

A WOMAN NAMED PAULI

Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina ECW Annual Meeting

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At our General Convention this past summer, The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray was added to the calendar of commemorations of The Episcopal Church. She will be included in future editions of *Holy Women, Holy Men*, which is the successor to *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. And her name will be added to the calendar listing in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Pauli was the first African American woman ordained a priest in The Episcopal Church. And she was much, much more – writer, lawyer, professor, and advocate for the rights of African Americans and women. Among her many accomplishments was writing *States' Laws on Race and Color* – an almost 800-page tome, commissioned by the Women's Division of the Methodist Church – which served as a major reference for the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case and which Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall referred to as “the Bible for civil rights lawyers.” She also wrote *Jane Crow and the Law: Sex Discrimination and Title VII*, in which she drew parallels between race-based and sex-based discrimination. She was one of the founders of the National Organization for Women and a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and of the Congress of Racial Equality, actively protesting segregated buses and cafeterias. And she was appointed by President Kennedy to the civil and political rights committee of the President's Commission on the Status of Women.

You can read many details of her life in the timeline that is included in your registration packets (<http://paulimurrayproject.org/pauli-murray/timeline/>). You will also find a link there to the Pauli Murray Project, which will lead you to a lot more information about her.

My focus today is on her life as an Episcopalian and, in particular, her association with several churches in this diocese.

The story begins before the Civil War, when Pauli's maternal grandmother, Cornelia, was born as the daughter of a slave (named Harriet) and Harriet's owner (Sidney Smith) – which was not an uncommon type of liaison in that era. Cornelia grew up on the Smith plantation on Smith Level Road in Chapel Hill, where she was raised by Mary Ruffin Smith, Sidney's sister; Mary was therefore both Cornelia's aunt and her owner. Mary took Cornelia to worship at The Chapel of the Cross, where Cornelia sat in the slave balcony. Cornelia was baptized there in 1854 (*December 20*), as “one of the five servant children belonging to Miss Mary Ruffin Smith,” according to the parish register.

Pauli's maternal grandfather was Robert Fitzgerald, whose father was a mixed-race freed slave and whose mother was white. He came south from Pennsylvania as a schoolteacher during Reconstruction.

Pauli Murray wrote two autobiographical books – *Proud Shoes*, which is the story of her extended family and her childhood in Durham, and *Song in a Weary Throat*, which is a more comprehensive autobiography.

Pauli wrote in *Proud Shoes*, “In line with her own training, Cornelia was determined to bring [her children] up as Episcopalians although Grandfather was Presbyterian. She won the first round when she had her first child christened Mary Pauline Fitzgerald at the white Episcopal Church in Hillsboro by Dr. Curtis, its rector.” (*p. 229*)

In fact, the baptisms of several Fitzgerald children are recorded in the parish register of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Hillsborough, with the designation “colored.” Cornelia was their sponsor. The family later moved to Durham, where Cornelia and her six children (including Agnes, Pauli's mother) were added to the parish register of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in 1881 – again with “C-O-L period” in parentheses. (Robert is recorded there as

being a Presbyterian.) This pattern of small numbers of blacks worshipping in predominantly white churches was typical of the antebellum period.

According to the typewritten *Origins of St. Titus Episcopal Church* in Durham, “St. Philip’s Episcopal Church...reported in May 1889 that there were 127 [adult] communicants – 121 white and 6 black. Some of the earliest colored communicants were Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald and several of her daughters who had attended St. Augustine’s School.” (St. Augustine’s had been founded in 1867 by Episcopalians for the education of freed slaves.) Continuing with the St. Titus document, “By the 1890’s, however, there was increasing sentiment among white Episcopalians in southern Dioceses for separate churches.” This seems to be the case for St. Philip’s, which sponsored a “Colored mission” in the Hayti community in Durham during this period. The mission flourished for awhile, but was dissolved before the end of the decade.

Anna Pauline Murray was born on November 20, 1910, at home, in Baltimore. During her childhood, she was called Pauline, but as an adult she changed her name to Pauli.

When she was 7 months old (*July 9, 1911*), she was baptized by the Rev. George F. Bragg at St. James’ Episcopal Church in Baltimore. Several years earlier, her father, William, a former Methodist, had been confirmed there.

When Pauline was only 3 years old, her mother died and her father could not care for the children. She was then taken to Durham, where she was raised by her maternal grandparents, Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald, and her mother’s sister, Pauline (an elementary school teacher, for whom Pauli was named).

They lived in a house at what is now 906 Carroll Street in Durham. This house has been purchased by the Pauli Murray Project and is being renovated as The Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice – a center for dialogue, learning and the arts, as well as a pilgrimage site and a national memorial to Murray’s groundbreaking life. The building is in

desperate need of substantial repairs, and so I encourage you to consider making a donation to the Pauli Murray Project to support this work.

Maplewood Cemetery is behind the house. For many years, the Fitzgerald family plot was separated by an iron picket fence from the cemetery, which was limited to whites; in the late 1990s, the fence was finally taken down, and the graves of Fitzgerald family members and other African Americans are now part of the city-maintained cemetery.

Pauli and her extended family worshipped at St. Titus' Episcopal Church in Durham. In the document outlining the history of St. Titus' there's a note from Pauli Murray, as follows: "My family tradition is that my aunts, Mrs. Pauline Fitzgerald Dame and Miss Sarah A. Fitzgerald (who later married the Rev. J. E. G. Small) were among the prime movers to establish St. Titus Mission. They were products of St. Augustine's School and longtime friends of the Rev. Henry Beard Delany." In her autobiography, Pauli comments, "[Aunt Sallie] loved her teaching and her independence. I think she finally consented [to marry Father Small] because of her sense of mission and because she was one of those women in the Episcopal Church who would have entered the ordained ministry had it been possible in her time. As it was, she answered her call to service by becoming a minister's wife." (p. 50)

At the age of 9, Pauli was confirmed by Delany, who had recently (1918) become the Suffragan Bishop for Colored Work in North Carolina. You may have heard Bishop Curry refer recently to Bishop Delany as the first "missionary bishop" in this diocese. It is this "missionary bishop" concept that is envisioned for our new Bishop Suffragan – someone who can take the church to populations that are not currently served by the church.

In 1928, when Pauli was 18, she visited Bishop Delany on his deathbed. According to her autobiography, "During his prayers he blessed me, and later he said to me, 'You are a child of destiny.'" (p. 70) This affirmation seems to have had a profound life-long effect on her.

Pauli attended the West End School and graduated first in her class from Hillside High School in Durham. She then moved to New York City, where she attended another year of

high school, in order to meet the requirements for admission to Hunter College. She graduated from Hunter in 1933, one of only 4 African Americans in her class.

Five years later, she applied to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill for graduate studies, but was denied admission because of her race – despite the recent Supreme Court decision requiring segregated states to provide graduate education for black residents. Much later, in 1978, she was offered an honorary degree from UNC, which she declined.

Six years after her application to UNC, she graduated from Howard Law School first in her class (and the only woman). She won a Rosenfeld Fellowship, which she hoped to use for an additional year of study at Harvard Law School, but Harvard turned her down, this time because she was a woman. Instead, she received a Master of Law degree from the University of California, Berkeley the next year, and, 20 years later, a doctoral degree in law (*Doctor of Juridical Science*) from Yale – the first African American to receive such a degree there.

When she first moved to New York City, she worshiped at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, and subsequently at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Harlem. While a student at Howard University, she worshiped at the Church of the Atonement in Washington, DC. The vicar was The Rev. Eugene L. Henderson, who had been the vicar at St. Titus' in Durham. Pauli has written, "No one could have conceived...that thirty-five years later I would be serving in the same church as an Episcopal priest." (*autobiography, p. 245*)

In 1945, at the age of 35, Pauli settled again in New York City. Her Aunt Pauline retired from teaching in Durham and moved to New York to live with her. Ten years later, as Aunt Pauline was dying, Pauli read to her from *The Book of Common Prayer*. Pauli's autobiography states, "... for a long time after her death I felt an incompleteness, as if I had somehow failed her, and I kept asking myself why, in the ultimate crisis of a devout Christian life, I was called upon to render the service that I then believed was authentic only when performed by an ordained member of the clergy. I would wrestle with that question over and over before finding an answer." (*p. 304*)

Pauli wrote that, as Aunt Pauline was dying, she tried to contact “the Reverend Coleman or the Reverend Sedgewick at Saint Philip’s Church” in Harlem. (*autobiography*) Twenty years later, Pauli returned to St. Philip’s as a candidate for Holy Orders. In her sermon that day she said, “... it was here at St. Philip’s that I had my first spiritual crisis.... My first assignment ... was to teach a Sunday school class of twelve-year-old boys, and the theme for the church year was the life of Jesus Christ.... After about two lessons with those squirming youngsters, I experienced perhaps my first defeat in performance.... The realization that what I had taken for granted all of my life could not be communicated to others was a traumatic experience.... And so a crisis in teaching became a crisis of faith. ... I resigned from teaching the Sunday school class, eventually dropped out of church for several years, and began a lifelong quest for the meaning of Jesus Christ in my life.” (*sermon book, p. 12-17*) When she returned to the church, she did so as “a Christian by conviction and an Episcopalian by choice.” (*Pinn, 2008, p. 37*)

In the mid-1950s, Pauli became friends with Irene Barlow, known as Renee (“*rhymes with Jeannie*”). This friendship developed into a lifelong committed relationship.

One thing that Pauli and Renee shared was worship at St. Mark’s Church-in-the-Bowery in New York City, where they both sang in the choir. Pauli wrote that, in March 1966, she walked out of St. Mark’s in the middle of the Sunday service because she could no longer tolerate the sight of only boys and men filling all the roles except choir member. She wrote, “The intensity of this assault at the deepest level of my devotional life produced a crisis in faith.” (*autobiography, p. 370*)

Three years later, she wrote, “The history of Episcopalianism in the United States reveals a consistent policy of subordination, not merely of Negroes/Africans/Afro-Americans/Blacks, but also of women....The Episcopal Church, USA, has begun to recognize its failure to fulfill its Christian mission in the case of Negroes; what it has not fully recognized is its equal and far more extensive failure to fulfill its mission with respect to half or more of the human race, namely women.” (*Pinn, 2008, p. 30*) The next year, in 1970,

Pauli worked with others to craft a resolution to General Convention advocating full inclusion of women, including ordination, but it would be 6 more years before ordination of women would be approved.

In 1973 (*February 21*), her partner, Renee, died. Again, Pauli was at her bedside and read the 23rd Psalm – but, once again, as a lay person, she was unable to perform last rites. Pauli planned the memorial service, which was held at Calvary Episcopal Church in New York City. The Rev. Thomas F. Pike officiated; afterwards, he commended her on the beautiful service and asked her if she'd ever thought about being ordained.

Pauli was then a tenured Professor of Law and Politics at Brandeis University and worshiped at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Boston. She consulted with the Rev. Alvin L. Kershaw at Emmanuel regarding a possible call to ordination. In her autobiography, Pauli wrote, "Once I admitted the call of total commitment to service in the church, it seemed that I had been pointed in this direction all my life and that my experiences were merely preparation for this calling. In spite of my own intellectual doubts and the opposition to women's ordination which was widespread within the Episcopal Church at the time, I took the fateful step of applying to the Right Reverend John M. Burgess, bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts, for admission to holy orders." (*p. 427*)

Pauli entered General Theological Seminary that fall, in 1973. The next summer, 11 women priests were ordained, in what was termed an "irregular" ordination because the General Convention had not yet approved the ordination of women. (*July 29, 1974, at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, PA*) Pauli Murray was in the congregation. Of interest to this diocese is that Marie Fleishcher (then Marie Moorefield), who came to work in the diocesan office when Bishop Curry arrived, was among the 11 women ordained that day.

Pauli spent her third year of seminary at Virginia Theological Seminary. That year she served as a seminarian at St. Philip's Chapel, Aquasco, Maryland – which was the church her uncle, the Rev. Small, had served 50 years previously, after leaving St. Titus' in Durham.

Pauli received the Master of Divinity degree in 1976, at the age of 65. She was ordained a deacon in The Episcopal Church by the Rt. Rev. Morris F. Arnold, Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts.

That summer, The Episcopal Church, at its General Convention, voted to ordain women as priests, beginning January 1, 1977.

On January 8, 1977 (only a week after women's ordination was permitted), Pauli was ordained a priest in The Episcopal Church at the Washington National Cathedral by the Rt. Rev. William F. Creighton, Bishop of the Diocese of Washington. She was thus one of the first women, as well as the first African American woman, to be ordained a priest in The Episcopal Church.

A month later (*February 13, 1977*), The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray celebrated her first Eucharist at The Chapel of the Cross, at the invitation of the rector, the Rev. Peter James Lee. This was also the first time a woman celebrated the Eucharist at an Episcopal church in North Carolina. Pauli read from the Bible that had belonged to her grandmother (Cornelia), from a lectern that had been given in memory of the woman who had owned Cornelia (Mary Ruffin Smith).

Pauli described her feelings at the Chapel of the Cross service as follows: "Whatever future ministry I might have as a priest, it was given to me that day to be a symbol of healing. All the strands of my life had come together. Descendant of slave and of slave owner, I had already been called poet, lawyer, teacher, and friend. Now I was empowered to minister the sacrament of One in whom there is no north or south, no black or white, no male or female – only the spirit of love and reconciliation drawing us all toward the goal of human wholeness." (*autobiography, p. 435*)

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray served as an ordained priest for 8 years, at St. Stephen and the Incarnation and at Church of the Atonement in Washington, DC, at Church of the Holy Nativity in Baltimore, and at Church of the Holy Cross in Homewood, PA. (*Pinn, 2008, p. 62-63*)

A year after her ordination (*May 14, 1978*), she preached at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Durham, saying, "It is entirely appropriate that my first sermon and celebration as a priest in Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in my 'hometown' where I grew up be performed on Mother's Day in the Church of St. Philip's. For it was this church that my grandmother, my aunts, and my mother attended before I was born.... I feel moved to share with you some reflections upon women I have known who had the gift of the Holy Spirit and whose impact on my life brings me to you today in a unique homecoming. The first was my grandmother, Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, a citizen of Durham until her death in 1923. A devout Episcopalian, she sent three of her daughters, one of whom was my mother, to St. Augustine's School in Raleigh, and they in turn were confirmed and attended St. Philip's...." She goes on to say more about Cornelia and her Aunt Pauline, as well as several other women. As she so often did, she also spoke of reconciliation, stating "The contribution I hope to make as one of the successors to Martin Luther King, Jr. is to address myself to the possibility of reconciliation." (*sermon book, pp. 88-94*)

A recent book by Sara Azaransky, analyzing Pauli's writings, concludes, "...Murray's preeminent theological concern [is] reconciliation... between human beings and between human beings and God. For Murray, reconciliation is intimately connected with salvation.... Murray worried that despite clear teaching to the contrary, many people assume that their religious faith offers *private salvation*, because many Christians do not understand the second great commandment [about loving your neighbor] with the same urgency as the first ["You shall love the Lord your God"]." (*p. 112*) "For Murray, salvation entailed the power and possibility of transforming the world and of restoring creation." (*p. 114*)

On July 1, 1985, at the age of 74, Pauli Murray died of cancer in Pittsburgh, PA. A memorial service was held July 5 in the Washington National Cathedral. She was buried in the Cypress Garden Cemetery in Brooklyn, NY, under the same headstone with Renee Barlow, along with Aunt Pauline, Aunt Sallie, and Renee's mother (Mary Jane Barlow).

Five years ago, in February 2007, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori celebrated the Eucharist and preached at The Chapel of the Cross, in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Pauli's ordination and of her first Eucharist, at that church. In her sermon, Bishop Katharine said, "I know I stand here today only because she [Pauli] stood here before me. Her proud shoes carried many others down the road to freedom." (The "proud shoes" reference is to Pauli's book by the same name.)

Beginning in 2009, diocesan commemorations of the life and work of Pauli Murray have been held each year at St. Titus' Episcopal Church in Durham.

Then this past summer, the General Convention voted to add Pauli to the Calendar of Commemorations of The Episcopal Church. (*Trial use for the triennium 2012-2015; Resolution A052*) Her feast day is set as July 1st. As Bishop Curry said at the time, "Pauli Murray is going to be remembered and her life recalled not just in Durham, not just in North Carolina, not even just in the United States, but in the largest diocese in The Episcopal Church, which is Haiti, in Colombia, in Ecuador, in parts of Mexico and Costa Rica." The Convention resolution states, "Pauli Murray was the first African-American woman ordained to the Episcopal priesthood (1977). Growing up as a mixed-race person in the South, she became an advocate of 'the universal cause of freedom,' and throughout her life she worked tirelessly and with distinction as a lawyer, an advocate for civil and labor rights and feminism through her legal writings, essays and poetry."

And just last month the Pauli Murray Chapel at the Raleigh Episcopal Campus Ministry (*2209 Hope St.*) was dedicated and consecrated by The Right Rev. Michael B. Curry, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. (*The Rev. Deborah Fox, Chaplain; The Rev. Nancy Titus, Deacon*)

I'll close with some quotations in the local media this past summer, in reference to the inclusion of Pauli Murray on the liturgical calendar.

The Rev. Sarah Woodard, deacon at St. Titus', said that Pauli would "turn over in her grave" from all the attention she is getting. "She would not like for us to do this," Sarah said.

The Rev. Brooks Graebner, Rector of St. Matthew's in Hillsborough, noted that, "The Episcopal Church's calendar of commemoration includes significant examples of faith.... They're an ongoing inspiration for all people." He said that he finds Pauli Murray inspiring, adding, "She witnessed to the importance of racial and gender inclusion in the Church, calling the Church to fuller acts of justice." He referred to Pauli as a "pioneer, ... an advocate for racial reconciliation, an agent for social justice, racial and gender equality, both in the church and society.... I would consider her a woman who in many ways anticipated major movements in the life of church and society."

And, finally, from Bishop Curry:

"Holy Women, Holy Men is one way that the church lifts up people whose lives have exemplified what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and make a difference in the world, and Pauli Murray is one of those people. As a descendant of slaves and slaveholders, people who were members of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, she is a symbol for the importance of bringing different worlds together, even in the midst of great pain."

In another setting, Bishop Curry said "[Pauli Murray] did all that because she was a Christian. And in a time when the word 'Christian' has been held hostage by negativity and sometimes bigotry, it's time to raise up somebody who represents a way of being Christian that's grounded in the love and the justice and the compassion of the goodness of God."

And, finally, again from Bishop Curry, "Pauli Murray, a woman who functioned in a predominantly men's world, helped in the civil rights struggle, helped in the struggle for women's equality, helped in the struggle for rights for gay and lesbian people, helped in the struggle to make this world a better place. She was not always popular. People did not always agree with her, but they knew where Pauli Murray stood. She was a bridge person who helped to bridge some of the divides that keep us separated from each other. [She

was] feisty. If Pauli didn't like something you said, she'd cut you off at the knees. She wasn't [a] sweet saint, but she was a saint."

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