

## Celebrating 2023 Women's History Month: Remembering EDLI's First Women Clergy

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1988, Bishop Witcher gave his address to the Diocesan Convention where he stated that it is the "inevitable" that women be ordained into priesthood and that despite his own beliefs he states that "we simply have to get on with it". Despite his discouraging tone, this marked a monumental moment for women's rights here on Long Island. Luckily, it wasn't long after this announcement that the Rt. Rev. Orris G. Walker Jr., who at the time was Bishop Coadjutor for EDLI, and who has always long supported ordaining women, announced that in the year of 1989 three women were to be ordained into the priesthood through our Diocese. Attached is a press release from our archives detailing this moment.

### Women Priests on LI

*Episcopal bishop, bowing to 'inevitable,' OKs ordination*

By Kathy Boccella

Bishop Robert C. Witcher of the Long Island Episcopal Diocese announced yesterday that the diocese's first women priests could be ordained as early as January — 13 years after the Episcopal Church in the United States authorized female clergy.

"When I became coadjutor of the Diocese of Long Island, I made a very clear statement that my concept of apostolic ministry did not include women in the priesthood," Witcher told the annual diocesan convention in Garden City. " . . . Even though my personal convictions have not changed, I can see no substantial reason for standing in the way of what appears to be the inevitable and which appears to be approved by the diocese."

Witcher also said he planned to retire in two years as spiritual leader of the 80,000-member Long Island diocese.

Witcher's announcement that women will be ordained was greeted with loud applause from the roughly 300 clergy and laity attending the daylong conference.

To carry out the change, Witcher, 62, said he is turning ordination duties over to Bishop Coadjutor Orris Walker, his assistant and eventual successor. Walker, 45, who was appointed in April, has long supported ordaining women.

The authority to ordain Episcopalian priests rests with the bishops in each of the nation's 97 dioceses. Most have allowed women to be ordained. Witcher's personal objection to having women priests has placed the Long Island diocese, which includes Nassau, Suffolk, Kings and Queens Counties, among the fewer than 10 in the United States that have chosen not to ordain women.

A recent diocesan survey found that 61 percent of the communicants favored women priests, 22 percent were opposed and 17 percent had no opinion.

The diocese has three women deacons eligible for ordination, Walker said yesterday. It is a "strong possibility" that all three will be ordained, he said.

Women priests "should be a reality in the diocese in the first months of the new year," he said during the

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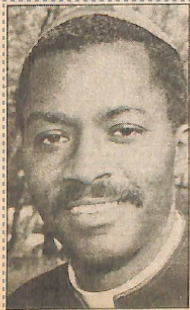
### Women to Be Ordained

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lunch break. Two of the three women already have been approved for ordination by a diocesan committee, he said. The third has not yet gone before the committee, which recommends who should be ordained.

Two of the women were at yesterday's conference and expressed joy about the news of their impending ordination.

"I'm very glad," said Janet Campbell, a recent seminary graduate and assistant vicar of St. Peter's Church in Manhattan.



Newsday's George Argeropoulos  
Bishop Walker

Noreen Mooney, a deacon at-large in Suffolk County who has waited several years to be ordained, said she is "looking forward to the whole diocese moving together into a new era." Mooney, a spiritual adviser to St. John's Hospital and Nursing Home in Kings Park, said she also is looking forward to administering the sacraments to residents of the home.

The third eligible candidate is Anne Lyndall, a geriatric chaplain at The Hospital Chaplaincy in Manhattan.

Witcher said he decided to step down in two years because, "we have a coadjutor, and I don't want to keep him waiting too long. I have other things I want to do as a bishop."

Witcher, who under church laws does not have to retire for another 10 years, declined to say what his plans are. In recent months, he has been involved in negotiations to free American hostages held in Iran.

Walker, the first black leader of the diocese, will share duties with Witcher until he retires.

NEWSDAY, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1988

The three women who were ordained into the priesthood are Anne Elliott Lyndall, Noreen O'Connor Mooney, and Janet Fulton Bragg Campbell (pictures follow in this order).

There isn't much public knowledge about the Anne or Noreen, but it was clear that they continued practicing their faith and spreading the word of God. As for Janet Fulton Bragg Campbell, she recently retired in 2021 from being Priest-in-charge of Christ Episcopal Church in Tacoma, Washington.



Ann Elliott Lyndall



Noreen O'Connor Mooney



Janet Fulton Bragg Campbell

I think it is important that we all take a moment and recognize these women and the part they played in getting us to where we are today. I think it is also important to thank them and recognize them for paving the way for the 62 Canonical Female Clergy which are currently a part of our Diocese here on Long Island. We have come a long way, but I can't wait to see what the future holds for us and the women in our Diocese!