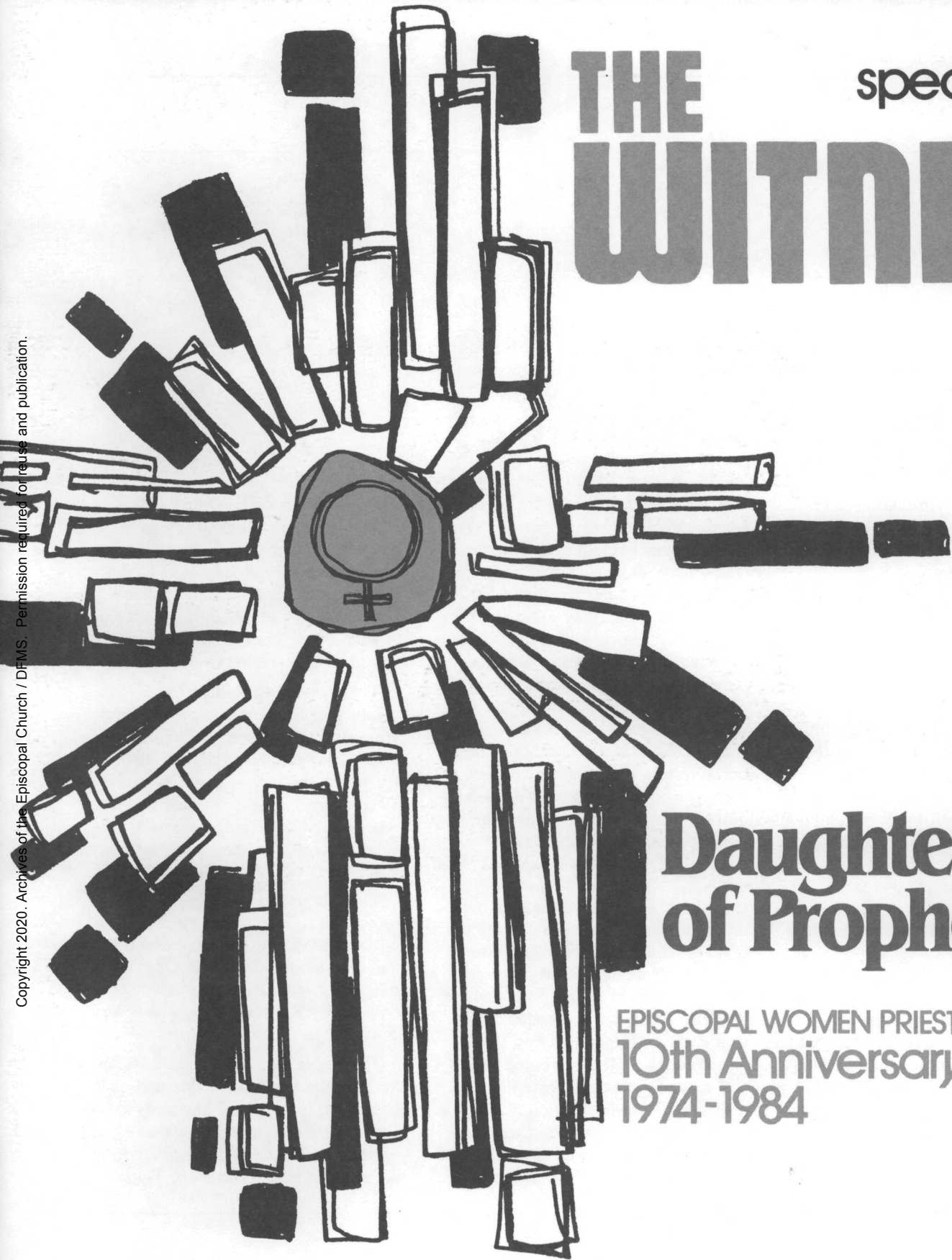


THE WITNESS

special issue

Daughters of Prophecy

EPISCOPAL WOMEN PRIESTS
10th Anniversary
1974-1984



Daughters of Prophecy

The “irregular” ordination of 11 women in Philadelphia was one of the top news stories of 1974 — a genuine media event.

Pitting themselves against the Episcopal patriarchy, the Philadelphia 11 and their supporters risked reputations and reprisals to claim the right for women to be ordained. Articles by key participants in this issue recall the poignant events which led to that moment of *kairos* and the religious drama acted out at the Church of the Advocate on July 29, 1974.

That these daughters of prophecy are still unrecognized, however, is underscored by the fact that the institutional church is waiting until 1987 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of women priests.

Therefore, THE WITNESS wants to state clearly that *we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of women's ordination in 1984*. Having said that, even as we celebrate, we also puzzle over women's gains and losses during the last decade, and the role of the media during that period.

Consider the historical context of the ordinations:

In the 1970s, women were breaking sex barriers everywhere, but the news media tended to chart their progress with tongue in cheek. Look, a woman policeman, a woman hardhat! Bless their hearts, aren't they something? The media seemed willing to trivialize the women's movement to death, at best, or at worst, ignore or dismiss women as strident, unkempt, or not — well — not very nice. Those women shouted things and insisted on making uncomfortable connections between their own struggle and the struggle of other oppressed people. A number of them made no bones about their distaste for men with chauvinist attitudes.

And 1974 wasn't too far from the disorder of the '60s; 1974 was the year of the Symbionese Liberation Army and the kidnapping of Patty Hearst. Watergate was in its last year, and the debacle of Vietnam had ended only a year earlier. Marginal groups, the disenfranchised, the oppressed were still vocal and those in power feared a resurgency of radical action.

This was the ambience in which the Philadelphia 11 went head-to-head with a powerful religious institution.

The 11 women were White, well-educated, from a religious denomination of solid credentials — easily comprehensible to male media decision makers. And their challenge to the church had a slightly threatening quality: a bell, book and candle aura. These women wanted to *consecrate*.

They wanted to perform the mystical, spiritual duties of the church. Not just fix the flowers or run bake sales. They wanted to consecrate the Eucharist and forgive sins. On a visceral level, people still fear that when you mix women and rituals, you get witchcraft. And they burn witches, don't they?

The mix was irresistible. The press turned out in such force that the ordination became the service heard and seen around the world. One religious journalist commented that only Bobby Kennedy's 1968 campaign generated as much frenzy.

The media blitz made it impossible for the church to ignore what had happened. It forced the hierarchy to confront the issues raised by the ordination. They could not ignore front page stories in the *New York Times*

10 YEARS



and cover stories in *Time* and *Ms.* magazines, even if they would have preferred to study or theologize the women into submission.

It was when the glare of publicity died that the real struggle began. The Episcopal Church ordained the first "official" woman priest in 1977. Now women could be priests . . . if. If the bishop or Standing Committee did not invoke the "conscience clause" which protects those who deny women's priesthood and calls them "none the less members in good standing of this church."

The conscience clause sent a message to women: "You can sit at the counter, but we reserve the right not to serve you." Women are still forced to search for a bishop who will ordain them, a parish that will accept them. This deadening daily battle does not attract the same media attention that the packed churches, the defiant eucharistic celebrations, the ecclesiastical trials once did.

Ten years ago, too, it seemed the issues were clearer. Change seemed possible, if not inevitable. But institutions have long memories and

wait patiently for the backward swing of the pendulum. Who would have believed 10 years ago that the Equal Rights Amendment would fail? That employment gains would be lost in a failing economy where "last hired, first fired" becomes the rule? That those in power could pit women against people of color in competition for scarce jobs? That for every woman who rises to a position of power in a formerly restricted field, many of her sisters sink below the poverty level?

The joy and dignity of July 29 must never be lost. We rejoice in that victory, and in the heaven among us today of some 500 women priests. But the painful efforts to hold the ground gained, to move forward inch by torturous inch, to subsist on crumbs — those stories must be told, too.

Connections between past and present, between struggles of all oppressed groups must be explored. In a time where history threatens to repeat itself finally and fatally, making sure that all the chapters of the story are included is key to survival.

With this special issue dedicated to the Philadelphia 11, *THE WITNESS* renews its commitment to that task. ■

Film of '74 Ordination in Production

A half-hour video film documenting the 1974 ordination of the first women priests in Philadelphia is currently in production, financed by the Episcopal Church Publishing Company.

The film, which will present archival footage of the '74 ordinations and interviews with key participants, will be premiered July 29, according to the Rev. Barbara C. Harris, ECPC Executive Director.

Issues to be covered in the presentation are:

- The function of power and authority in the church
- How to organize around an issue effectively
- The functions of class and economics (including an analysis of the usefulness of sexism and racism in keeping the unorganized powerless)
- What has been accomplished and what is yet to be done.

For further information, write or call *THE WITNESS*, P.O. Box 359, Ambler, PA 19002 (215) 643-7067.

**For Extra Copies
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THE WITNESS

will be happy to provide this special 10th anniversary issue about women's priesthood in the Episcopal Church to individuals or groups upon request. For particulars write Ann Hunter, *THE WITNESS*, P.O. Box 359, Ambler, PA. 19002 or phone (215) 643-7067.

Chronology of Events Concerning Women in Holy Orders

1862 The Bishop of London orders a deaconess with the laying on of hands.

1885 Deaconesses are ordered in the Episcopal Church.

1889 General Convention directs deaconesses to be "set apart."

1920 Lambeth Conference (of all Anglican bishops) concludes "ordination of a deaconess confers on her holy orders."

1930 Lambeth changes its mind, asserts deaconesses are *not* in holy orders.

1935 A Church of England commission reports it finds no compelling reason for or against ordination of women, but affirms an all-male priesthood for the church of that day.

1944 Bishop R. O. Hall of Hong Kong ordains Li Tim-Oi as priest. In the face of world-wide censure, she ceases to function as a priest for many years.

1964 General Convention changes the canons to read that deaconesses are "ordered" rather than "appointed," and they may marry.

1965 Bishop James Pike formally recognizes Phyllis Edwards as a deacon because of her ordination as deaconess.

1966 U. S. House of Bishop receives report on "The Proper Place of Women in the Ministry of the Church" and asks the next Lambeth to consider the ordination of women to the priesthood.

1968 Lambeth refers the question of ordaining women to the member churches of the Anglican Communion for further study. It endorses the principle that deaconesses are within the diaconate. Hong Kong, Kenya, Korea, Canada ordain women to the diaconate.

1969 Special General Convention votes that women may be licensed as lay readers and be allowed to administer the chalice.

1970 At General Convention in the House of Deputies the lay order passes but the clergy order rejects ordination of women as priests. The bishops do not vote on the

issue. Convention declares deaconesses are within the diaconate and that women should meet the same standards as men for ordination to the diaconate.

1971 The Anglican Consultative Council, an international lay and clergy body meeting between Lambeth, declares it is acceptable for a bishop to ordain a woman with the consent of his national church or province. The Bishop of Hong Kong ordains two women. Episcopal bishops commission another study on the ordination of women as priests. Episcopal women begin to be ordained as deacons.

1972 The House of Bishops votes 74-61 in favor of the principle of women's ordination as priests.

1973 The Anglican Consultative Council reaffirms its 1971 position. The General Convention rejects ordination of women to the priesthood and 56 bishops issue a statement expressing distress at Convention's action.

1974 *February:* Presiding Bishop - Elect John Allin meets with women deacons and seminarians. *March:* Bishops meet to discuss women's ordination but reach no conclusions. *June:* Sermons preached in Cambridge, Philadelphia and Syracuse call for ordination of women to the priesthood. *July 10:* Bishops, priests, deacons, and laypeople meet in Philadelphia to plan an ordination. *July 20:* Plans for an ordination are announced to the church and the press. *July 29:* Service at Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate. Two retired and one resigned bishop ordain 11 women deacons to the priesthood. A diocesan bishop is present but does not ordain. *July 30:* Some of the women priests are inhibited by their bishops from priestly functions, some inhibited as deacons; others agree voluntarily to refrain from priestly ministry. *July 31:* Presiding Bishop John Allin calls a special meeting of the House of Bishops to deal with the questions raised by the ordination. *Aug. 15:* The bishops meet in Chicago, decry the action of the four bishops as a "violation of collegiality" and declare the ordinations did not fulfill the necessary conditions for validity. The 11 women state they cannot accept the bishops' actions. Dr. Charles Willie resigns as vice president of the

House of Deputies in protest. *August:* Many Episcopalians are dismayed at the bishops' actions and petition for a special General Convention. Charges are filed against the Philadelphia bishops. *October:* The House of Bishops reaffirms its 1972 endorsement of the principle of women's ordination, 97-35, but agrees almost unanimously not to act until an affirmative action of the next General Convention. *Oct. 27:* The Rev. Alison Cheek, the Rev. Carter Heyward, the Rev. Jeannette Piccard publicly celebrate an Episcopal Eucharist in New York's Riverside Church. *November:* The Rev. Alison Cheek celebrates at St. Stephen's and the Incarnation in Washington at the invitation of the Rev. William Wendt who is charged and later tried for violations of the canons. *December:* Two women priests celebrate at Christ Church, Oberlin, Ohio at the invitation of the Rev. Peter Beebe who is charged and later tried for canonical violations.

1975 *January:* The Rev. Suzanne Hiatt and the Rev. Carter Heyward, ordained in Philadelphia, are appointed to the faculty of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. *April:* Board of Inquiry reviews charges against ordaining bishops — declares the matter is doctrinal and should be handled by the House of Bishops. *July:* The Church of England's Synod approves the principle of women's ordination. *September:* Bishops of the Church of Canada endorse women's ordination. *Sept. 7:* Bishop George Barrett, resigned Bishop of Rochester, ordains four women deacons at the Church of St. Stephen and the Incarnation in Washington, D.C. They are the Rev. Eleanor Lee McGee, the Rev. Alison Palmer, the Rev. Elizabeth Rosenberg, and the Rev. Diane Tickell. *Sept. 19:* The House of Bishops meeting censures the actions of the ordaining bishops in Philadelphia.

1976 *September:* General Convention approves the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate, and agrees that the previous ordinations may be regularized, not repeated. *November:* The Church of Canada begins to ordain women priests.

1977 *Jan. 1* marks the date that women may be ordained to the priesthood under the canons of the Episcopal Church.

THE WITNESS

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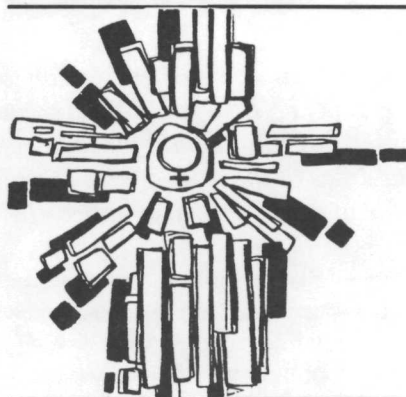
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THE WITNESS

an ecumenical journal
of social concern



Assistants to the editor of *THE WITNESS* for this special 10th anniversary issue were Janette Pierce, managing editor of *The Episcopalian*, and Susan E. Pierce, a free-lance journalist based in Philadelphia. Many thanks!

Table of Contents

6	First Women Priests Reflect on Decade
10	Pentecost Revisited Barbara C. Harris
12	Those Washington Ordinations
14	Why the (Other) Bishops Balked Robert L. DeWitt
18	Paul Washington, Church of the Advocate Susan Pierce
22	View From the Press Agent's Pew Betty Medsger
26	An Ecumenical Perspective Connie Myer

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First Women Priests Reflect on Decade

As the 10th anniversary of women's ordination to the priesthood approaches, *THE WITNESS* was able to contact a number of the 11 women ordained in Philadelphia for their reflections on the past decade. Brief updates of those who were out of the country or otherwise unavailable at press time also appear below.

Suzanne Hiatt

Some of my students today don't know history. They are surprised there was any trouble attached to women's ordination. The church, too, is blocking it out. It now seems to take the attitude that it had always encouraged and respected women's vocations and when women expressed a call to ordination they were graciously welcomed. This is reflected in the church's ignoring 1984 as the 10th anniversary of women's ordinations.

The July 29 participants had to be obedient to the *kairos*, the pieces that the Holy Spirit had been lining up for years, which come together in a moment. If you don't seize the *kairos*, it may not come again.

England may have missed its moment for women's ordination. At one time, women were anxious to offer themselves for ordination and some bishops might have been persuaded to go ahead. The mood of the country and world was such that they might have carried it off. But it didn't happen. Now some of the women have gone to other countries to be ordained, like Liz Canham who came here, and some bishops have died or retired. Consequently, ordination in England may be pushed off much longer.

With regard to clergy deployment in the United States, many women are ready for top posts, and had they been men they would have achieved them by now. But women don't move up the career ladder. Moves tend to be lateral. Women and

men have equal luck in finding entry level jobs. It's where women hope to advance that they run into trouble. And few bishops go out of their way to help women.

People ask me if women priests have made any difference in ministerial style. Individual women have, I'm sure, but by and large, women are expected to adapt to the male style, and most successful ones do. This results in an *Animal Farm* scenario where you can't tell the women from the men.

Women are doing other creative ministries such as school, hospital and prison chaplaincies, and work in hospices or in the field of geriatrics, but money for funding of those ministries is tight when there is a recession.

The first year, women priests needed courage. Today they need mutual support. Women priests have no organization of their own, and there is no advocate for them at the national church level or in most dioceses. I've met with women priests in several dioceses to try to build that support network.

(The Rev. Suzanne R. Hiatt is Professor of Pastoral Theology at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass.)

Betty Bone Schiess

I see several problems which still exist within the church. As an Episcopalian, I'm burdened daily by the notion that a bishop because of his "conscience" can refuse ordination. The conscience clause is a scurrilous accommodation to the enemy.

Another in-house problem is that women still find it difficult to get appointments as rectors. An Old Boys Club promotes its own to positions of grandeur and men find women either attractive nuisances or real problems in terms of the job market.

People say to me, if only women knew how to use power more effectively, dressed better, were less assertive, they might get ahead. That's what I call the "dressing for success syndrome." The shoe should be put on the other foot. Every priest or bishop with reservations about women needs a course in rehabilitation. They should be given a test, and if they don't pass, they should take the course over. I believe the church either influences and sanctifies human behavior, as we did in the 1974 ordinations, or it blesses a status quo that will do us in as a species.

The condition of women in the world and women in the church is quite parallel. Our slim gains are presently being undermined. But there are two differences. Government officials must run for re-election; church officials do not. And the church claims to be speaking for God, therefore it should be held more accountable. The difference between the church and General Motors is that the church says it believes in equality, justice and love and General Motors says it is out to make money.

(The Rev. Betty Bone Schiess is a feminist activist in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania.)

Carter Heyward

In 1974 when the Presiding Bishop raised the issue of *order* in the church he was getting at the heart of the matter. The questions of order, power and authority are always challenged, fundamentally by the marginalized when they say, "No more. We want to be involved totally."

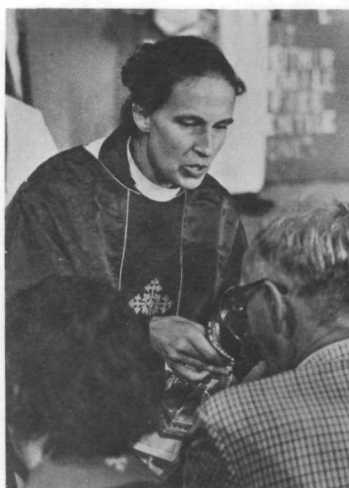
Without the element of defiance, these issues would not have been raised. We might have been ordained later — whenever the church got around to it, but we would have looked a lot like other priests.

To understand order and authority within a justice motif makes for a different understanding, a different kind of *holy order*. One problem with the Pope is that he says he believes in justice for women, but not ordination. This implies a church-world dualism, a division between ecclesiastical authorities and the world.

The church sends a perverse message when it says work for justice should be done decently and in an orderly fashion so the faithful will not be offended. Today the struggle for justice is central to the Christian vocation, no matter how one chooses to live it. The sacraments and evangelization have to be seen in the context of living justice-making lives.

The Philadelphia ordinations had a radical effect on many of us. We began to make connections between the various "isms." Without the Civil Rights movement, we could not have been ordained at the Church of the Advocate. The movers and shakers like Paul Washington, Chuck Willie and Barbara Harris had been on the front lines and saw connections between racism and sexism.

Also, the women's movement over the past 10 years has become more rooted in rich soil, making connections between races, classes, genders, religions, and nations. To write off feminism as a White women's cause is to caricature and trivialize it. Today most feminists — women and men of all colors — know that poor



An Episcopal eucharist was publicly celebrated in October, 1974 at Riverside Church, New York, by (from left) the Rev. Alison Cheek, the Rev. Carter Heyward, and the Rev. Jeannette Piccard. Inset: The Rev. Katrina Swanson distributes communion to her uncle, Sam Welles, at the July ordination service. Her father, the Rt. Rev. Edward R. Welles, was one of the ordaining bishops.

women and women of color are doubly and triply oppressed, and the women's movement is a vital justice struggle.

Two issues are paramount today for the Episcopal Church — class and heterosexism. Class is not dealt with, and is an invisible oppression among us. The tension generated can render us all impotent. Frequently, the anti-feminist rhet-

oric I have heard comes from those with no class analysis.

As for heterosexism, even when people think they have dealt with the women's issue, they still operate on the assumption that our families should be ordered heterosexually. Whether it is the church or nuclear family, the man should be on top. To say women don't have to have a

man to feel whole, creative or productive is heresy to many, which gets us back to order.

(The Rev. Carter Heyward is Professor of Theology at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass.)

Alla Bozarth-Campbell

I have a much clearer historical sense than I had 10 years ago. I see now that we're only a small part of a large process. We are one of the many generations whose gifts will transform the church and the face of the earth.

What I've learned from my work in the church and in the peace movement is that it isn't just one of us becoming a martyr that causes change; it's all of us doing our best together. The moment of the solitary hero has given way to the call of the many to share in the collective transformation of the church and the world.

I'm worried because the question of 10 years ago, "Are we doing the right thing, or are we just opening up the male priesthood to create female patriarchs?" has not yet been fully answered. It's very lonely for women priests with no female role models. We have to create our own role models.

I also worry about the women who are alone in no-woman's land, isolated, misunderstood by the men they work with, and in danger of being co-opted. I pray that these women don't lose their sanity or their identity.

Today sexism and racism are more subtle than 10 years ago. More women and minorities may be in external positions of power, but attitudes have not changed. Prejudice will exist in our culture until we get used to the idea of women and minorities in power as normative.

Why am I still in the church? The church belongs to me, too. I'm proud of that ownership. To be forced out would be inconceivable — like being forced out of my home. If there are bullies in the family, is everyone going to leave the

house, or wait until they leave? Or are they going to stick around to try to heal them?

Struggle needs to be renewed. It's not linear, but a spiral. Any generation that forgets that is in danger of regression. To borrow a phrase, "We just got out of Egypt, but we're not yet in the promised land."

(The Rev. Alla Bozarth-Campbell is Director of Wisdom House, an ecumenical center for women in Minneapolis, Minn.)

Nancy Hatch Wittig

Women are not taken seriously in terms of jobs, ministry, or even presence. A lot of change happens one to one, but if you don't even allow that one to come in front of you, to be present with you, you negate the possibility for change.

I am rector in a marvelous corner of God's kingdom. But for those of us who have been blessed and graced, there is also the awareness of those not here; of those struggling elsewhere in the church and outside the church. I carry a gnawing sense of that with me.

We need to change the hearts, minds, and souls of people. In many ways, that's the story of salvation. But there can be pockets of salvation along the way, something similar to celebrating Easter every Sunday.

Many men and women don't want to deal with discrimination against women. They think the problem is taking care of itself. I agree with the politician who said, "I'd rather deal with an Alabama redneck than with a *New York Times* liberal."

I want to reiterate the possibility of health and wholeness by staying at the altar. The challenge before me and my parish is to work together for wholeness and healing.

(The Very Rev. Nancy Hatch Wittig is Rector of St. John the Divine Church, Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., and Canon of Trinity Cathedral, Newark.)

Merrill Bittner

I came out of the woods, literally, to answer the phone call from THE WITNESS. I am in the process of clearing and developing 50 acres, with another woman, and it is my dream that one day women might come to use it as a retreat, to rest and renew themselves.

I've changed over the past decade. It has taken a long time to heal from the wounds and disillusionment, but the struggle remains much the same.

The issue of women being accepted in ordained ministry is still critical, and I only hope those women coming in now realize that the battle still must be fought. The retreat we're preparing for some who might be victims of that and other struggles is on a mountainside, across from a river in Newry, Maine. But the dream has begun. We're just putting up the first log cabin.

(The Rev. Merrill Bittner is presently doing supply and interim ministries in Maine.)

Marie Moorefield Fleischer

I see the questions raised about the church today as significant, but I have been out of touch with the structures of the church and others may be more articulate spokespersons. I was ordained in '74 because of the relationship I saw between ordination and my ministry at the time as a hospital chaplain. I didn't take on ordination from a feminist viewpoint, although some of the others saw this connection. The 1974 ordinands all came from different perspectives. In 1979 I went to work in Washington, D.C. in the field of Education and Management Consultancy and I married. I am a very private person. I now live on a farm in Keedysville, Md., which has a population of 456. We moved in two months ago and are now fencing, rehabilitating the place to undertake a cow-calf operation. The area is quite rural, the nearest neighbor a half mile away.

Three More Updates

Three of the Philadelphia 11 were away and unable to be reached as *THE WITNESS* went to press. Two — the Rev. Katrina Swanson and the Rev. Alison Cheek — were out of the country. Swanson, on vacation in Puerto Rico, is currently rector of St. John's Church, Union City, and canonically resident in the Diocese of Newark. Cheek has been

serving this past term as a consultant on women in a seminary in New Zealand. She will return to the U.S. soon. Also out of town and unable to be contacted was the Rev. Emily Hewitt, who is an attorney practicing with a Boston law firm. She is canonically resident in the Diocese of New York. ■



And Jeannette Piccard: In Memoriam

The Rev. Jeannette Piccard, who at age 79 was ordained with the Philadelphia 11, died of cancer in Minneapolis May 17, 1981. A noted scientist, stratosphere balloonist and space consultant, she was 86 years old. What follows are excerpts from articles which appeared in *THE WITNESS*, July 1981, written by the Rt. Rev. Daniel Corrigan, one of the ordaining bishops in 1974, and the Rev. Chester Talton, former pastor of St. Philip's Church, St. Paul, where Piccard served as assistant.

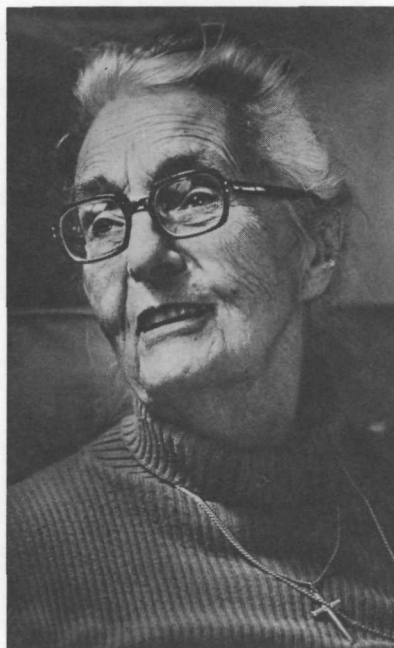
As she approached dying, Jeannette moved quickly into mature and faithful acceptance. Our conversation on the evening before her surgery was little concerned with the operation but filled with projects: Ideas to get out and onto paper, maybe publish; places to visit, etc. When we talked two days after her surgery which revealed inoperable cancer, she had already surrendered those projects and characteristically moved on to the business at hand — Holy Dying . . .

And then Jim Diamond again with a new hospital phone number. Jeannette's voice was tired but clear when I asked, "Would you like it better for me to come now to be with you or for me to come dance at your wedding?"

"Call in a couple of days and I'll tell you," she said.

So next call — "Right away, come dance — and the Bishop and the Dean and Fr. Diamond have all come this afternoon and made me a Canon of the Cathedral."

I couldn't resist. "Another first, Jeannette!



Jeannette Piccard: 1895-1981

I never heard of anyone being canonized until long after their wedding!" And she laughed. "Vale!"

We did feel sad during and after the intimate family requiem at St. Philip's, St. Paul Wednesday morning. The people there were doubly bereaved that evening in the Cathedral. The Good Shepherd in Jeannette had arranged all things however — the order of service, the cast and even the evening hour so that men and women, both clergy and lay, could come from anywhere; that her beloved Phillipians might not only swell the throng but serve and lead as ushers, crucifers — and

oblation bearers. Oblation bearers — Holy offerings rich and rare.

And the Good Shepherd knew I might need a lift. Her magnificent balloon stole was there for me to wear — so I could be up and away — maybe with the young Magee, "Touch the Face of God." The wind bloweth where it listeth and tends toward the Source.

—Daniel Corrigan

Blacks Understood

Jeannette Piccard was a balloonist, an adventurer, a mother, a courageous fighter, a priest and pastor. The role she preferred was that of pastor, and it was that role she fulfilled at St. Philip's Church.

Jeannette loved to celebrate the Eucharist at St. Philip's. She wanted her last service to be very much a joyous occasion, like a party. She didn't want her people to be sad, to feel so much a sense of loss as to celebrate a life which she had tried to live well and for a long time.

Historically, Jeannette had been a member of St. Philip's for 10 years. The Rev. Denzil Carty was originally responsible for welcoming her into the parish, and he also presented her for ordination in Philadelphia. For the past five years, she was a regular part of the ministry at St. Philip's.

To me, it is significant that a parish like St. Philip's, predominantly Black, could particularly understand some of Jeannette's suffering at not being able to exercise herself fully in what she was called to do. Blacks familiar with that feeling could reach out to her in a way others could not.

—Chester Talton



"I was tempted to stride forth like Joshua and lead that courageous band 'seven times around the walls.' "

Pentecost Revisited

Ten years is a long and hazy time over which to look back on any single event, even one in which you were intimately involved, and recall it in sharp focus. Yet July 29, 1974, remains very much with me in vivid clarity, including the heat — the sticky, stifling oppressive heat.

The heat was as oppressive as the sticky voting procedure and the stifling tradition 11 women deacons and their supporters sought to overcome that day. Of no small significance is the fact that one of the few places in which that historic event could take place was in the bosom of an oppressed community — in a church that frequently had opened its heart and its doors to the rejected, the marginalized and those seeking to exercise their non-institutionalized power *to be*.

The church phones rang incessantly from early that morning as people, pro and con, called to verify that the service was indeed to take place. One woman, whose trembling voice bordered on hysteria, asked the by then familiar question: "Is there going to be ordination of women as priests there this morning?" My response was a simple, quiet, but firm, "Yes."

"You people" (a phrase repugnant to Blacks) "are going to split this church," she screamed. I closed the conversation by saying: "Madam, this church is split already. That is why we are having this service."

Most of what I felt that day was the rightness of what was taking place. This feeling of rightness, of "oughtness," was reinforced by several things. Primarily there was the great sense of "the church gathered" as nearly 2,000 people streamed into and filled the cavernous Church of the Advocate in one of Philadelphia's most depressed neighborhoods. They came from far and near, from home and abroad, and there seemed to be a soul-touching oneness as people wedged themselves even closer together to make room for yet another and another kindred spirit.

We seemed to be standing on the edge of a new Pentecost and I silently hummed an anthem frequently sung by the Advocate's choir, "Truly the Lord Is in This Place."

By contrast, detractors of the occasion were so few in number and so consumed by hostility that they proved to be a pathetic presence, at best. Their pre-service huddle in the Parish Hall had all the verve of a two-hand touch football squad about to go up against a Superbowl team.

By agreement, and for the safety of the ordinands, their presenters and other participants in the service, the procession was to make its way to the chancel by the shortest possible route. As crucifer, for one fleeting, emotionally charged moment, I was tempted to throw caution to the winds, stride forth like Joshua and lead that courageous band

face to the service, drawing an analogy to the untimely onset of a mother's last stages of labor pains and the attendant inconveniences as well as problems. The other, by a last-seen-heading-for-Rome suburban rector, warned: These women cannot be priests, "they can only offer up the sight, sound and smell of perversion." Wonder what he might have said to our Lord about the women of his company.

Ten years is a long and hazy time over which to look at what has ensued since that fateful July day.

Some of what has happened has been obvious: the ordination of more than 500 women to the priesthood; increasing female seminary enrollments; some instances of satisfactory deployment of ordained women and certainly a lessening of the overt hostility experienced by the Philadelphia 11 and their immediate successors.

The hastily convened Chicago meeting of the House of Bishops a month following the ordinations, the presentations and the trials of the Revs. William Wendt and Peter Beebe, except for their ecclesiastical overtones, might well have been scripted right out of *Alice in Wonderland*. Even more bizarre was the need for some members of the House of Bishops to keep reminding themselves and the church that they really had censured the ordaining bishops by pressing to censure them yet again.

In an age where productivity ranks as a precious "commodity," the church would scarcely have gotten high marks for all the time and energy it expended in these areas. But, then, how typical of this church and the society it reflects to get its adrenalin flowing over non-issues like irregularity versus validity, while real issues go unaddressed — justice, power, authority, shared mission and ministry and wholeness in the Body of Christ. Can't recall who said it, but someone is credited with declaring: "The issue is *order*, not *Orders*." Shades of Orwell.

by Barbara C. Harris

"seven times around the walls." But remembering that the church, like any other place, has its share of crazies, my better judgment prevailed and I accepted the discipline. But, my God, it would have been like walking about in Zion.

Faces from that day remain indelibly etched upon my memory. Tears streaming down the cheeks of Jeannette Piccard's son . . . pride shining in the eyes of Bishop Edward Welles, father of Katrina Swanson . . . the madonna-like quality of Alison Cheek's countenance . . . the rugged jaw "cool" of my rector, Paul Washington and the ever watchful, ever alert visage of our Cassandra, Sue Hiatt, expecting the worst. Another hymn came to mind, "I sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true." A line that closes another stanza reads: "and there's not any reason, no not the least, why I shouldn't be one too." Perhaps the stirrings in my heart that day marked the unrecognized beginning of my own response to call and my journey to ordination.

Trapped in the midst of the ordaining throng in the chancel (I was holding the only portable microphone) I experienced another Pentecost-like sensation. I was convinced I heard "the rush of a mighty wind" as a myriad of hands stretched forth to the first bowed and waiting head (Jeannette's).

More than the words from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer used that morning is my recollection of two statements. One was Paul Washington's moving pre-

For many the issue of women's ordination is well settled. Female priests are a fact of life and the bitterness of 1974 and the months immediately thereafter seems to have been swept neatly under the rug. But there is a lump in the Episcopal carpet.

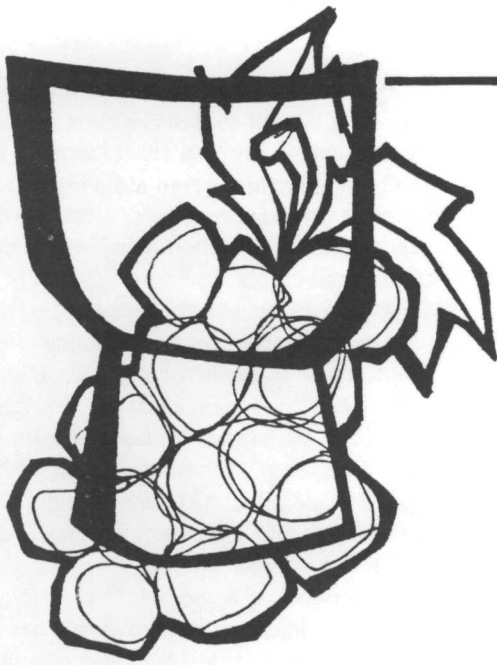
Much of what has not happened is less obvious, but no less troublesome. For some it is the quiet invoking of the damnable 1977 "conscience clause" that permits bishops to reject women on the basis of gender alone or to restrict them to the office of deacon. Although priests, the Philadelphia 11 were similarly restricted by their bishops.

Others of us, as pointed out by Nan Arrington Peete elsewhere in this issue, are keenly aware that the number of women ordained since 1977 far exceeds the total number of Black clergy in the church. As a result, the so-called "glut" of White clergy and the under-supply of Black and other minority priests make the issue of deployment both sensitive and a source of tension. Black women priests, meanwhile, live with the double jeopardy of racism and sexism.

In a speculative look ahead, with a perspective informed by history, one suspects that the eventual and inevitable election of women to the Episcopate (and perhaps their "irregular" ordinations) will have its adverse effect on more Blacks getting to occupy seats in the House of Bishops. Ten years is indeed a long time and the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. ■

The Rev. Barbara C. Harris became Executive Director of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company on Jan. 1, 1984.





Oh, No, Not Again!

Those Washington Ordinations

Would the 1976 General Convention have approved women's ordination if four more women had not been ordained in Washington, D.C., 14 months after the Philadelphia event?

Possibly not.

The Rt. Rev. George Barrett, resigned Bishop of Rochester, ordained the four at the Church of St. Stephen and the Incarnation in September, 1975, thereby setting off further ecclesiastical handwringing.

The Philadelphia ordinands see no distinction between the two events. The Washington women were "part of the same prophetic moment," according to the Rev. Suzanne Hiatt, ordained in Philadelphia.

One of the Washington ordinands, the Rev. Alison Palmer, strongly believes the Washington ordinations helped assure the 1976 vote: "Had there been no further ordinations, Philadelphia might have been viewed as an aberration. But the bishops saw that if this could happen in Washington, ordinarily a rather conservative diocese, it could happen through-

out the church."

The Rev. Betty Rosenberg, also of the Washington 4, concurs. "When the church faced *two* ordinations and *15* women priests, it began to look like a mass movement." Rosenberg is canonically resident in Washington and is still active with St. Stephen's while she is building her counseling practice. She would like to teach in the area of women and religion, and feels that her ordination and the way it was done was a significant step in her own spiritual journey. "My concept of the deity changed, from my childhood understanding of a male deity to a deity with female traits. I have done a lot of research around the goddess image in ancient religion, which has enriched me."

Palmer has found her share of discrimination in Wellsfleet, Mass., where she moved following her retirement as a foreign service officer with the State Department. Several years ago she was recognized at a service during the kiss of peace by one of the communicants. "The rector

called me, subsequently, to help distribute Communion on Easter Sunday. But the day before the service he telephoned to say he didn't think the congregation was ready for this. I had to protest vigorously before he came around. I'm currently conducting the early summer service at the Chapel of St. James the Fisherman, founded by Bishop James Pike at Wellsfleet, and I have become a hospice volunteer on the lower Cape."

Palmer also remembers an ad in her diocese's newspaper offering clergy pulpit exchanges in England. "I protested that this was equivalent to inviting white clergy to join a club which excludes Black clergy, since women can't be ordained in England," she said.

The Rev. Lee McGee sees another kind of exclusion in the Episcopal Church since her ordination in Washington. "Although women are not being prohibited from the priesthood today, if one looks for an institutional church with a vision of ministry which includes not only male

and female but expects a great diversity with regard to minorities and economic status, we have a long way to go," she said.

Should the church ask her today, "What more do you want?," McGee would respond, "more women rectors, more women deputies to General Convention, and female leadership in vestries. I would also like to see women bishops in my lifetime. The door to ordination is open, but is there a sense of urgency to broaden the base of the priesthood and of the leadership of the church?" she wonders. On the other hand, her best memory of the early struggle was "participating with a community of people wrestling with great tensions and questions of right and wrong."

McGee currently teaches homiletics at Yale Divinity School.

The fourth woman ordained in Washington, the Rev. Diane Tickell, has been serving for the past five years as parish priest at St. George's church in a small fishing community in Cordova, Alaska.

"They probably wouldn't have chosen a woman, but it was myself or nobody," she laughs. "Formerly a priest filled in once a month from Anchorage. There's not much salary, but I have a small income and can support myself."

Her church celebrated its 75th anniversary last summer. Its most notable feature, perhaps, is the building called The Red Dragon, where Tickell now lives. "It was formerly a recreation hall set up by the founder who realized that

the men working on the railroad here in that era didn't need a church so much as a place to meet, play pool, and read," she said. "Every Sunday an altar was lowered from the rafters for services."

Tickell participates in a reciprocal ministry with the Lutheran pastor from Valdez once a month. "Valdez is the terminus of the Alaskan pipeline and about 60 air miles from Cordova. I go by ferry or by plane — there are no roads." The area is conservative in nature, "but we have an Amnesty International group and a peace group which meet in Cordova," she said.

"There are five women priests in our diocese, and our bishop is very supportive, which makes a great difference," she added. ■



The Rt. Rev. George Barrett is pictured with the four women he ordained in Washington, D.C. in September, 1975. From left, they are Eleanor Lee McGee, Alison Palmer, Diane Tickell, and Betty Rosenberg.



Clergy join Bishop Edward Welles in the laying on of hands for one of the ordinands.

Why the (Other) Bishops Balked

by Robert L. DeWitt

Enroute to a House of Bishops interim meeting in the early '70s, veteran religion writer George Cornell approached me: He was confused by the Episcopal Church, he said. He queried, if the House of Bishops had twice voted in favor of ordination of women, why did the bishops not proceed to ordain them?

I passed the question off lightly, saying he was not sufficiently aware of the many facets of Episcopal polity. But his question nagged. As a bishop I was well-positioned to ponder it.

That four Episcopal bishops found answers that led them to the Church of the Advocate on July 29 is a matter of public record. For the youngest bishop and only diocesan present, 36-year-old

Bishop Antonio Ramos of Costa Rica, it had become a question of conscience: Which was more important, the maintenance of law and order or the bestowal of orders enabling the full ministry of the church? Order or orders? He saw strong parallels to the Civil Rights movement where people challenged unjust laws for the sake of equality. We decided collegially that Tony Ramos, although present at the altar, should not ordain, considering that his youth and status made him vulnerable to the heaviest reprisals.

The three bishops who did ordain (myself, Bishop Daniel Corrigan and Bishop Edward Welles) no longer had diocesan responsibilities. Unquestionably, it would have been easier for, and on, the church if

the bishops of the women deacons had themselves done the ordaining. Eight diocesan bishops ordaining their own deacons to the priesthood would have been impossible for the church to repudiate. But the church — dare I say the Lord — makes use of whatever human instruments are available and willing.

In an open letter to the church about our actions we explained that we saw our part in the ordination as “an act of obedience to the Spirit...An act of solidarity with those in whatever institution, in whatever part of the world, of whatever stratum of society, who in their search for freedom, for liberation, for dignity, are moved by that same Spirit to struggle against sin, to proclaim that victory, to

attempt to walk in the newness of life.”

Long before July 29 I had come to know Suzanne Hiatt who, like me, worked in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. She had become the unofficial pastor, community organizer, and *agent provocateur* for the women interested in seeking ordination to the priesthood. I came to appreciate not only her friendship and her intellect, but her sharp focus of concern on the role of women in the church. We had innumerable conversations on the why, the whether, the how, and the when of women's ordination to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church.

Through knowing Sue Hiatt, I also came to know many of the other women aspirants who were bitterly frustrated at their ambiguous “ladies-in-waiting” status. I was familiar with the theological and ecclesiastical objections to women's ordination, though I doubt the objectors had studied the question any more than I, who had read everything I could find on both sides of the controversy.

But I came to feel the theological question had been settled in the mind of the church. Test votes in the House of Bishops indicated a clear majority in favor of ordination. A numerical majority of members of the House of Deputies

were in favor although technicalities of counting votes frustrated the evident will of the 1973 Convention. I began to see the issue as a pastoral one. Bishop Corrigan observed it could well be human arrogance to say ordination of women was the will of God, but it was clearly, for him, an appropriate response to the claims of justice. A pastoral matter.

Over the years, thanks to Sue Hiatt, I had moved from not being really aware of the problem to becoming nearly as frustrated as the women. With an increasing tempo, I was in conversation with bishops both singly and in small groups, focusing on the possibility of an “irregular” but valid ordination which would force the hand of a not unwilling but enormously turgid ecclesiastical structure. I met with little success.

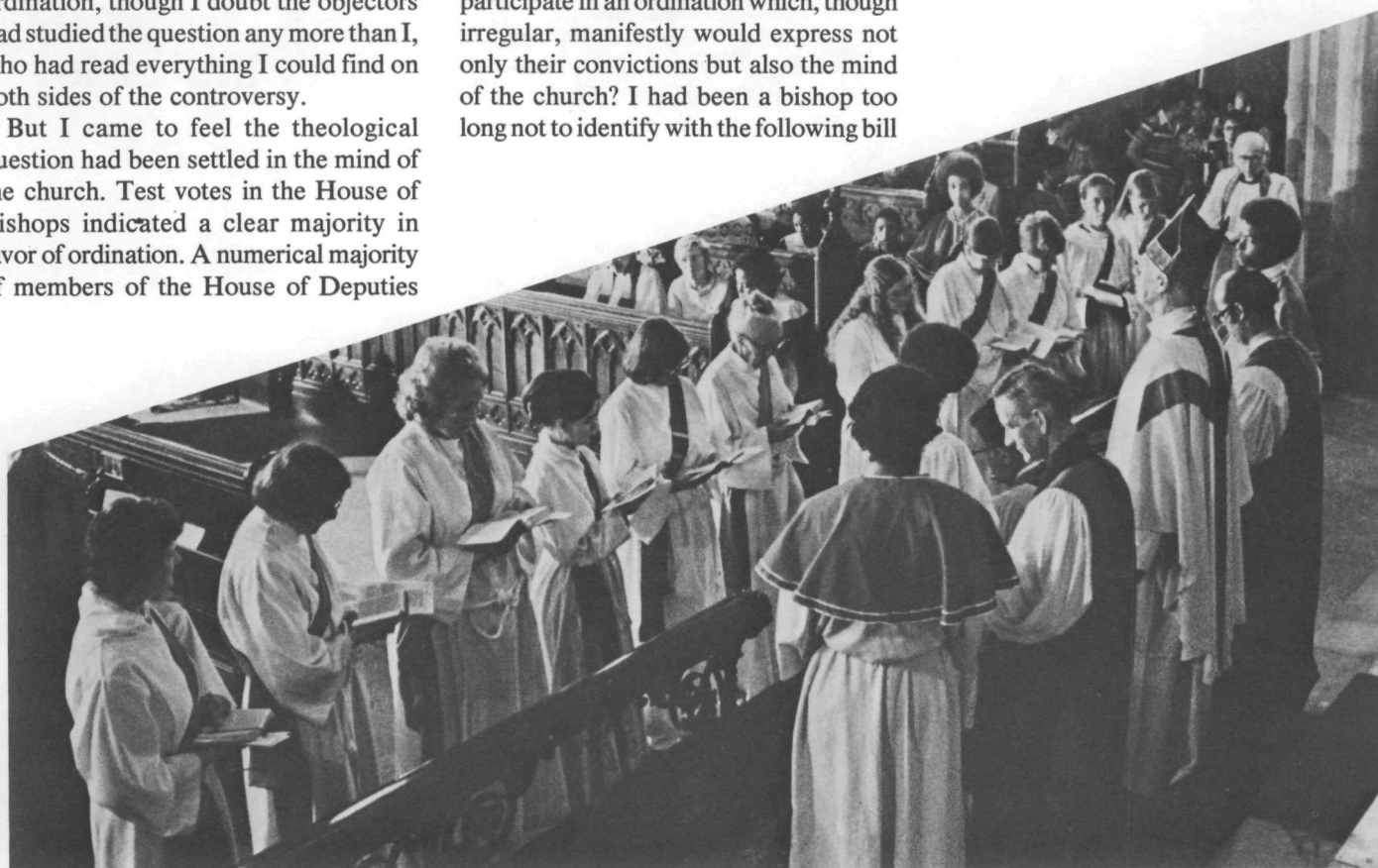
Why were these bishops not willing to participate in an ordination which, though irregular, manifestly would express not only their convictions but also the mind of the church? I had been a bishop too long not to identify with the following bill

of particulars which provides at least a partial answer to Mr. Cornell's question. It illustrates the ambiguity of most of our moral choices. Each point has theoretical validity, but each can be self-serving for a bishop avoiding a hard ethical decision.

- Bishops see themselves as Defenders of the Faith, not as agents of irregularity. It could be not only unseemly but a scandal for a bishop to come against the very ecclesiastical processes of which he is the custodian and for which he bears responsibility.

- Pragmatically, it is imprudent leadership for a bishop to get “too far ahead of the troops.” Clergy and laypersons might be offended, and with who knows what disarray in diocesan life?

- For some bishops, ecclesiastical



Ordinands stand before Bishops as service begins. From left, Alison Cheek, Suzanne Hiatt, Marie Moorefield, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Betty Bone Schiess, Jeannette Piccard, Merrill Bittner, Emily Hewitt, Carter Heyward, Katrina Swanson, Nancy Hatch Wittig. Bishops pictured, from left, are Robert L. DeWitt, Edward Welles and Antonio Ramos.

preferment is a factor; the church would be electing another presiding bishop. No bishop perceived as a zealot would be considered. The via media is assumed to be the pathway to ecclesiastical glory.

- Peer pressure is not the exclusive property of adolescents. Ask any executive in a large bureaucracy, secular or sacred. Bureaucracies mold their members in their own images, and a pretense of divinity is the idolatry lurking in any bureaucracy. Organizational values are internalized by members who come to believe genuinely — or believe they believe — that accepted procedures partake of the divine. Obviously this is an insidious posture for a religious institution which claims *ecclesia semper reformanda est*, the church should always be in the process of being reformed.

- Bishops, like all administrators, can have hard times with their organizations. When there are discontented clergy, budget deficits or whatever problems at home, a bishop doesn't go out of his way to create more trouble.

- Finally, bishops are people, too. When a man has served his best and retirement approaches, how careless dare he be about jeopardizing a full pension by risking deposition?

But the women were right: Without a fait accompli, the church would debate the theory and the proper procedure endlessly. An accomplished fact would have to be dealt with.

So it was that the ordinations of July 29, 1974 were done as, and by whom, they were done. I look back to the event with joy and satisfaction; but also with the recognition that I, too, was a reluctant dragon for a long time prior. Change for the better in human-affairs comes about, almost always, through the initiative of those who are oppressed — with the accessory help of an oppressor here and there whom they have helped to see, even through a glass darkly, the light of a better day. ■



To my infinite joy, an increasingly large proportion of people in the church accept women priests, and in the House of Bishops, fewer and fewer of my brother bishops treat me as a leper. For example, 10 years ago, the Bishop of Maine put me under inhibition within weeks of the Philadelphia ordination, so that I was not even able to baptize a grandchild in the Episcopal Church. I had to do it in a Roman Catholic church. Now he has rescinded the inhibition and I have been serving as assistant bishop in Maine until the coadjutor arrives.

"As to what remains to be accomplished, I'm really disappointed that there are no women bishops, and I guess that's all I need to say."

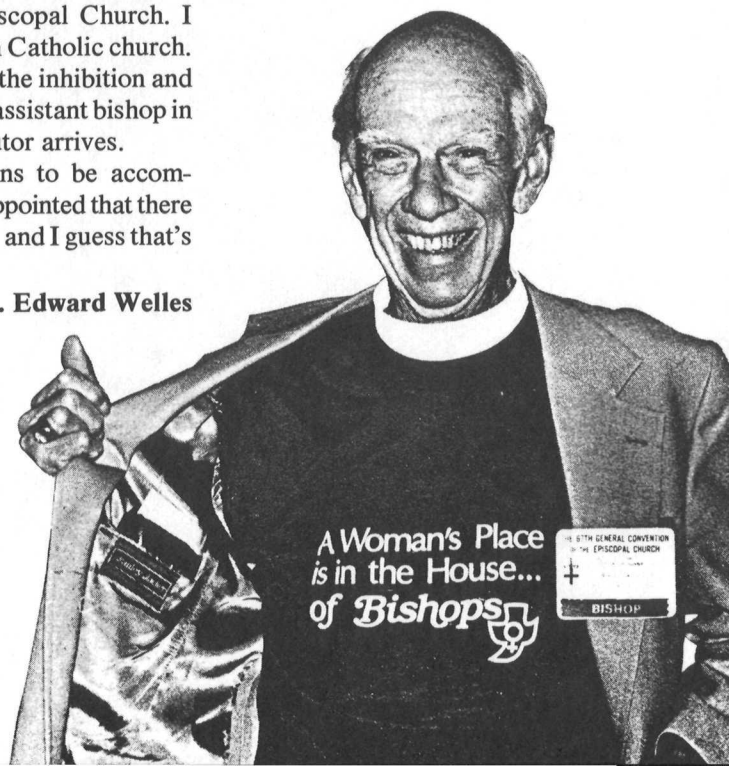
—The Rt. Rev. Edward Welles

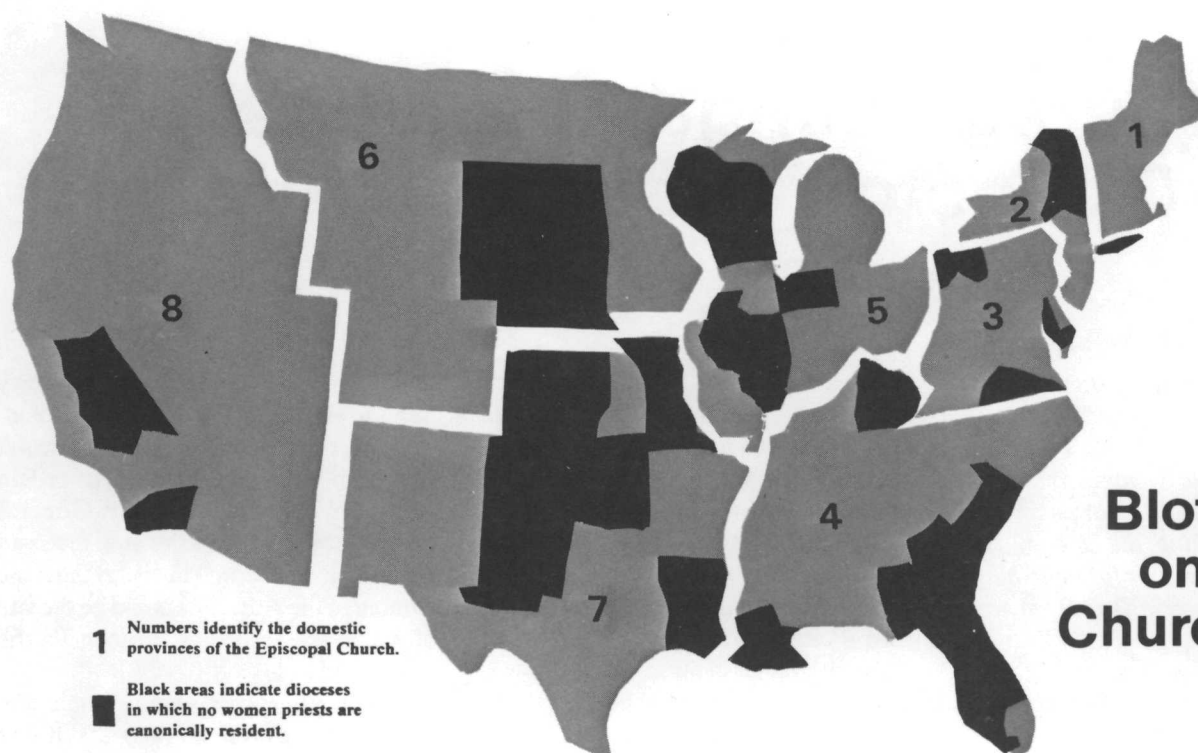
Women have brought a new dimension into the priesthood. Several phrases come in a stream of consciousness to describe it: The show must go on . . . I remember Mama . . . The mail must go through. Women don't crumple nearly as fast as men. They have an inner stability which carries them on. At a reception recently someone told me, "God bless you, sir," and I found myself saying for the first time, "She always has."

I have seen some fundamental mind changes. Ten years ago my parish rector asked me, "What the hell do you mean by ordaining those women?" Today his daughter is a priest, and he is extremely proud. Now we need to see women advanced to greater decision-making positions.

—The Rt. Rev. Daniel Corrigan

10 Years Later . . .





Blotches on the Church Map

PROVINCE 1

The 70 women priests are canonically resident in all seven dioceses.

PROVINCE 2

The 87 women priests are canonically resident in six dioceses. The dioceses of Long Island and Albany have no women priests.

PROVINCE 3

The 92 women priests are canonically resident in 10 dioceses. The dioceses of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Easton, and Southern Virginia have no women priests.

PROVINCE 4

The 25 women priests are canonically resident in 11 dioceses. The dioceses of Lexington, Georgia, Florida, Central Florida, Southwest Florida, and Louisiana have no women priests.

PROVINCE 5

The 75 women priests are canonically resident in eight dioceses. The dioceses of Northern Indiana, Springfield, Quincy, Milwaukee, Eau Claire, and Fond du Lac have no women priests.

PROVINCE 6

The 28 women priests are canonically resident in nine dioceses. The dioceses of Nebraska and South Dakota have no women priests.

PROVINCE 7

The 22 women priests are canonically resident in nine dioceses. The dioceses of West Missouri, Northwest Texas, Oklahoma, Western Kansas, and Western Louisiana have no women priests.

PROVINCE 8

The 67 women priests are canonically resident in 14 dioceses including Hawaii and Alaska (not shown). The dioceses of San Joaquin and San Diego have no women priests.

Province 9 includes the autonomous Diocese of Puerto Rico which has a canonically resident woman priest. Another is canonically resident in the Convocation of American Churches in Europe. Six other women are in jurisdictions other than those listed.

(Information and statistical data used in this presentation were compiled by Suzanne Hiatt and Sandra Boyd at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass., and are used by permission. Figures are accurate as of May 1, 1984.)

Courage Longtime Hallmark Of Rector, Ordination Site

by Susan Pierce

"What is a mother to do when the doctor says a baby is due on August 10, when on July 29 she has reached the last stages of labor pains? . . . It would not be an occasion for suing the doctor, for getting a divorce, or for punishing the child because it arrived too soon . . ."

It was with the above comparison to childbirth that the Rev. Paul Washington welcomed a standing-room-only congregation gathered at the Church of the Advocate to witness the first ordination of 11 women as Episcopal priests.

Ten years later, sitting in his office, Washington smiles as he recalls that his remarks were followed by the strains of the opening hymn, "Come Labor On," (he was unaware of the choice) and the congregation roared with laughter as the procession entered the church.

The ordination, which attracted worldwide attention and made the inner-city parish that day "the center of the Christian world," according to a reporter, was only one more battle in Washington's long campaign for justice and equality.

For all the tumult and notoriety he has experienced, Washington appears surprisingly serene. He sits in his office, a place so small it can be spanned with outstretched arms, and in his gentle, soft-spoken way, shares his reminiscences.

Since he first arrived at the Advocate in 1962 he has not been afraid to tackle

controversial causes. "By the time of the ordinations," he says, "Advocate had already hosted a number of Black activist events — Black power meetings, Panther rallies, a meeting with Stokely Carmichael. Simply to have a Black event in an Episcopal church in the 1960s — when many people didn't even use the word *Black* — was controversial."

The risk factor in these endeavors was exacerbated by the fact that the Church of the Advocate depends on the Diocese of Pennsylvania for financial support. Washington's activism has often angered the conservatives in the diocese, who have attempted to have the bishop cut off funding.

Washington's work in Philadelphia brought him into contact with Suzanne Hiatt, who had come to the city as a social worker organizing around welfare rights. He and Hiatt attended weekly meetings called by then Bishop Robert L. DeWitt to examine the relationship between church workers in the diocese and social issues of the day. Hiatt had joined the Church of the Advocate as a parish engaged in those issues, and because she knew Washington would support her vocation to the priesthood. Washington shared her disappointment at the failure of the 1973 General Convention to approve the ordination of women. He was a member of the Pennsylvania deputation at that convention.

The growing discontent among women like Hiatt, who had already been ordained deacon, found a focus for action in the challenge given in a June 1974 ordination sermon by Dean Edward

Harris of the Philadelphia Divinity School. His sermon at diaconal ordinations in the Diocese of Pennsylvania called on Episcopal bishops to ordain women without waiting for General Convention to act. Washington received a call soon after from Harris asking if the Church of the Advocate could be the site of a service to ordain women to the priesthood.

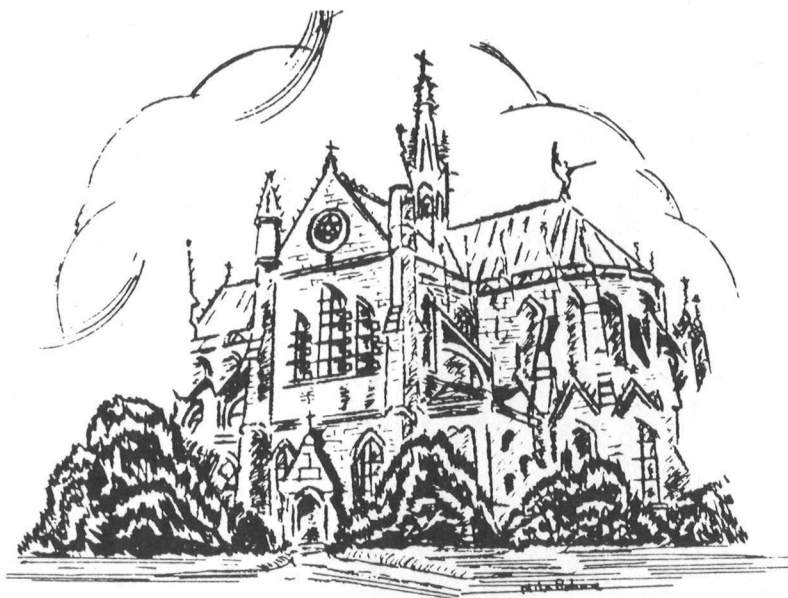
Harris' request presented Washington with "a choice between two risks. It was the risk of what would happen to me as an appointee of the bishop if he was displeased versus the risk to my conscience and my duty to God if I refused. I chose to fear God more than anyone else."

As plans for the ordination service went forward, it became clear that the women who would be ordained were all White and middle-class. However, it made no difference to Washington: "The race of the women was only incidental, and God wouldn't discriminate because of sexual distinction. The women were called as well as anyone to do God's work."

When Advocate was agreed upon as the site, Washington had to break the news to his parishoners. "I told the congregation on a Sunday morning and said I hoped they would back me because I had agreed to it. There wasn't a dissenting voice." He was facing a potentially greater risk to his church and his career than hosting the Black Panthers. The Bishop of Pennsylvania, Lyman Ogilby, had succeeded Bishop DeWitt just six months before. DeWitt would participate in the ordinations and Ogilby would

Susan Pierce is a free-lance journalist based in Philadelphia.

Church
of the
Advocate



oppose them. Washington did not know what Ogilby's reaction might be.

Washington says he was not fearful before or during the ordinations. His anxiety was only triggered after the event by a phone call from Ogilby's secretary: "The bishop wants to talk to you."

"Between that call and getting through to the bishop, all my fears descended on me. Bishop Ogilby was against it, the Presiding Bishop was against it. I thought the bishop would say to me, 'You defied me, this is it.'"

When he finally reached the bishop, Ogilby told him he had violated the canons of the church. Washington recalls saying, "I'm not aware of violating any part of the constitution of the church." Ogilby's response was, "I'm going to have to admonish you."

"After I hung up I thought, 'Phew — admonishment amounts to a letter.' There was no loss of funds, no punitive action," Washington says. But no matter what the consequences might have been, Washington knew the action was just and right.

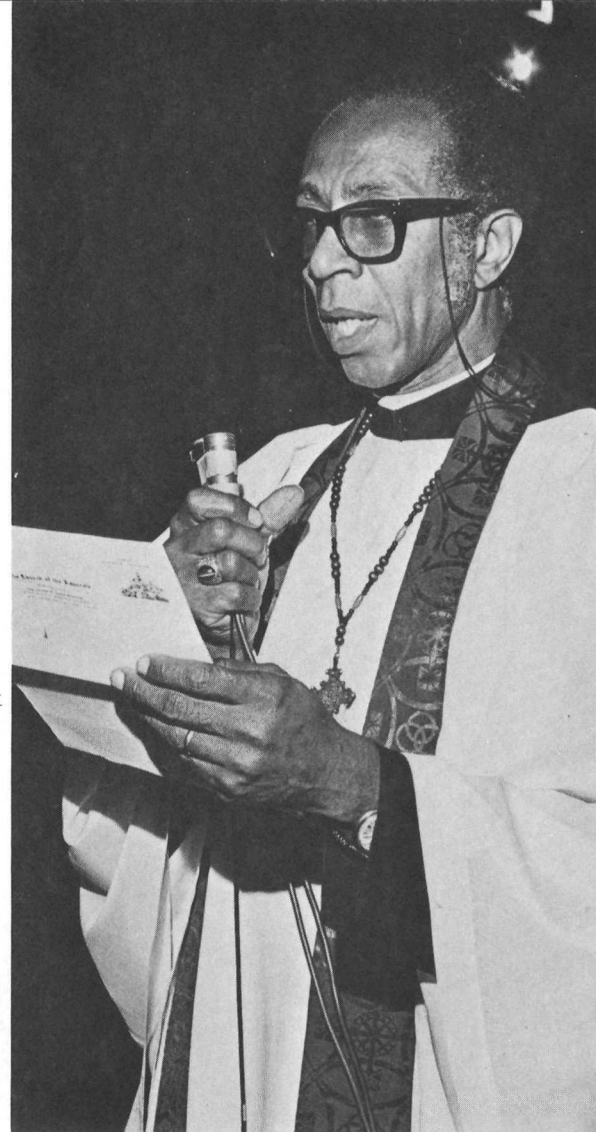
Washington feels that, "If the '74 ordination hadn't happened, it maybe

would have taken until 1979. People with conviction must raise an issue and keep confronting others with it. The ordination of women wouldn't have happened as soon as it did through regular channels."

If Washington's fears surfaced after the event, other participants were afraid beforehand that anti-women's ordination forces would try to disrupt the service using violent tactics. Washington heard rumors that the fear of violence might lead the planners to hold the actual ordination in secret in an empty church, followed by a public concelebration. Worried that this would compromise the spirit of witness in the service, Washington pleaded they not change their plans for a public ordination.

He remembers saying, "Don't withdraw now, because at this moment the church is very small."

"The witnessing church," he explained, "had shrunk to a remnant. That is typical of all prophetic moments. As we sing 'Once to every man and nation/Comes the moment to decide,' it's that small remnant that makes the witness and afterwards things are never the same."



Paul Washington greeting those assembled for the ordination of women at the Church of the Advocate in 1974.

He explains why he never shared the concern about possible violence. "I think that had to do with my own experience of dealing with violence. Being Black, living in North Philadelphia, I live with the possibility of violence every day, and some time ago I faced the possibility of death." When an activist confronts the ultimate violence, things fall into perspective, Washington believes, quoting St. Paul, "the last enemy that shall be defeated is death."

But other participants' ever-present



Ordaining bishops bring up rear of procession at Philadelphia ordinations at the Advocate. In foreground are Paul Washington and Pat Merchant Park.

fear of violence produced Washington's only disappointment of the day. He had hoped for a procession that would fill the nearby streets. Caution reduced it to a short walk from the side door to the altar.

Reflecting on the ordination from the distance of a decade, Washington sees them as one example of what he is called to do. "I view my ministry as acting out

the will of God. I believe in trying to find ways to make things happen."

To illustrate his position, Washington reaches for a well-worn copy of Gandhi's writings on non-violence. He quotes an essay describing a confrontation in which British colonial police injured numbers of unresisting Indians. He says the incident convinced the Indians "they could lift the foreign yoke and make the British

aware that they were subjugating India. When Indians allowed themselves to be beaten and they did not cringe, it showed that England was powerless."

Relating Gandhi's words to the liberation of women, he says, "Women will have to reach the point where they will decide they will no longer be victimized in a male-dominated world."

Asked what changes have taken place in the decade since the ordinations, he responds, "The political dynamics of the church haven't changed much; it is still male-dominated in the centers of power and control. I think it'll change when women are ready to make it change. The 1974 ordination service is an example — due process didn't work, so they made it happen."

He warns that in today's political climate where so many are left out in the cold, it is vital to keep fighting for progressive change. "July 29 changed things in that women could be ordained. We need battlefronts. July 29 was one battlefront. We need to identify others. As Frederick Douglass said, 'Power concedes nothing except by demand.'"

Burnout is a popular word today with those in high-stress careers. It is not a word, however, that is in Paul Washington's vocabulary. Washington, in fact, seems to be holding up much better than the church he serves. In recent months part of a wall has collapsed and winter storms have damaged its steeple and roof. Its continued existence is threatened and money for needed repairs may have to come at the price of selling one of the stained glass windows. Also in jeopardy are the services Advocate provides for the community, such as its soup kitchen. How can Washington continue to minister with this additional burden added to the need and suffering he sees in the desolate neighborhood around the church? How does he avoid burnout? His answer is simple, offered with a smile, "God is inexhaustible. You just have to reach up." ■

The Crisis That Blessed Our Common Life

by Charles V. Willie

Monday, July 29, 1974 was a strange and enchanting day: a day of tender, loving defiance, when 11 women decided to cease cooperating in their own oppression and become priests of the Episcopal Church in the United States. It was a day when the idolatry of an all-male priesthood was shattered forever. The worship of any idol, including male priesthood, is blasphemous and contraindicated in true religion. With courage and commitment, the participants in the Philadelphia ordination service issued a declaration of freedom that could liberate the Episcopal Church from sexist and, therefore, sinful discrimination against women in the range of vocational callings available to them.

The Philadelphia event rejected the arrogant and silly idea that men are better than women as ministers of the church's sacraments or as interpreters of God's word. Those who participated in that first ordination service asserted that all have access to the one living God who is an equal-opportunity provider.

One indication of the significance of an event is the context within which it occurs. As the manger where Jesus was born had a mysterious meaning for his future mission, so the ordination of 11 White women in a predominantly Black city parish was filled with mystery and meaning for their future ministry.

The Philadelphia service was more than an act of tender, loving defiance. It was an event of momentous learning in church and society. We learned, for example, that:

- Sexism, a form of institutional oppression, is sinful behavior;



Charles V. Willie is Professor of Education and Urban Studies at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. Dr. Willie resigned his position as Vice President of the House of Deputies in 1974 to protest the House of Bishops rejection of women's ordination to the priesthood. He termed the attitude "the height of male arrogance and sexism."

- Church leaders tend to sanction sin when it is encoded in their institutional rules and regulations;

- People of power often lack wisdom to know how and when to yield that which is not rightfully theirs to keep;

- Liberation is achieved by ceasing to cooperate in one's own oppression;

- Sinful people are redeemed only when they repent, ask for, and are granted forgiveness;

- Reconciliation is an ever-present possibility but can be attained only when the former oppressors fully repent and the former oppressed fully forgive.

And what of the future? Clearly, men and women have not yet identified a

common cause in church and society. Although the 1976 General Convention approved the ordination of women as priests, many male members of the church have not repented for their past sin of discrimination against women.

A sidelight of the disruption associated with the 1974 ordination of women priests was that the crisis revealed the essence of religious life. Church conventions and congregations emphasize doing good for others as a witness to religious commitment but ignore and sometimes reject repentance and forgiveness as fundamental to religious life.

All church members recite the General Confession from time-to-time, but few have personally repented for the harm their institution visited upon women by casting doubt on the fullness of their humanity. For example, in August 1974, the bishops approved a resolution which asserted that love and order are equal. They did this to condemn the July 29 ordination service because, in their opinion, it violated "the order of our common life." In their attempt to condemn disorder, the bishops misled their followers. For we all know love is the preeminent principle of life; that order not based on love is demonic and oppressive. The church leaders who misled us in their anger about disorder must repent if women and the church are to be reconciled.

Likewise, women who have suffered discrimination in the church and society must forgive those who have truly repented. Otherwise, they cannot be reconciled. It is easier to forget than to forgive. Hostility and hate are understandable adaptations among those who have been hurt and harmed by others. Nevertheless, they are inappropriate among men and women who wish to be reconciled. If out of the crisis of an "irregular" ordination, men and women in church and society learn anew to repent, forgive, and be reconciled, the crisis will have blessed our common life. ■



View From the Press Agent's Pew

by Betty Medsger

I was pushed, shoved, even kicked, by the reporters and photographers who covered that great ordination of women 10 years ago in Philadelphia. I was press agent for the event and as such, part of the support cast in that drama wherein 11 women and three bishops risked the wrath of the Episcopal Church establishment to do what they thought was just.

This scene was playing itself out in various forms for women everywhere as they struggled during the early 1970s to make the first inroads into many then all-male preserves. Other institutions do not have the rituals that the church has. Most women's struggles were worked out behind office doors, in coal mine shafts and assembly lines, not at an altar with cam-

eras and reporters poised to capture the change for the world. As women read and watched what happened in Philadelphia, they were watching themselves. It was a parable with massive appeal.

My role in all this began when Bob DeWitt called and asked me to handle press relations for the group. I had known Bob DeWitt and Sue Hiatt since the late 1960s when I was a reporter at the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*. At the time of the ordinations I was freelancing, so there was no conflict of interest involved in handling press for the group. I agreed to do it, my respect and enthusiasm for the people and the issues involved overwhelming any doubts I might have had about being overcommitted in workload.

When I started planning how we would let the world know about the ordination of women, it was very important to remember that to a lot of reporters in Philadelphia both DeWitt and feminists were clichés. DeWitt was considered at least a maverick, if not a left-wing nut.

And feminists were, to some reporters, silly "bra burners," an inaccurate label used by the press a few years earlier at a feminist demonstration outside the Miss America pageant (in fact, no women burned bras).

There was a danger that DeWitt and the women would be seen as extremists out to do another "stunt." One of my main goals as press agent was not to let that image develop. My plan was simple: Be first with the news. Act as though the event is the most natural and appropriate thing in the world, and achieve that by explaining the situation fully. Point out that there will be opposition and outline what the theological and canonical basis of the opposition is likely to be. The idea was to have ready a thorough and comprehensive description of the coming event.

This was not how I planned to spend my summer. I had been working all of that year on a photographic documentary book, *Women at Work*. Now I took several weeks out to be a press agent for

Betty Medsger is an award-winning investigative reporter and documentary photographer. She is presently an associate professor of journalism at San Francisco State University, and recently authored the book, *Framed: The New Right Attack on Chief Justice Rose Bird and the Courts* (Pilgrim Press, 1983).

11 women who had a legacy of deep historical opposition to the work they wanted to do. It seemed appropriate that I should interrupt my work to make a small contribution toward helping these women become part of the work force, though I suspect the Episcopal hierarchy doesn't often use that term to describe its priests.

The press packet I prepared for reporters included a news release about the event itself; it emphasized the unique nature of the proceedings. It explained why the participants were taking this unprecedented step, giving quotes from each of them. The three ordaining bishops were also quoted on their reasons for doing this, and background on relevant canon law was supplied.

Accompanying the basic story were two-to-three page biographies on each of the 11 women, filled with quotes from lengthy interviews I had with each of them. The instructions urged reporters to contact the participants directly and phone numbers were provided.

Fate Intervenes

I planned to send the packet to specific reporters at all major newspapers, wire services, magazines, radio and TV stations, and interview shows. Release date was to be just before the event. But fate made me move faster.

Before I was ready to send the packet, I learned that Bishop Lyman Ogilby, worried about an action he did not approve of taking place in his diocese, had decided suddenly to release a press statement of his objections. For me that was a red alert; it was crucial that we be the first with the news. If anti-ordination forces preceded us to the press, the condemnation of the event would make the first and most memorable public impression. We had to announce the news so as not to be put in a defensive position.

I consulted with DeWitt and the women and we agreed it was time to release the story. I had to do it over the phone,

since the packets weren't ready. Due to time constraints, I limited my contacts to Philadelphia papers, the wire services, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Each conversation was over an hour long because I wanted to be sure reporters had all the background material to do informed stories.

Approach Understated

My approach was understated. It was a bit like calling a reporter and matter-of-factly saying, "I'm Larry Speakes and I'd like to tell you that President Reagan is changing his registration today from Republican to Democrat. Are you interested?" The facts carried the story. Yes, they wanted it. Yes, they even wanted to know the theological and canonical background on the issue (information that, left to their own initiative, many never would have pursued). Yes, they wanted quotes from each woman's bio. I suggested they call Bishop Ogilby since this was going to happen in his diocese and I understood he did not approve of it.

The result was that I was hoarse for days and the story ran everywhere on July 20.

Later, I distributed the entire packet to a long list of reporters. Because I thought Anglicans elsewhere might be interested, I also sent it to the Washington bureaus of numerous European and Canadian newspapers and networks.

The phones of all of us involved rang frequently during the next few weeks. When opposition forces voiced their opinions, they, not we, were on the defensive. I think the press strategy helped the event to be perceived as a significant historical moment that meant the righting of a longtime injustice. These women and bishops were not kooks; they were wise and committed individuals willing to take a risk in order to obey what they thought faithfulness to justice, truth and the church demanded.

The day of the ordination, the press

box was a mob scene. How was I to know that every journalist invited plus many others not contacted would come? They came in droves. Before the ordination, when asked how many chairs to place in front of the altar for press, I naively said, "Oh, about thirty." But unlike the loaves and fishes, the chairs did not multiply to accommodate the unexpected crowd. It was standing room only.

There seemed to be between 150 and 200 journalists there that day by my estimate. Every network was there. The BBC was there. The pushing, shoving, and jostling for position in the press section was unbelievable. The ordination service was reported throughout the world that evening and the next day. The women appeared later on the covers of *Time* and *Ms.* magazines.

I would like to think that it was partly because of my news releases that the event got such massive press coverage, but the truth is that the great significance, dignity and symbolism of the ordination were the main reasons it was covered so well and so widely by the media.

No amount of planning by a press agent or anyone else could account for the great attention the event received. Now, 10 years later, I think I understand why a little better. The Philadelphia ordinations were the women's movement's Selma. Of course, the two moments are not comparable in terms of risk — there was no threat of deadly violence and loss of life in Philadelphia as at Selma. But women, like Blacks before Selma, were not taken seriously and were mocked and treated with disdain when they spoke of equal rights. Feminist concerns were reduced to funny front-page stories about "bra-burning women's libbers." Women were downplayed and trivialized.

But in Philadelphia we were not trivialized. The 11 women were articulate spokespersons for what they believed in. It was a story of dignity and courage and a symbol of hope for women everywhere. ■

Memories Are Not Enough

For most Episcopal women, July 29 was a life-changing day. Women who saw their ministry in the lay order were affirmed to that as a *calling*, now that it was not simply “the only choice available.” For those called to serve God as priests, the day changed their dream to a possibility.

And you didn’t even have to be there to feel the impact. Nan Arrington Peete, presently a seminarian at General Theological Seminary in New York, remembers:

“I learned of the ordination on the evening news. I was full of mixed feelings and questions. What did this mean? How was it done? Who were these women? Where had I been that I didn’t know about it in advance? Then my telephone began to ring as friends wanted to discuss it. I soon realized something very profound was happening, something affecting me.”

As she began to read about the ordination and the women involved she was amazed at the tenacity of Jeannette Piccard. “What vision and courage! I couldn’t imagine a woman believing herself called to the ordained ministry for all those years.” But she was also struck by the fact that none of the women or the bishops involved were Black. Consequently, “the role of the Rev. Paul Washington in the event meant a lot to

me. He knew liberation was important for all and no one is free unless all are free. The church would now be opened up for everyone,” she thought.

For the Rev. Nilda Anaya of Puerto Rico, the ordination signaled that she might pursue her own dream of becoming a priest.

“I was really happy,” she said. “In 1974 I was doing lay ministry at Holy Trinity Church in Ponce, but the canons prohibited me from pursuing the priesthood. Now, I thought I could go on with my studies.” The mother of five children, and now a grandmother as well, she began her seminary studies in earnest in 1979 after her own children had finished school. She is the second Hispanic woman to be ordained, the Rev. Nina Alazraqui having preceded her.

Anaya admits the Latin American church still fears women (her own rector did not lay on hands when she was ordained) but she has a staunch supporter in Puerto Rico’s Bishop Francisco Reus-Froylan, who is a friend of women priests. Anaya says the bishop jokes, “I’m going to get rid of all the men; women priests work harder and are more creative.”

Many commentators observe that the most important aspect of July 29 is that it incarnated the issue of women priests. The church was faced with 11 real women, not just an abstract possibility.

Anaya’s own experience affirms this: “When they meet you, they change. I went to a *cursillo* in Mexico and afterwards one cleric said, ‘I was 100% against women priests. Now after meeting Nilda, I’m 100% for them.’ I had similar experiences when I visited the Dominican Republic and Panama.”

Anaya is presently stationed at St. Mary the Virgin Church in Ponce. She reports that other Puerto Rican women to be ordained soon, or studying for ordination are Angeles Bermudez, Ana Mercedes Lago and Miriam Jeam.

Janice Duncan, a member of the Bishop’s Staff in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, attended the July 29 service and remembers it as a day “marking the beginning of a new and adult faith. The message came to me and to other women: ‘You can hope to choose your place, according to your gifts.’”

Duncan left her family on vacation to return for the service, “having to be there as a witness.” She says she was scared as she approached the church, convinced that someone would block the way, tell her to go back. “I wandered around the church as it filled with friends, strangers, people I was surprised to see.” The fear remained, edged with excitement, and she remembers “an awesome sense of presence, of the church gathered.”

She sat by chance in the chancel and



Nan Peete



Marge Christie



Jan Duncan



Nilda Anaya

“tried to make myself small.” She waited for what she was sure to be angry shouts and rude interrupting outbursts but found the objections, when they came, “strong but restrained.” She also remembers “listening while the sense of community, of the presence of the Spirit within the body, grew and burst forth in the singing of *Alleluia*.” After the event she remembers being surprised to find herself moving forward to rearrange the stole of a woman she knew and saying, “you are a priest now.” “Thank you.” Then the terror was finally gone, “replaced with deepest joy.”

For Duncan, the ordination on July 29 and the ones since have made it possible for a woman, clergy or lay, to risk visibility; to seek responsibility; to accept leadership.” The ordinations of women “have authenticated the value of the woman who chooses to exercise her ministry as a laywoman.”

Marge Christie, an active lay leader from the Diocese of Newark and a member of the Executive Council, remembers July 29 as “a lovely day. The church was full. There were reunions with friends who had shared the path that led us there; the traditional prayer book words were majestic, the hymns stirred the soul, and Charles Willie’s sermon challenged old myths and called us to a new gospel. The presence of the Holy

Spirit was very real.”

But for Christie July 29 evokes prior memories, too. The mixture of joy and pain as the 1970 General Convention accepted women as deputies for the first time but rejected them as priests. The three years of work between the conventions, the close friendships, the crushing “no” in 1973. Christie treasures her copy of *Our Call*, a book prepared for the 1973 General Convention in which women wrote about their faith journeys and their call to priesthood.

Christie says, “The story that touches me most is by Jane Bloodgood, then a teacher and deacon from Oklahoma. I can still see her pacing the corridor waiting for the decision from the House of Deputies. As she walked, alone and apart, she became for me the symbol of woman eternally waiting.”

For Nan Peete, since she was not present July 29, the real impact came at the January 1977 ordination of the Rev. Victoria Hatch, whose sister, Nancy, was one of those ordained in Philadelphia. But, she remembers, “Still no Black women were being ordained.” Then finally came the ordination of the Rev. Pauli Murray. Peete makes a litany of the Black women priests: Mary Adebenojo, Barbara Harris, Michelle Thornton Page, and others. Still a number tragically small; able to be counted on two hands.

Peete is upset with today’s seminarians who disassociate themselves from the original 11. “If we do not remember our story we lose our identity. Just as we cherish our country’s or family’s history, so we need to remember ‘herstory.’” But as a Black seminarian she is not willing to forget any part of her own story. She admits that the ordinations of many Whites and few Blacks creates tension. “Racism was not eliminated in the church with the ordination of women. Since 1974 over 500 women have been ordained but fewer than 100 Blacks—men and women. In fact, today there are more women clergy than all the Black clergy put together.”

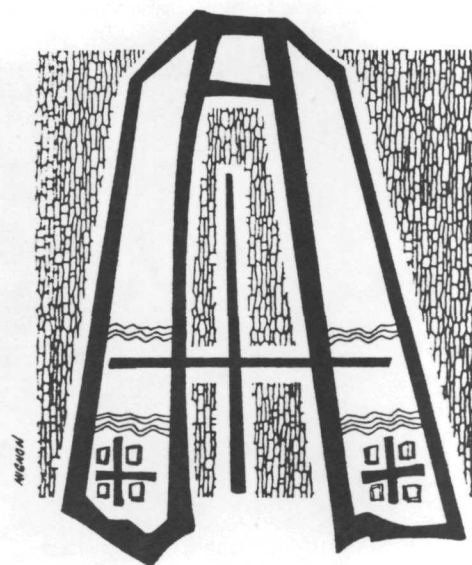
Christie also sees problems still unresolved: “While most dioceses ordain women, still some bishops and standing committees refuse and the conscience clause allows this. Few women are rectors, mostly in struggling rural or urban congregations. Deployment is slow, salaries and benefits low. The age-old divisions between clergy and laity exist among women as well. National committees and commissions have a low proportion of women members and General Convention is still 90% male. Inclusive language efforts are trivialized or ignored.”

Many would agree with Christie that “Memories are not enough.” ■

An Ecumenical Perspective:

What Progress for Women Clergy?

by Connie Myer



Ten years after the first ordination of Episcopal women to the priesthood, what is the overall picture regarding the status of women clergy in other denominations? And did the Philadelphia 11 ordination elicit reactions in ecumenical circles?

Interviews with a number of prominent church women bring mixed reactions. While all were personally touched by the ordination itself, not all are sanguine about progress since, or future possibilities.

One of the most positive responses comes from Presbyterian laywoman Claire Randall, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. Of the Philadelphia ordination she says, "It brought more strength to the ordination of women across all denominations, especially in liturgical churches where there are priests." She believes the influence of Protestant clergywomen is growing and "will grow more as the percentage of women in seminaries is so high." Presbyterians have ordained women for about 25 years, but Randall says, "Even though some women were or-

dained earlier, they didn't have the opportunity, visibility and momentum they have now. There's a stream flowing out there and it's bound to make a difference. Once the movement is out of the box, there's no way it's going back in again."

The publicity around the Philadelphia ordination was nearly matched by that of the first Eucharist publicly celebrated in New York by three of the ordinands. A United Methodist minister, the Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers, played a major role in developing that 1974 Reformation Day service in Riverside Church at which Alison Cheek, Carter Heyward and Jeannette Piccard celebrated. Powers, who is Associate Secretary of the Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, remembers "the church was jammed." The women had celebrated in private, but at the first public celebration, "There were Blacks and Whites and the Canaan Baptist Church choir sang. Then the three women came in, vested, and looking properly solemn. When Jeannette Piccard, then about 79 years old, got to the altar steps I was so moved to think that this woman, who had wanted to be a priest for 50 years, had finally made it."

The United Methodist Church, with 9.4 million communicants, has admitted women to full clergy rights since 1956,

Powers says. By 1983 it had 2,383 women clergy with 1,456 serving in local churches. Of the total, 145 were from ethnic minorities. It also has elected its first woman bishop, Marjorie Matthews of Wisconsin.

Powers thinks, "The Episcopal experience helped every woman's ordination. And United Methodist clergywomen helped their Episcopal sisters by letting them know that women in other denominations were cheering them on."

"Each woman in any denomination who does a good job helps the women in other denominations," says Doris Anne Younger, General Director of Church Women United. Younger, a member of the American Baptist Churches, says she hears some success stories, but also hears that "women pastors are relegated to small parishes or dying churches." Her own denomination, which ordained a few women back in the 19th century, is now "having a difficult time coping" with seminary enrollments that are rapidly approaching 50% female.

On the positive side, Younger reports, "We are graduating a number of Black women from our seminaries. We're now beginning to place some women in Black American Baptist churches, which are even more male-dominated than White

Connie Myer, a free lance writer who lives in Manhattan, taught English for the Church of Uganda (Anglican) in 1968-69.

churches.”

Dr. Sylvia Ross Talbot, a Vice Moderator of the World Council of Churches, is a member of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. She was pleased “Episcopal women broke the barrier, but the event was shrouded in so much controversy and alienation, it also saddened me a bit. I just hope it leads to more ordinations of Anglican women around the world.” Talbot says the AME Church began ordaining women in 1948 and has seen the number of women clergy grow in the past 10 years. She reports that women still are not assigned to large metropolitan churches, and only two are presiding elders — a supervisory position — one in Guyana and one in Ohio.

Rabbi Deborah Prinz of Temple Beth-Am in Teaneck, N.J. also expresses some regret about the Philadelphia ordination. In 1974 she was in her first year of rabbinic school in Israel and says, “I thought it was too bad the entire church didn’t ordain women and I was glad I was part of the Jewish tradition that did.”

Still, it took 50 years from the day in 1922 when the Reform Central Committee of American Rabbis approved ordination until the first seminary-ordained woman rabbi was graduated. Since the early 1970s, Prinz says, 60 women rabbis have been ordained by the Reform movement and 15 to 20 by the Reconstructionist branch. Conservative Judaism has recently decided to accept women rabbis and is now taking seminary applications.

Prinz, formerly assistant rabbi at Manhattan’s Central Synagogue, now has her own congregation, a new trend in Judaism. “There’s been a change since 1979. About 10% of women rabbis are in solo congregations now,” she said. “Sometimes we look to Protestants and are embarrassed because of the little we have done compared to the positions they have, but we’re catching up.”

Catching up is not the question today for Roman Catholic women who have seen their church retrogress during the past decade, according to Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz. “Under Paul VI the church had a more relaxed attitude. Questions could be asked. Churches in the United States and France allowed young girls to be altar servers and women were preaching unofficially in some places. But within the last few years this has been labeled liturgical abuse and is no longer allowed. Since John Paul II, the church has tended to go back to pronouncements from on high.”

Isasi-Diaz was formerly a member of the Women’s Ordination Conference whose goal was ordination of women to a renewed priestly ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. Now finishing a master of divinity program at Union Theological Seminary, 41-year-old Isasi-Diaz still believes renewal may come, “but not in my lifetime. It depends on how long the present Pope lives and who the next Pope will be,” is Isasi-Diaz’ opinion.

The Rev. Dr. Beverly Harrison believes the Episcopal ordination “had a tremendous impact on Catholic women. It hasn’t upped the ante for their own ordination strategy, but it certainly increased their consciousness of the depths of misogyny. Other Protestant denominations prior to 1974 had women clergy, but in the Catholic view, they weren’t ‘real clergy.’” She sees no progress towards ordination in that church “until the women figure out something to shift the ground rules.”

Harrison, a Presbyterian and professor of Christian ethics at Union Theological Seminary, says the Philadelphia event was “a creative moment in the feminist politics of change. The Episcopal Church never would have voted in favor of women’s ordination. Direct action had to be taken. Anyone who thinks there would have been movement without the events in Philadelphia and Washington is wrong.

“The ordination also discovered a heritage of resisting oppression by modeling the occasion around the fact that the first American Episcopal bishop was ‘irregularly’ ordained after the Revolution.

“The Episcopal ordination had a big impact because it was so controversial and newsmaking. It opened offending theological statements about women to public scrutiny and the media got excited about how women were treated in the church. I briefed the media for the Riverside Church service and one young woman reporter couldn’t believe Christians talked that way about women.

“What Philadelphia did was to make people aware of the suffering of Episcopal women, but the Episcopal Church remains unresponsive to this day,” she maintained.

Acceptance of the reality of women’s ordination is still an up-hill battle in the Episcopal Church, in the opinion of feminist theologian and author Virginia Mollenkott, who teaches English at William Paterson College in Wayne, N.J.

“I was jubilant they had the nerve to do it,” she says of the participants in the 1974 ordinations, “and I made tracks to get communion from one.”

Mollenkott, now an Episcopalian, says her former church, the Plymouth Brethren, “doesn’t have women clergy and never will. We wore hats to service to indicate our submission to men.”

She is concerned that, despite the ordination, Episcopal women are still not welcome in the highest decision-making levels. “And the blockage of gay and lesbian people from full citizenship in the church is very painful to me,” says Mollenkott. “It is difficult to be part of a system where there’s still so much injustice.”

For Mollenkott, the Episcopal attitude is “We’re ordaining women, but we don’t have to accept them.” She concludes, “The church’s failure to lift up women is idolatrous.” ■

P.S. This has been a special supplement to THE WITNESS, commemorating the 10th anniversary of the "irregular ordination" of 11 women priests in Philadelphia, which broke centuries of sexual discrimination in the Episcopal Church. That occasion also marked the rebirth of THE WITNESS, a monthly magazine of social commentary, serving as the social conscience of Episcopalians and as an ecumenical journal of Christian concerns. Each month THE WITNESS explores a wide variety of topics in the realm of church and society. If you are not already a subscriber, we invite you to continue the journey with us. Use the convenient coupon inside.

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