

Verna Dozier, Pauli Murray, and Barbara Harris

African-American Pioneers and Episcopalians

Verna Dozier



- Verna Dozier was born on October 9, 1917 in Washington, DC
- As a child she attended the 19th Street Baptist Church with her mother and sister Lois
- Verna, her sister, and her mother would read the Bible or Shakespeare together every evening when their father was at work
- At the age of 16 Verna began attending Howard University. She graduated in 1937 with a BA in English and in 1938 with an MA in English literature.

Verna Dozier



- Verna worked for 34 years in the public school system in Washington, DC. She was a high school English teacher, department chair, and assistant director of the system's Division of Instruction
- She believed her work as a teacher was as much a ministry as any thing she did within the church.
- In her book *The Dream of God*, Verna wrote: When I began my second career, people would say to me, 'You taught school for 32 years; then you began your ministry.' In my unredeemed way, I would steal myself and reply through clenched teeth, 'No, I *continued* my ministry!'

Verna Dozier



- Verna began attending the University Chapel with her father while a student at Howard University. At Howard she developed an interest in other denominations and religions which led her to become active in the Washington Federation of Churches.
- Through the WFC she met Gordon Cosby whose sermons led her to recommit to the church.
- In 1950 she joined the Church of the Saviour a multi-denominational, integrated and diverse community founded by Cosby. Members of the Church of the Savior participated in community formation, daily meditation and devotions, weekly participation in an educational group, study, tithing and social action.
- By the 1950s Verna had become a well-known Bible teacher and had begun working with many churches including the Episcopal church.

Verna Dozier



- At the Diocesan School of Christian Living in Chevy Chase, Verna met Bill Baxter the rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill. She was impressed with his preaching which focused on the poor and oppressed.
- In 1955 Bill Baxter invited Verna to join St. Mark's. Verna would be the first Black member of the church. Some of her friends joined her, helping to further integrate the church. She would be a lifelong member of St. Mark's, becoming the first woman Senior Warden, and leading Bible study and preaching ministries.
- In the Diocese of Washington, she was a member of the Standing Committee and the Commission on Ministry. She served on the Episcopal Church's Board of Examining Chaplains, the Church Deployment Board, the Board of the Alban Institute, the Council of the College of Preachers at the National Cathedral and Mid-Atlantic Training and Consulting.
- Of joining the Episcopal Church, she said "When I discovered the Episcopal Church, it was as if I had been waiting for that all my life."

Verna Dozier



- Verna was one of the preeminent Episcopalian theologians of the 20th century.
- She advocated that the ministry of the laity is as important, if not more important, than the ministry of the ordained.
- In *The Authority of the Laity* she wrote "*The lay person's primary function is out there in the world. There is a problem when the church becomes the primary focus of their lives.*"
- Verna consistently advocated for oppressed people in the world and the church. She supported the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate, spoke out against racism, and was an advocate for gay and lesbian rights in the church.

Verna Dozier



- She said that for some her prophetic impact was muted by racism: *I probably am one of the most radical voices in this church today but people respond to me with great affection and love because I look like Aunt Jemima. I sound like Sojourner Truth, but they don't pay any attention to the Sojourner.*
- Her books include *Equipping the Saints: A Method of Self-directed Bible Study for Lay Groups, Sisters and Brothers: Reclaiming a Biblical Idea of Community*, co-authored with James R. Adams, *The Authority of the Laity*, co-authored with Celia Hahn, and *The Dream of God: A Call to Return*.

Verna Dozier

Speaking on Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, 'Let us make humankind* in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,* and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'



The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



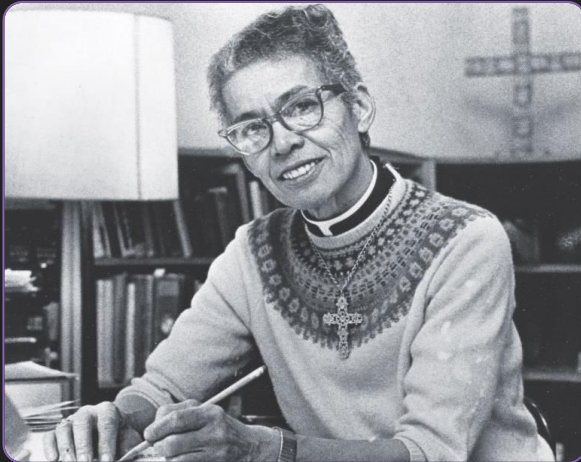
- Pauli Murray was born in Baltimore on November 20, 1910 and moved to Durham, NC in 1923 to live with an aunt and grandparents after being orphaned.
- Pauli Murray was a human rights activist, legal scholar, feminist, author, poet, Episcopal priest, labor organizer, and multiracial Black, LGBTQ+ community member.
- Pauli graduated from Hunter College in 1933 with a degree in English Literature.
- Pauli became active in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1930s. Among other actions, Pauli petitioned to be admitted to the all-white University of North Carolina (they refused), wrote a letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt asking him to address White Supremacy which led to Pauli developing a friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, and in 1940 was arrested for refusing to give up a seat on a bus.

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



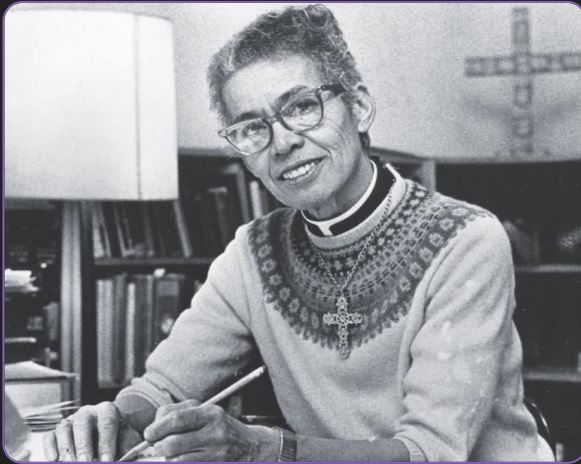
- Pauli met Thurgood Marshall and Leon Ransom, a law professor at Howard University after she gave a speech in Richmond that they attended. Ransom encouraged her to apply to Howard's Law School and ensure Pauli that he would find the funds to cover the cost. Thurgood Marshall wrote Pauli a letter of recommendation.
- Pauli attended Howard University Law School from 1941-1944. While at Howard, Pauli wrote a paper on *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the case which established the separate but equal doctrine used to uphold segregation. Pauli argued that the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause should be used to argue for the overturn of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, rather than the strategy the NAACP was using at the time to challenge the separate but equal doctrine.
- Her Professor Spottswood Robinson kept the paper and used Pauli's arguments a decade later when he, Thurgood Marshall, and the NAACP were preparing *Brown v. Board of Education*.
- Pauli then attended the University of California at Berkeley Boalt School of Law receiving an LLM (Master of Laws) degree and in 1965 Pauli became the first African American to receive a Doctor of Juridical Science degree from Yale Law School.

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



- According the Pauli Murray Center "Several scholars have explored Murray's personal journals and writings, bringing to light that Pauli identified at different parts of their life as a man, a woman, and somewhere in-between. We would identify this now as gender fluidity..."
- Pauli encountered sexism throughout Pauli's life.
- On Pauli's first day of law school a professor had commented to Pauli that he didn't know why women went to law school.
- The only woman in their class at Howard, Pauli often was ignored even though they were the number one student in the class.
- While at Howard Pauli coined the term "Jane Crow" to refer to how black women were treated in America not just by white people but by black men as well.

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



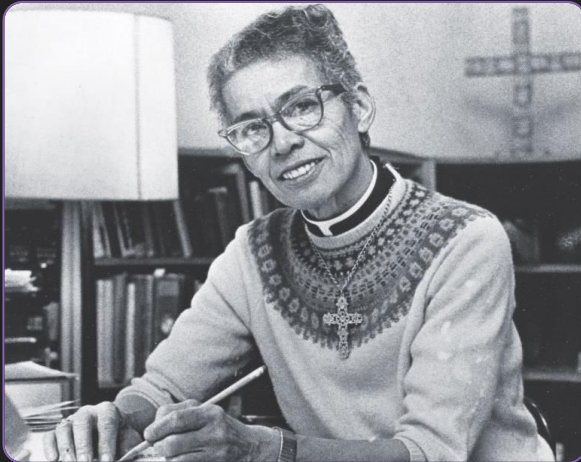
- Pauli's experiences with sexism included Harvard's refusal to admit Pauli for post-graduate studies despite having won an award from Howard to attend. Why? Because Harvard would not admit a woman.
- The Harvard Law School admissions committee wrote to Pauli "Your picture and the salutation on your college transcript indicate that you are not of the sex entitled to be admitted to Harvard Law School."
- Pauli replied to Harvard "Gentlemen, I would gladly change my sex to meet your requirements, but since the way to such change has not been revealed to me, I have no recourse but to appeal to you to change your minds on this subject. Are you to tell me that one is as difficult as the other?"
- Unfortunately, even the intervention of FDR could not persuade Harvard to admit her.

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



- Throughout Pauli's life, Pauli continued to be active in the Civil Right Movement. Pauli became disillusioned however with the treatment of women leaders in the movement by their male counterparts. She was outraged during the 1963 March on Washington when women were required to sit in the balcony of the all-male National Press Club when A. Philip Randolph gave a speech, when no women were included in the meeting with President Kennedy, and no women were given major places in the speaking line up.
- President John F. Kennedy appointed Pauli to the Committee on Civil and Political Rights as a part of his Presidential Commission on the Status of Women which was headed by Eleanor Roosevelt.
- In 1966 Pauli Murray was a founding member of the National Organization for Women (NOW). Pauli later moved away from a leading role because Pauli did not believe that NOW was addressing the issues of Black and working-class women as Pauli thought they should be addressed.

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



- From 1968 to 1973, Pauli Murray taught American Studies at Brandeis University.
- In 1973, following the death of Pauli's longtime partner Irene Barlow, Pauli left Brandeis to become a candidate for ordination at General Theological Seminary.
- In 1977, Pauli Murray became the first African American woman in the U.S. to become an Episcopal priest.
- One month after her ordination, Pauli administered her first Eucharist at the Chapel of the Cross where, more than a century earlier, a priest had baptized her grandmother Cornelia when she was a baby and still a slave.
- Pauli Murray died in 1985. Pauli Murray is honored on July 1 on the Episcopal Church calendar. The Pauli Murray Center in Durham, NC, holds exhibits, community dialogues, visual and performing arts, activism, and workshops at the Center connect history to contemporary human rights issues.

The Rev. Pauli Murray



My Name is Pauli Murray, documentary available on Amazon Prime Video

The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris

Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts



Rt. Rev. Harris at her consecration as bishop in 1989.

- Barbara Clementine Harris was born on June 12, 1930, in Philadelphia
- She attended the Charles Morris Price School of Advertising and Journalism.
- After graduating she worked at Joseph V. Baker Associates Inc., a black-owned national public relations firm headquartered in Philadelphia eventually becoming president of the company.
- In 1968 she joined the Sun Company as a community relations consultant, then manager of community and urban affairs and heading Sun's public relations department from 1973 until becoming a senior staff consultant at Sun's corporate headquarters in 1977.
- A lifelong Episcopalian, she was active in the Civil Rights Movement through the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU), and the National Council of Churches' Delta ministry. She traveled to Greenville, MS, to help register black voters in 1965 and took part in the Selma to Montgomery march.

The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris

Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts



Rt. Rev. Harris at her consecration as bishop in 1989.

- Barbara served as the crucifer at the Church of the Advocate in 1974 when the "Philadelphia 11," the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church, were ordained by bishops who defied the prohibition on ordaining women.
- She was inspired by the ordinations and discerned a call to ordained ministry. She did not attend seminary, rather she undertook coursework at Villanova University, the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, England, and the Pennsylvania Foundation for Pastoral Counseling.
- She was ordained in the Diocese of Pennsylvania by Bishop Lyman Ogilby, as a deacon in 1979 and as a priest in 1980.
- Harris served priest-in-charge of St. Augustine of Hippo Church in Norristown, PA, from 1980 to 1984. She also served as chaplain to the Philadelphia County prisons. In 1984, she was named executive director of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company and publisher of the social justice magazine *The Witness*.
- In 1988, she took on additional duties as interim rector of the Church of the Advocate, her home parish.

The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris

Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts



Rt. Rev. Harris at her consecration as bishop in 1989.

- On September 24, 1988, Barbara Harris was elected Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts and was consecrated on February 11, 1989. She was the first woman elected bishop in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.
- Her election as bishop received much attention and caused controversy in the church and the Anglican Communion. There were many who objected to a woman being elected Bishop. Others objected because she was divorced, had not graduated from college or seminary, and had been a priest for less than a decade. Others objected to her theology.
- People campaigned against her candidacy, and she even received death threats.
- Some who objected to electing a woman as bishop, left the Episcopal Church and formed the independent denomination, the Episcopal Synod of America.

The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris

Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts



Rt. Rev. Harris at her consecration as bishop in 1989.

- All questions about her qualifications were addressed during the election process clearing the way for her election as the first woman bishop in the Episcopal Church.
- She served until 2003 in the Diocese of Massachusetts working to eradicate racism, sexism and homophobia, and to help bring about the full inclusion of all people in the life and sacraments of the church.
- She served as Assisting Bishop in the Diocese of Washington from 2003-2007.

The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris

Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts



Rt. Rev. Harris at her consecration as bishop in 1989.

- In addition to her work as a bishop, she was a member of the Union of Black Episcopalians, represented the Episcopal Church on the board of the Prisoner Visitation and Support Committee, was a founding member and president of the Episcopal Urban Caucus, was a member of the church's Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns, and served as a member of the Board of Trustees of Episcopal Divinity School.
- She wrote *Hallelujah, Anyhow!*, a memoir written with Kelly Brown Douglas (2018, Church Publishing, Inc.), and the sermon collection *Parting Words: A Farewell Discourse* (2003, Cowley Publications). She is also featured in *In Conversation: Michael Curry and Barbara Harris*, edited by Fredrica Harris Thompsett (2017, Church Publishing, Inc.)
- She passed away on March 13, 2020.

The Rt. Rev. Barbara Harris Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts



Rt. Rev. Harris at her
consecration as bishop in
1989.



Learn more...

VERNA DOZIER

- [Books by Verna J. Dozier](#)

PAULI MURRAY

- [Pauli Murray Center](#)
- [*My Name is Pauli Murray*](#), documentary available on Amazon Prime Video
- [The Many Lives of Pauli Murray](#), *The New Yorker*
- [Books by Pauli Murray](#)

BARBARA HARRIS

- Video [*Barbara Harris: Becoming the First Female Elected Bishop*](#)
- Video [*Bishop Barbara C. Harris 30th Election Anniversary Celebration*](#)
- Books: *Hallelujah, Anyhow!*, a memoir written with Kelly Brown Douglas (2018, Church Publishing, Inc.), and the sermon collection *Parting Words: A Farewell Discourse* (2003, Cowley Publications). She is also featured in *In Conversation: Michael Curry and Barbara Harris*, edited by Fredrica Harris Thompsett (2017, Church Publishing, Inc.)

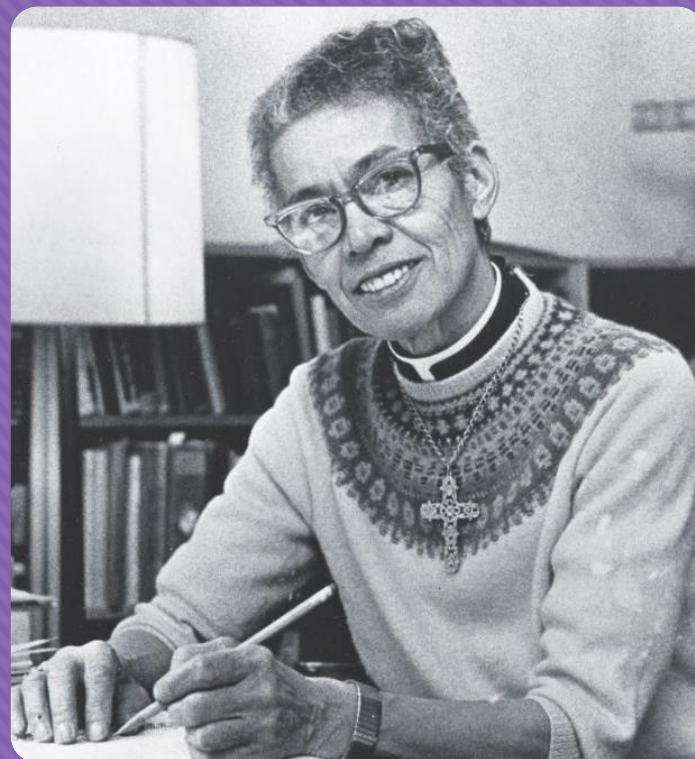
And so much more to be found through internet searches.

“The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice”

- “The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice” *The Church Awakens* is an electronic publication and online exhibit of The Archives of the Episcopal Church first created in 2008 and updated periodically. The exhibit arose from an institutional call to examine the impact of racism on the Church and received impetus from the gift of a generous donor, and the Archives Board's commitment to uncovering the historical legacy of the Church's African-American faithful.

- <https://www.episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/>





Verna Dozier, Pauli Murray, and Barbara Harris

African-American Pioneers and Episcopalians