted in England.

# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ Many Protestants who were attracted to the theology of the Reformed churches of Calvin and others wanted Elizabeth to take things further from the theology and doctrine of Rome than she was willing to do. These Protestants would come to be known as Puritans.
- ▶ For them the Church of England maintained too many elements of the medieval church including the orders of bishop, priest, and deacon; elaborate liturgy, and the use of the sign of the cross in baptism, the wedding ring in marriage, which clerical vestments were used,
- ▶ In 1572 a bill was introduced in Parliament that would have allowed bishops to grant permission for Protestants to omit certain ceremonies in the 1549 Prayer Book and to license clergy to use French and Dutch Protestant liturgies. Elizabeth opposed the measure as it undermined her efforts to establish religious uniformity.



# Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland

- ▶ That same year two *Admonitions to Parliament* were published which called on the church to move to a presbyterian form of government rather than its current episcopal polity. Puritans also began to organize convert presbyteries and eventually covert national synods. The leaders were discovered in 1588 and the movement fell apart.
- ▶ By the end of her reign in 1603 Elizabeth had established the Church of England as the *via media* or middle way between Catholicism and Protestantism.
- ▶ Although the Puritans would rise to power in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century for 20 years, the Church of England and today's Anglican communion continue to follow the *via media*.

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ Merrill Bittner
- ▶ Alla Bozarth-Campbell
- ▶ Alison Cheek
- ▶ Emily Hewitt
- ▶ Carter Heyward
- ▶ Suzanne Hiatt
- ▶ Marie Moorefield
- ▶ Jeanette Piccard
- ▶ Betty Schiess
- ▶ Katrina Swanson
- ▶ Nancy Wittig



# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ Throughout its history the canons of the Episcopal Church related to ordination to the priesthood did not explicitly exclude women from the priesthood. But because no Diocesan Standing Committee or Diocesan Bishop would agree to ordain women who had completed the process for ordination to the priesthood, by practice, if not canon, women could not be ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church.
- ▶ By the 1960s though there were active discussions in the Episcopal Church about whether women should be ordained to the priesthood.
- ▶ In 1966 the Episcopal Church received a report supporting the ordination of women.
- ▶ In 1967 a resolution was passed by General Convention to open the diaconate to women and recognize that women serving as deaconesses were members of the diaconate.
- ▶ Resolutions to approve the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate had been narrowly defeated at General Conventions in 1970 and 1973.
- ▶ Following the 1973 rejection of the ordination of women to priesthood by General Convention, 56 bishops issue statement of distress. In December 1973, women deacons were presented alongside men for ordination to priesthood in New York, but bishop refused.



# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ On July 29, 1974, St. Mary and St. Martha's Day, eleven women were ordained at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia by retired bishops Daniel Corrigan, Robert DeWitt, and Edward Welles II in defiance of the Episcopal Church. Costa Rican Bishop Antonio Ramos did not ordain them but joined in the laying on of hands.
- ▶ 2000 people attended the service. In the middle of the service when Corrigan said, "If there be any of you who knoweth any impediment or notable crime (in these women), let him come forth in the name of God..." several priests in attendance proceeded to read statements against the ordination. The bishops responded that "hearing God's command, we can heed no other. The time for our obedience is now." And they proceeded with the ordinations.
- ▶ The canons did require that a person being ordained be ordained by the bishop of their diocese. None of the diocesan bishops of the Philadelphia 11 would agree to ordain them and the Bishop of Pennsylvania did not want the ordinations held in the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ There was immediate reaction by the public and the leadership of the church.
- ▶ The next day some of the 11 were inhibited by their bishops from priestly functions, some from deacon's service; others agreed voluntarily to refrain from priestly ministry.
- ▶ A contentious emergency meeting of the House of Bishops on August 15, 1974, denounced the ordinations and declared that "the necessary conditions for valid ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church were not fulfilled." Essentially the women were declared not to be priests.
- ▶ The bishops who had ordained the women were brought up on ecclesiastical charges.
- ▶ The women were harshly criticized and received threats of harm and death.
- ▶ The Rev. Lee McGee, the Rev. Alison Palmer, the Rev. Betty Powell, all of Washington, D.C., and the Rev. Diane Tickell of Anchorage, Alaska were subsequently ordained in 1975 in Washington, DC by Resigned Rochester Bishop George W. Barrett

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ The General Convention of 1976 approved the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. The canon now read: "The provisions of these canons for the admission of Candidates, and for the Ordination to the three Orders: Bishops, Priests and Deacons shall be equally applicable to men and women."
- ▶ The House of Bishops, during the 1976 convention at first ruled that the Philadelphia 11 and the Washington Four would have to be re-ordained. The women said they would refuse to be re-ordained and the next day, the bishops voted unanimously for a "completion" ceremony that would avoid the laying on of hands.
- ▶ Ten of the "Philadelphia Eleven" participated in public events of "completion" in the next year. Marie Moorefield left the Episcopal Church to join the United Methodist Church.

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ Presiding Bishop John Allin had said he did not think “that women can be priests any more than they can become fathers or husbands,” and offered to resign as presiding bishop. The House of Bishops affirmed Allin’s leadership and adopted the “conscience clause” in October 1977.
- ▶ The House of Bishops’ “A Statement of Conscience” assured that “No Bishop, Priest, or Lay Person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities as a result of his or her conscientious objection to or support of the sixty-fifth General Convention’s actions with regard to the ordination of women to the priesthood or episcopate.”
- ▶ The clause was not adopted by the House of Deputies so it had no canonical authority, but a few bishops and their dioceses used it for decades to refuse to ordain women. The 1997 General Convention revised the canons to prevent any diocese from denying ordination or refusing to license a member of the clergy solely on the grounds of gender.
- ▶ As of July 2019 of the 4,901 full-time priests, 38% were women. Women made up 69% of part-time priests. Since 1989 when Barbara Harris became the first women elected bishop, 48 women have been elected bishops and 259 men have been elected bishops. Twenty of those women were elected in the last five years.

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ **The Rev. Merrill Bittner**, 67, served in the Diocese of Rochester from 1973 to 1976, including a 1973-1975 term as an associate at Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Webster, New York. She worked as a hospital chaplain and served at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Rumford, Maine from 2001-2006. She married Nancy Noppa, a college friend with whom she had traveled the United States, in 2013.
- ▶ **The Rev. Alla Bozarth**, 67, founded Wisdom House, a Minneapolis-based interfaith spirituality center. After her husband died in 1985, she returned to her native Oregon and continued her ministry with Wisdom House West. She serves as resident priest of there and writing poetry and prose. She has written two books on grief, *Life is Goodbye/Life is Hello ~ Grieving Well through All Kinds of Loss* (1982) and *A Journey through Grief* (1990). Some of her poetry is on a blog [here](#).
- ▶ **The Rev. Alison Cheek**, 87, served at St. Stephen's and Incarnation Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. After her husband died, she served at Trinity Memorial Church in Philadelphia before studying at the Washington Institute of Pastoral Psychotherapy and beginning her own counseling practice. She later joined the faculty of Episcopal Divinity School as director of feminist liberation theology studies. After retirement, she moved to Maine and became part of the staff of the Greenfire Retreat Center, then active in Tenants' Harbor. She also affiliated with St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Rockland, and served as spiritual counselor, pastoral minister, and supply priest for St. Peter's until she moved in 2013 to Brevard, North Carolina.



# The Philadelphia Eleven

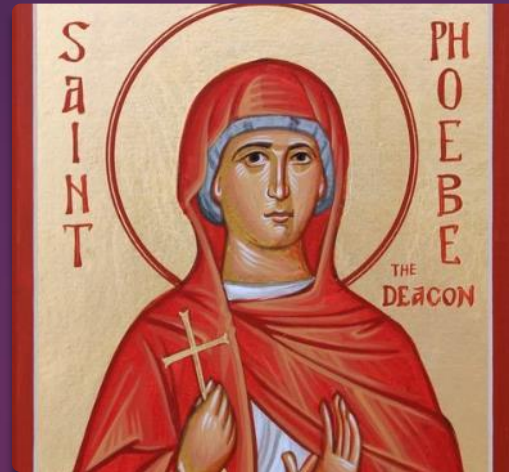
- ▶ **The Rev. Emily C. Hewitt**, 70, worked for a short time at Andover Newton Theology School as an assistant professor of religion and education before earning a law degree from Harvard. She retired in 2013 as chief judge of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. She is an avid long distance race walker and won the U.S. National Race Walking medal in 1987.
- ▶ **The Rev. Carter Heyward**, 68, was hired by Episcopal Divinity School, along with the Rev. Suzanne R. Hiatt, in January 1975. Heyward taught at EDS until 2005. She was the author of many books and scholarly papers. She moved back to her native North Carolina and now runs and teaches at a therapeutic horseback riding center.
- ▶ **The Rev. Suzanne R. Hiatt** (1944-2002) taught on the faculty of Episcopal Divinity School from 1975 until her retirement in 1999. She was the author of many b

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ **The Rev. Marie Moorefield Fleischer**, 70, left the Episcopal Church in 1975 and became a United Methodist minister. She served as a chaplain in Methodist healthcare settings. She was recognized as an Episcopal priest in 1985 and since then served parishes and diocesan offices in Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, and Western New York. She served as canon to the ordinary in the Diocese of North Carolina from 2001-2006. Her husband, astronomer Robert Fleischer, died in 2001. looks and scholarly papers.
- ▶ **The Rev. Jeanette Piccard** (1895-1981), served as an unpaid assistant at her home parish of St. Philip's in Minneapolis. She was a popular speaker throughout that area. She and her husband, Jean Felix Piccard, were pioneering aviators and she was the first woman licensed as a hot air balloon pilot in the United States and the first woman to pilot a stratosphere-capable balloon to that height, and thus she has been called "the first woman in space." She served as a consultant to NASA.
- ▶ **The Rev. Betty Bone Schiess**, 87, was the executive director of the Mizpah Educational and Cultural Center for the Aging in Syracuse, New York, from 1973-1984. She later served in various campus ministry and parish positions in New York, where she still lives. She reported that she recently wrote a letter to her local newspaper about failed U.S. immigration policy, suggesting that the U.S. ought to return the Statue of Liberty to France. She says that she received more hate mail over the letter than she did during the time around her ordination.

# The Philadelphia Eleven

- ▶ **The Rev. Katrina Welles Swanson** (1935-2005) was hired by St. Stephen's, a poor parish in St. Louis, Missouri, as an assistant for a dollar a year in 1975. In 1978, she became the first female rector in the tri-state New York metro area when she was hired as the rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Union City, New Jersey, where she served until retiring in 1995. The website devoted to her memory, [Katrina's Dream](#), promotes the full inclusion of women in society and urges people to support passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Her husband, the Rev. George Swanson, continues to promote her causes.
- ▶ **The Rev. Nancy Hatch Wittig**, 68, served parishes in the Diocese of Newark before a 20-year term as rector of the Church of St. Andrew in the Fields in Philadelphia. She moved to Ohio after retirement and is an assistant at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Lakewood, Ohio. In 2012, she married Pamela Darling, an author and lay leader in the Episcopal Church.



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