

## Obituary

The Rev. John B. Morris  
1930-2010

The Reverend John Burnett Morris, an early leader in the efforts to integrate the Episcopal Church and in the Civil Rights movement, died on December 28 at a retirement home in Evans, Georgia. Morris was a founder and the first Executive Director of the Episcopal Society of Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) and a civil rights activist in the 1950s and 1960s. He was 80.

The cause was complications from Parkinson's disease, his son John Morris, Jr., said.

An Episcopal minister, Morris worked for civil rights both within the Episcopal Church and more broadly across the South. In 1961, as part of the Freedom Rides protesting the segregation of bus facilities in the South, he organized the "Prayer Pilgrimage," in which an integrated group of clergymen left New Orleans by bus intending to ride to the Episcopal Church General Convention in Detroit. At their first stop, in Jackson, Mississippi, Morris and 14 other white and black clergy were arrested and jailed after they tried to eat at the bus station lunch counter as an integrated group. Morris described the Prayer Pilgrimage as "a sermon in action ... to set the household of faith in order so that prejudice may be eliminated."

In 1963, Morris led protests in Atlanta, Georgia, against the segregated policy of an Episcopal school, the Lovett School. At the time, Morris' children attended Lovett, and Morris had recommended to Martin Luther King and his wife Coretta that they apply to Lovett for one of the King children. Lovett rejected the application on racial grounds, leading to four years of protests before the school changed its policies to admit blacks. Although Morris had withdrawn his older children from Lovett in 1963, years later his youngest daughter, Ellen, graduated from the school.

On October 12, 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke at an ESCRU dinner at the Episcopal General Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, and described "the great and significant work that is being done through ESCRU—the work that is arousing the conscience of so many people on this question of racial injustice."

ESCRU was active in many civil rights protests, including at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and at St. John's Episcopal Hospital in New York City. ESCRU also organized groups of clergy to participate in the March on Washington in 1963 and in the protests in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.

Morris was born Brunswick, Georgia, on February 10, 1930, to Hervey Clark Morris and Annie Wright (Burnett). He graduated from Columbia University in 1951. In 1952, he married Harriet (Patsy) Barnes Pratt, daughter of H. Irving and Ellen Pratt of Oyster Bay, New York. He went on to attend Virginia Theological Seminary and was awarded a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1954. He was ordained to the diaconate in 1954 and to the priesthood the following year.

Morris served as parish priest in Dillon, South Carolina, from the time he was ordained until the formation of ESCRU in 1959. Morris was a cofounder of ESCRU and then served as its Executive Director from 1960 to 1966. Morris later served from 1968 to 1970 as a Special Assistant to the Southern Regional Council, and then from 1971 to 1981 Morris worked as a Civil Rights Specialist for the U.S. Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare, and later, Education.

The Rev. Morris is survived by his second wife, Wright [Cousins] Morris, one daughter, Ellen Morris McCann of Lincoln, Massachusetts; two sons, Christopher W. Morris of Haverford, Pennsylvania, and John B. Morris Jr. of Bethesda, Maryland; one sister, Anne Berlin formerly of Augusta, Georgia; and six grandchildren. He was predeceased by his first wife, Patsy Morris, and his daughter, Anne B. Morris.