

# Historic Ordinations



*Newly-ordained priests prepare to celebrate the Eucharist. Photo: Broffman*

There cannot have been many times in his twenty-five years at Washington Cathedral that Dean Francis B. Sayre has found himself in the lectern begging worshippers to resume their places so that a service may continue. That may have been another in the historic firsts which occurred in the cathedral on Saturday, January 8.

For, history was made that day, not only for the Diocese of Washington but for the national church as well. Two women (whose ordination in 1975 had not previously been officially recognized) were accepted into the priesthood and three other women deacons were ordained. Three brother

deacons, who had waited with their sisters through the months until General Convention voted to approve the ordination of women, joined in the joyous service.

The Reverend Lee McGee and the Reverend Dr. Elizabeth Rosenberg, both of whom had participated in a service of ordination in 1975, came forward from the ranks of clergy gathered for the occasion to have their ministry recognized. As they completed the simple statements which officially placed them as ordained priests of the diocese, Bishop William F. Creighton greeted each of them with a welcoming embrace.





*The Reverend Elizabeth Wiesner administers the chalice  
Photo: Broffman*

Following this warmly open gesture of love and acceptance, the ordination service proceeded according to the rite in the Proposed Book of Common Prayer. This marked the first time that the new service had been used in the Diocese of Washington.

Traditionally priests in the Episcopal Church are ordained in their own home parishes. However, this was the first ordination rite in the Washington area in nearly two years

and as such was celebrated by the entire diocese. In April 1975 Bishop Creighton, together with Bishop John T. Walker, declared a moratorium on all ordinations "until qualified women can be ordained with men."

In the service the Reverend Elizabeth Lee Wiesner, who has been working at Washington Cathedral for several months, and the Reverend Carole Crumley joined the small-but-growing ranks of women in the priesthood. Rejoicing with them were the Reverend Rayford Ellis, the Reverend Joel Gibson and the Reverend John Leslie Rabb.

The first black woman to become a priest in the Episcopal Church, the Reverend Dr. Pauli Murray of Boston, was ordained by Bishop Creighton for the Bishop of Massachusetts. Dr. Murray, who was also the first black woman to be admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States, left a distinguished career in jurisprudence to study for holy orders.

A congregation numbering close to two thousand heard Bishop Walker predict in his sermon that the action taken in the ordination would "have an impact upon our understanding and practice of the ministry of the church for a thousand years and beyond."

The service proceeded sedately through the sermon and into the Eucharist. It was when the new priests themselves pronounced the traditional "peace of the Lord be always with you," that the congregation of priests and laity broke out of their seats and responded with happy hugs and exclamations of joy. Close to five minutes later Dean Sayre made his plea for quiet so that the service might continue.

Choristers from the Kennett High School Chorus, North Conway, New Hampshire, accompanied by their director Richard Wright, made a special pilgrimage to Washington to sing at the service. Lee Wiesner, one of the ordinands, spends her summers in New Hampshire and her son sang with the chorus when he attended high school there. The eighty-six singers and their parents should be very proud of the quality of music they produced and of their hard work in raising the money (\$7,000) for the trip.

Before the service a group of about fifty persons from Washington-area parishes walked up and down outside the cathedral's south transept in protest to the ordination of women to the priesthood. They disbanded shortly after the service began and at that moment in the rite when the bishop asks for objections the nave of the cathedral remained quiet. The protesters had sought and received permission from Dean Sayre to assemble and make their statement outside the cathedral.

Three of the ordinands were in their late fifties-early sixties; three were in their thirties. Three were black and three were white; three were women; three were men. All of them, when asked by Bishop Creighton, "Do you believe that you are truly called by God and his church to this priesthood?" responded affirmatively. Their voices could be heard clearly throughout the vast nave as they agreed to take on the responsibilities of the sacred order of priests. **N M**