

The Episcopal Church and Race

St. Alban's Forum

February 3, 2019

Let us pray together

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

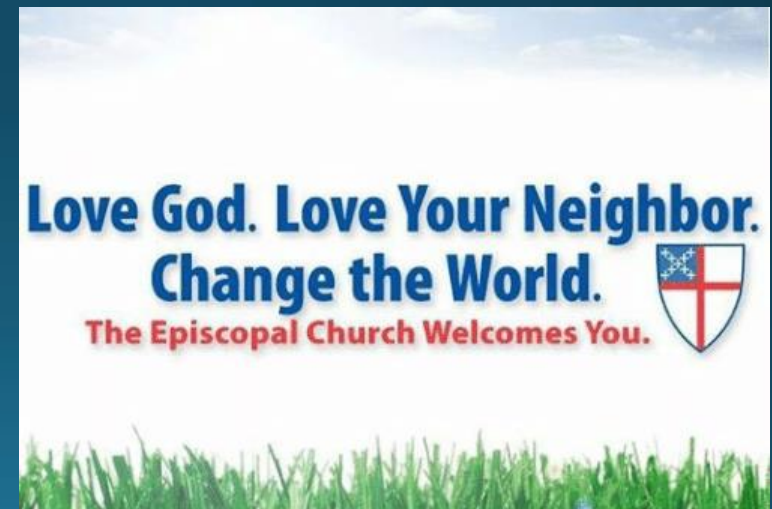
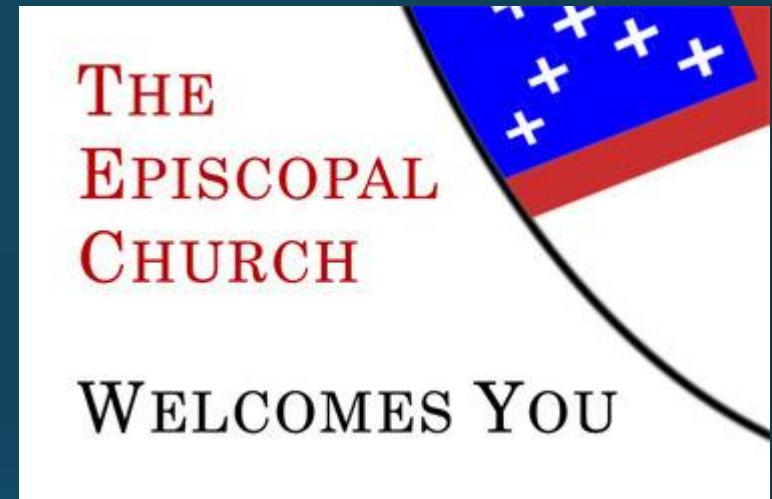
(Collect for the Human Family, BCP p. 815)

The Episcopal church has “probably done less for the Black people than any other aggregation of Christians.”

--W.E.B. DuBois
The Negro Church (1903)

“The church has, for generations, behaved in racist ways.”

--Episcopal Diocese of Washington
Seeing the Face of God in Each Other (2017)



In the beginning



- 1607: First Anglican church in the American colonies is established
- 1627: First enslaved Africans are baptized in the Anglican church
- 1671: Maryland law decrees that conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity does not affect their status as enslaved people
- 1789: Protestant Episcopal Church established in U.S.

Absalom Jones

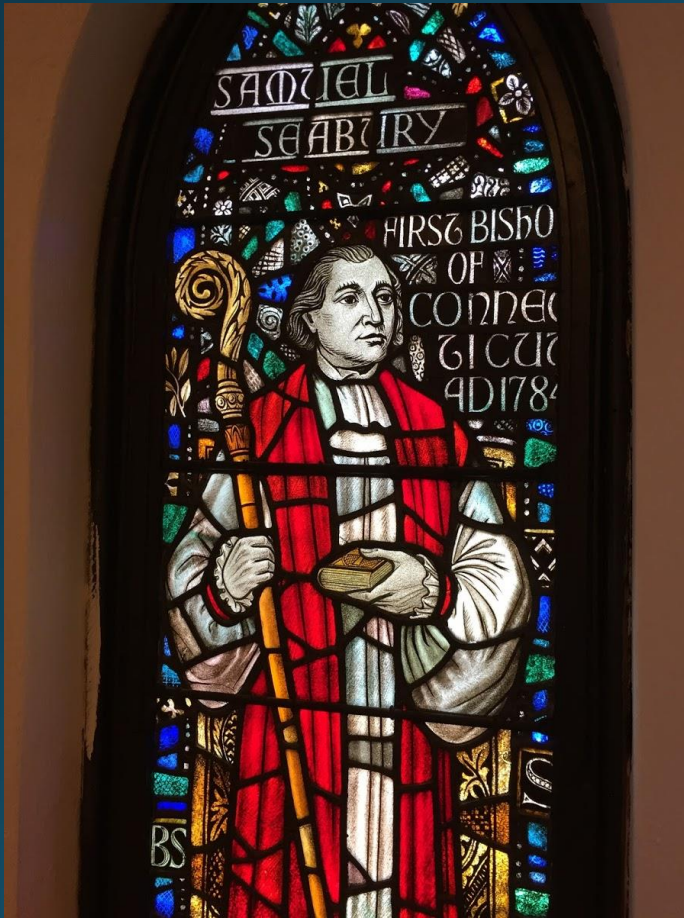


- Born into slavery, later freed
- Lay minister to black members at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia
- Established First African Church, which becomes the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas
- First African American priest ordained in the Episcopal Church

Historically black parishes



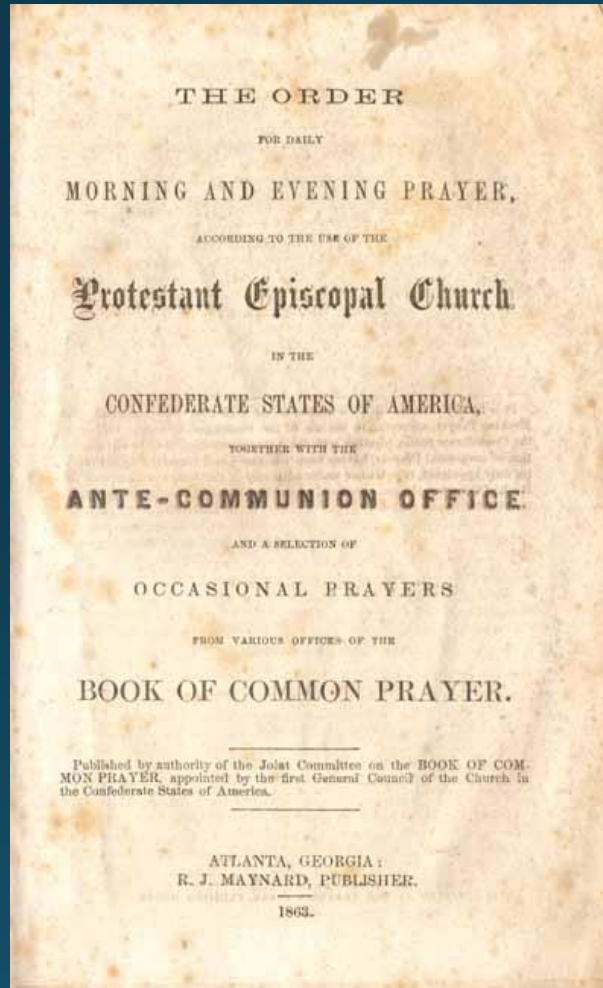
Samuel Seabury



- First bishop consecrated for the Episcopal Church
- Son and grandson also Episcopal clergy
- Samuel Seabury III one of first professors at GTS
- Author of "American Slavery Justified" (1861)



Civil War



- Episcopal Church took no position for or against slavery before or during the war
- Episcopalians in the South formed the "Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America"
- North never recognized the separation
- 1865: Only two southern bishops attend convocation called in Philadelphia
- 1866: All dioceses rejoin national church

Post war



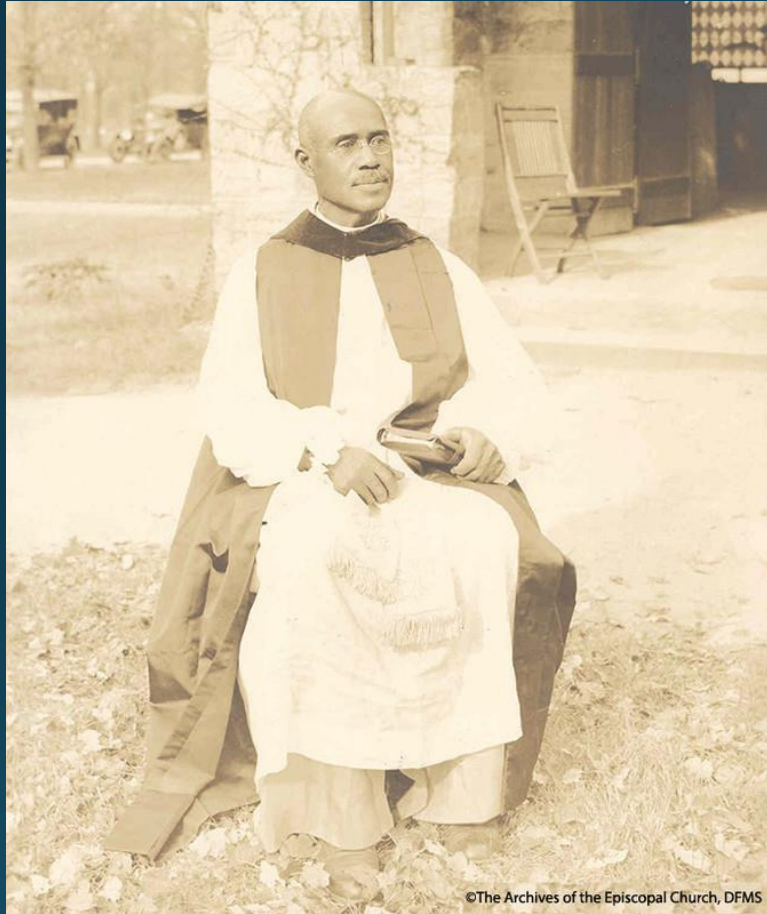
- Protestant Episcopal Freedman's Aid Commission created (1865)
- First black Episcopal parish founded in DC (1867)
- Schools and seminaries established
- VTS founds Bishop Payne Divinity School in Richmond for black students

Clergy rules



- Black deacons had to wait five years before ordination as priests
- Black clergy could not vote at diocesan conventions
- Black clergy could only be consecrated as bishops for missionary work, serving outside the U.S.

Church hierarchy



- The church approves the appointment of suffragan bishops (1877)
- “Sewanee canon” attempted to prevent election of black bishops (1883)
- First African Americans named suffragan bishop “for colored work”: Henry Beard Delaney and Edward Thomas Demby (1918)

Change agents



- The Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People (1886)
- American Church Institute for Negroes (1906)
- Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity ESCRU (1959)
- Union of Black Episcopalians (1968)

Seminaries



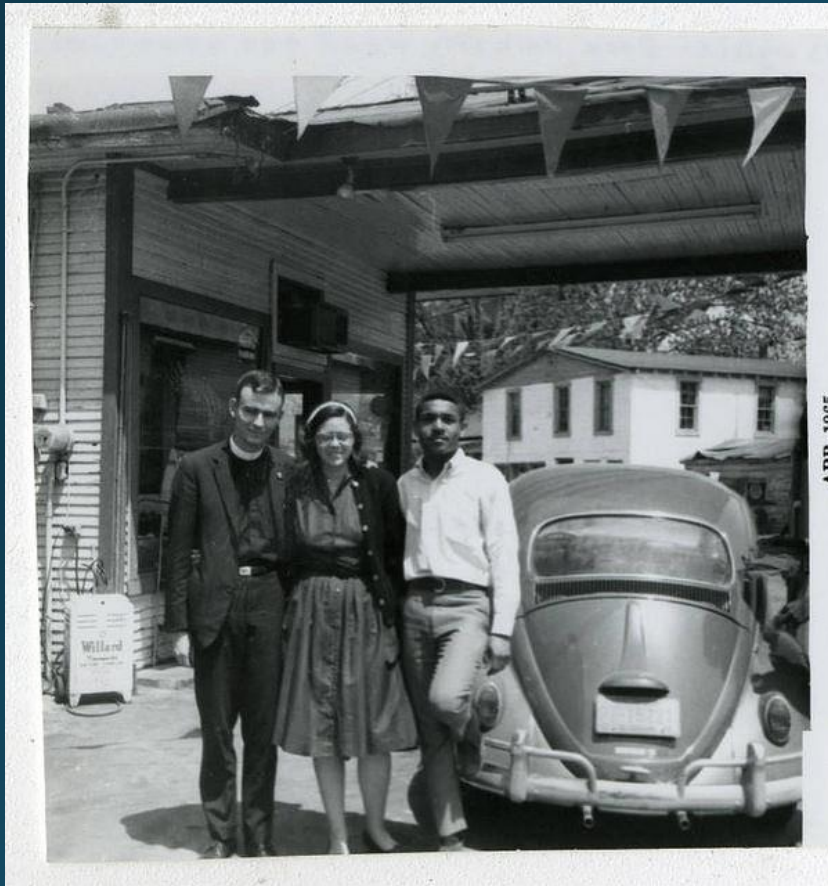
- John Walker first black student admitted to VTS (1951)
- Sewanee upholds exclusion of students based on race (1952)
- Most Sewanee faculty resign
- Sewanee reverses policy (1953)
- First black diocesan bishop: John Burgess, Massachusetts (1962)
- Walker becomes suffragan bishop of DC (1971) and bishop (1977)

Civil rights



- Black and white clergy go south on a “prayer pilgrimage” organized by ESCRU (1961)
- In Jackson, Mississippi, 15 arrested and sentenced to four months in prison
- Presiding bishop supports pilgrimage but notes ESCRU is not official church agency

Civil Rights



- Jonathan Daniels, Episcopal seminarian, campaigns for voting rights in Alabama (1965)
- Arrested during voting rights demonstration in Fort Deposit, Alabama (1965)
- Released from jail, he is murdered while shielding 16-year-old Ruby Sales
- Church remembers him on August 14, the date he was killed

Protests



- St. John's Episcopal hospital in New York City excluded black patients from private rooms and segregated the races in semi-private ones
- ESCRU vigil forced bishop to change policy (1961)

Protests

Church School in Atlanta Rejects Rev. King's Son

By BERNARD LEFKOWITZ

In a year or two an Atlanta housewife will sit down in her living room and explain to her young son why he is going to a segregated school.

She will start: "When you were five we wanted to send you to the Lovett School. It is a school with Episcopal affiliations and since we are all Christians, we felt there would be no trouble. But we are Negroes, and they said they could not become involved in a racial problem."

"This is why," she will conclude, "you must go to a crowded, segregated, inferior school."

This is a scene that Mrs. Martin Luther King would like to avoid. But the events of last week leave her little choice.

Mrs. King, wife of the Atlanta minister and integration leader, was denied permission to enroll her five-year-old son, Martin III, at the private school near the couple's home on Johnson Av.

The rejection note was curt: "This is the first application from a Negro we have ever received," headmaster James R. McDowell wrote. "I had to consult our board of trustees. They voted not to accept it."

To this, James M. Sibley, chairman of the school's Baptist executive committee, added: "We've got a young school and we are just trying to get started. We are not trying to get in any problem about race one way or another."

Disappointments in this area are no new experience for Mrs. King and her husband, who have led successful integration battles in a dozen Southern communities. Two years ago the Rev. King, a Baptist minister, was not permitted to enroll his daughter, Yolanda, in a private school near their home.

"We tried to get the Atlanta bishop to make a statement on racial policy then," Mrs. King said. "But he refused. From that we assumed all Protestant



DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. and FAMILY.
His son must go to a segregated school.

private schools, Episcopal and Baptist, are open to everyone."

Yesterday the Rt. Rev. Randolph R. Claiborne, bishop of the Atlanta Diocese, said only, "I am interested to know that a Baptist minister has a desire for an education for his son where Episcopal services take place."

Mrs. King told The Post that

the only alternative is to send the boy to a segregated public school.

"Our daughter and our son were not permitted to go to an integrated school," she said. "Maybe it will be different for our son who is two now. Personally, I feel there's an advantage to sending your child to an integrated school."

By permission of the New York Post

- All-white private school in Atlanta, affiliated with Episcopal cathedral, refuses to admit 5-year-old Martin Luther King III (1963)
- Headmaster resigns in protest
- ESCRU pickets
- Policy changed (1967)

International efforts



- ESCRU protests church investments in Chase Manhattan Bank, which made loans to the white minority government of South Africa (1966)
- Executive council calls on all church institutions to reconsider investment policies

“Special program”



- Black clergy express anguish over “systematic exclusion” (1967)
- General convention approves “special program” held in 1969
- Redirected church funds from institutional support to support community groups for social change



Church actions

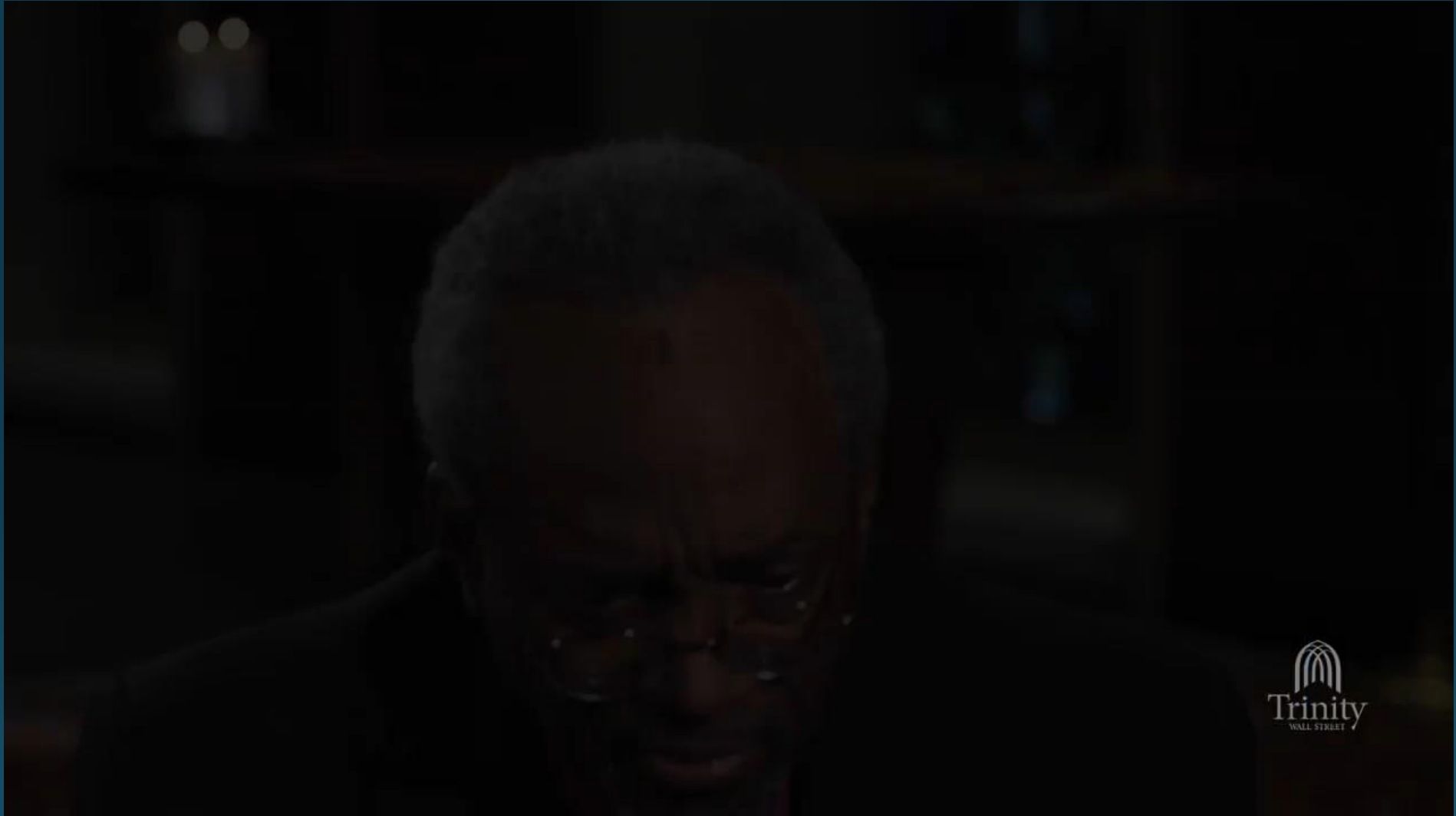


- General convention resolutions on racism and accountability (1988, 1991)
- Pastoral letter on racism, House of Bishops (1994)
"Racism is totally inconsistent with the Gospel and, therefore, must be confronted and eradicated."
- Anti-racism training required (2000)

Today



- Michael Curry elected presiding bishop (2015)
- General convention resolution calls on leadership to create a vision for addressing racial injustice.
- Church-wide program aimed at racial reconciliation: “Becoming the beloved community” (2017)



Let us pray together

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Collect for Social Justice BCP p. 823)

Resources

- “Yet with a Steady Beat, The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church,” by Harold T. Lewis, former staff officer for Black Ministries at the Episcopal Church Center in New York. 1996
- The Church Awakens, a timeline
<http://episcopalarchives.org/churchawakens/>
- Seeing the Face of God in Each Other—EDOW Race and Social Justice manual for participants