

1989

Barbara Harris Visit 1989

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December 16, 1988

*Robin
draft for you & John
to sign/amend -*

The Rev. Barbara C. Harris
Diocese of Massachusetts
138 Tremont Street
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Rev. Harris:

Next year we at Denison University will celebrate an institutional milestone: the Tenth Anniversary of our pioneering graduation requirement in Women's Studies/Minority Studies.

Both Black Studies, Women's Studies, and the College Chaplain, would be honored and excited if you could help us celebrate this event by delivering a public lecture or sermon on campus.

Your achievements, coupled with the regrettable opposition to your elevation to the office of Suffragan Bishop, make you a singularly appropriate choice as our keynote speaker. We want to mark both how far the cause of human rights and acceptance has progressed in the United States and yet how far we still have to go. We also want our Tenth Anniversary to mark a renewed educational and spiritual commitment on the part of Denison to the ideal of tolerance of diversity. Your eloquence could help us in this renewal.

We understand that Denison students have invited you ^{upon} to campus to speak this February, and we do not wish to intrude ^{or} complicate their invitation. Should you not be able to accommodate their request, however, we enthusiastically invite you to come to Denison at any point in the 1989-1990 academic year.

←

(?)

We look forward to receiving your response.

Very sincerely,

Robin Bartlett
Acting Director of Women's Studies

John Jackson
Director of Black Studies

cg

Advocate Of Equality

Barbara C. Harris

By PETER STEINFELS

On July 29, 1974, when women were first ordained as priests in the Episcopal Church, a young black public relations executive and civil rights worker literally led the way. Holding the crucifix high, she led the procession into Philadelphia's massive Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, where three Episcopal bishops, acting without authorization, ordained 11 women as she watched.

Barbara Clementine Harris is again out in front. She is on the verge of becoming the first woman to be bishop in the Anglican Communion, the international family of 28 autonomous churches tied to the Church of England.

Several years after that 1974 ceremony, she decided to leave her work as head of the public relations department at the Sun Oil Company and to seek ordination herself. In 1980 Ms. Harris became a priest.

Occasion for Debate

On Saturday, delegates representing the Episcopal clergy and laity in Massachusetts elected her to fill a position as suffragan, or assistant, bishop for the Diocese of Massachusetts. Her election awaits confirmation by a majority of diocesan committees representing Episcopal priests and laity throughout the United States and by a majority of the bishops who lead those dioceses. It is sure to be an occasion for sharp debate because she is a woman. It will also have reverberations in the 27 other churches that are part of the Anglican Communion, many of which do not allow women to be ordained.

Born in Philadelphia in 1930, Ms. Harris grew up in the Episcopal Church there. In the mid-60's, she joined church-sponsored efforts to register black voters in Greenville, Miss., traveling to the South during time off from her public relations work. She also participated in the march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in 1965.

In 1968, she became active in the Episcopal Church of the Advocate, a largely black parish in Philadelphia, serving on the vestry, volunteering services for prisoners and working with other Episcopalians urging the ordination of women.

The Rev. Paul Washington, who was then rector of the Church of the Advocate, recalls his parishioner speaking to him of her desire to seek the priesthood. He advised her to think about it for a year and to pray. Her sense of a calling to the priesthood remained unchanged at the end of the year, he said, and he strongly recommended her to the bishop for ordination.

'Sense of Justice'

Ms. Harris "always had a strong sense of justice and compassion for the poor," Father Washington said. He described her as "extremely brilliant" and able to more than hold her own with both business and church leaders.

From 1980 to 1984, Ms. Harris served as chaplain at the Philadelphia County prisons and was appointed to head a small parish in Morristown, Pa. She reached a wider audience, however, by speaking on behalf of racial justice and prisoners' rights and in opposition to the system of racial segregation in South Africa.

Her reputation is particularly based on her association with The Witness, a venerable Episcopal journal she served as an editor, writer and publisher.



The New York Times/Dan Miller

Founded in 1918, the journal had long been a platform for radical voices within the church, and in the mid-1980's, Ms. Harris began writing a column there under the title "A Luta Continua," a Portuguese phrase meaning "the struggle continues," taken from the anti-Portuguese Angolan guerrilla movement.

In 1984, Ms. Harris wrote in the journal about how much energy the Episcopal Church had spent debating the ordination of women. "How typical of this church and the society it reflects to get its adrenalin flowing over nonissues like irregularity versus validity," she said, "while real issues go unaddressed — justice, power, authority, shared mission and ministry and wholeness in the body of Christ."

Ms. Harris is divorced and has no children. She has a sister and a brother. Her mother is alive; her father has died.

Ms. Harris has a reputation as a powerful preacher. After receiving word of her election in Massachusetts, she refused to take questions from the press so that she would have time to work on yesterday's sermon. She plans to hold a news conference in Boston on Tuesday.

The text for the sermon was from the Book of Isaiah, 43:19: "Behold I am doing new things..."

"There seem to be fresh winds blowing across the church," Ms. Harris said. "Things thought to be impossible just a short time ago are coming to be."

But she also said that the wind some people found "refreshing," others found "fearsome as a hurricane."

Episcopal Diocese in Ohio Installs First Black Bishop

CINCINNATI, Sept. 25 (AP) — The Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio installed its first black bishop Saturday.

More than 20 visiting bishops symbolically laid hands on the Rev. Herbert Thompson Jr. as part of the ordination ceremony, which was attended by about 2,700 people. It took place in the Taft Theater because no Episcopal church in the Cincinnati area had room for so large a crowd.

Mr. Thompson, who is 54 years old and a native of Queens, was elected bishop in June. He will serve as coadjutor to Bishop William G. Black and is to succeed Mr. Black when he retires in 1992.

"My election says what the church is and what it should be: a place where race is not an issue," Mr. Thompson said Friday.

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Clar—
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