

Delois Burney Ward Oral History, Interview One: Transcript



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Narrator: Ms. Delois Burney Ward

Interviewer: Dr. Joseph Downing Thompson, Jr., Assistant Archivist for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection

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Abstract:

In this interview, prominent Episcopal laywoman Delois Burney Ward discusses her childhood in North Carolina, her active involvement during forty-seven years of membership at the Church of the Atonement in the District of Columbia, and her leadership positions in the Diocese of Washington.

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Same Day Transcriptions, Inc.
11523 Palmbrush Trail, Suite 102
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Key:

[] = Note or addition of transcriber, narrator, or interviewer

Time stamps are noted in red and bold for ease of identification and citation.

Processing and Content Notes:

After the interview, the recording was sent to a professional transcriptionist who transcribed the conversation using a “light edit” method. This entails the omission of most verbal pauses and false starts. The initial transcript was then sent to the narrator who suggested further revisions, including minor deletions, additions, and substitutions (e.g., giving an individual’s full name and title), for the sake of clarity and accuracy. The interviewer incorporated those revisions, as well as minor revisions of his own. This transcript is thus an acceptable rendition of the recorded interview. However, the audio, as well as the written edits of the narrator, are also available to researchers. The written edits are kept in the collection control file.

The interview took place on the campus of the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, which is in the Diocese of Virginia. However, the narrator and the interviewer sometimes allude to the Diocese of Washington as being “here” or “this diocese” because of the seminary’s proximity to the District of Columbia and Alexandria’s inclusion in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area.

Finding Aid: There is a thorough finding aid that includes information about all of the individual interviews in the Delois Burney Ward Oral History, RG A59. It may be found on this page: <http://www.vts.edu/podium/default.aspx?t=131182>

Access Points:

Ward, Delois Burney, 1937-
African American Episcopalians
Black Episcopalians
Blacks -- History
Blacks -- Religion
Episcopal Church
Episcopal Church. Diocese of Washington
Episcopalians -- Biography
Church of the Atonement (Washington, D.C.)
Harris, Barbara C. (Barbara Clementine)

Nelson, Mandela, 1918-2013
Walker, John, 1925-1989
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Africare (Organization)
TransAfrica (Organization)
Anti-apartheid movements
Diocese of North Carolina
Diocese of Washington
Coalition for Human Needs
Black Women's Task Force
National Organization for Social and Specialized Ministries
Kanuga Conference Center
Thompson, Joseph Downing

TRANSCRIPT

THOMPSON: Today is December 6, 2013. This is Joseph Thompson, Assistant Archivist for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection, the AAEHC. Here with me is Ms. Delois Burney Ward who has graciously agreed to sit for an oral history interview with the AAEHC and to discuss her very accomplished life, particularly her dedicated service to the Episcopal Church at the parish, diocesan, and national levels. It is so good to see you again and to sit with you. Thank you very much for being here.

WARD: You are very welcome.

THOMPSON: We are going to have a bit of a special beginning. Yesterday marked the passing of Nelson Mandela, yesterday, December 5, 2013, and you have some [00:01:00] special remembrances of the era in which so much political activism was occurring in this country to end apartheid. We thought that we would have a bit of a discussion about that, and then, we will turn to the beginnings of your life. I remember hearing a news story about the protest at the South African Embassy here in Washington, DC in the mid-1980s. I believe it was 1985. You actually have some memories of that and participated in that. Would you say a bit about what you remember of those protests and how you were involved?

WARD: If I may, I would like to start a little bit before the actual lobbying of the South African Embassy. It goes [00:02:00] to my service on the Coalition for Human Needs, which was the outreach efforts for social ministry of the national Church. I served on that committee, and CHN was the funding arm for social ministry of the national Church. The kinds of ministries that we funded were cutting edge ministries—not proven—where funding was problematic. In that capacity, we received a grant application from TransAfrica, which was then headed by Randall Robinson who was the head of TransAfrica. Through that process, we actually funded TransAfrica [00:03:00] as it was mobilizing to protest against the incarceration of Mr. Mandela. That was sort of the beginning for me of learning more about TransAfrica and its advocacy. During the time that I was President of the Washington Chapter of the UBE [Union of Black Episcopalians] was when we began to picket the South African Embassy on Massachusetts Avenue. We organized so that there was someone there. I do not remember the specific day, but it was a day of the week that we marched and protested and carried our signs, which got lots of ink in the *Washington Post*. That was such a sense of being involved although half a world away, [00:04:00] and it was a really good

feeling. There was a lot of passion and a lot of validation of those of us that marched around. Hopefully, I had a picture or two that I shared with you of our marching.

Then, Mr. Mandela was finally released. Within the first year or so, he made a trip to the United States and because of my activism with the UBE and others—and it was not just the UBE. We had other groups that were advocates as well and joined us. Anyway, I received an invitation to attend a meeting to welcome Mrs. Winnie Mandela, and I decided, “I don’t want to see her. I want to see [00:05:00] him!” I elected not to go, and then, I found out he came with her, and I was justly sorry that I missed that. That is my memory of what we did to advocate for his release.

THOMPSON: Your friend and mentor Bishop John T. Walker also participated in some of the protests. Were you there with him on that day?

WARD: Yes, and in fact, Bishop Walker was very active in Africare. That was his baby. He did a lot of work with that. During the time that he was very active with them, I happened to lose my job. I was working on a grant funded program for first [00:06:00] NIMH and then at Howard University College of Medicine which expired. While I was unemployed, I talked to Bishop Walker about going to Africa to work, and I came very close to doing that, but I found out they did not pay a stipend, and I had a house note. So that did not work out so well. So I did not actually get to go. But yes, Bishop Walker was very active in supporting our advocacy for Mr. Mandela’s release.

THOMPSON: Have you seen the statue of Mandela out front of the South African Embassy that exists there today?

WARD: I have not.

THOMPSON: I understand there is a statue of him raising his hand, and I wanted to know how that made you feel to see that kind of progress.

WARD: I have not seen it, but just knowing it is there is very gratifying. As I was driving up today, [00:07:00] I usually listen to NPR, and my NPR I listen to is in Chapel Hill. As long as I was able to get the signals, it was just story after story after story. They talked about wreaths being laid at his statue. I did not know it was the statue here at the South African Embassy. I will have to find my way up there.

THOMPSON: Excellent. Thank you for those remembrances. I appreciate it.

WARD: You are welcome.

THOMPSON: Now, we will turn to the things that we had actually discussed beforehand—about your life and trying to create a record of some of your earliest years and continuing on up to your movement to DC and work here in the diocese. Let us begin at the very beginning, so to speak.

WARD: The very beginning is a long time. I [00:08:00] was having a conversation with my mother as an adult, and I was telling her about something that I remembered, and she said to me, “You do not remember that. You were not old enough to remember that.” And I went on to give her the particulars about it. She said, “You were only eighteen months old!” And so as I went through school and became a child psychologist, one of the principles that I learned is that folk who

cannot remember their early lives tend to have had a significant amount of trauma so it is blocked. It is not available to them to relive. The fact that I can remember something—not everything—to eighteen months speaks well of my parents.

THOMPSON: So, maybe say a little bit more about that. You were raised in Hallsboro, North Carolina until the age of eighteen, [00:09:00] if I have that correct.

WARD: For the most part. I was actually born in Bladen County. Bladen County is the county north of Columbus County, which is the county where both of my parents were born. If you look at the birth certificates, you will see that it says Bladen County. We moved from Bladen County to Columbus County for my father to have work. During that period of time, the king crop for southeastern North Carolina was tobacco, and people who had land farmed tobacco. My maternal side of my family had lots of land. I cannot believe how much land they had for those periods of time. We counted a hundred and eleven acres that they owned. [00:10:00] As one of the heirs, I have some property for that. But my father's family did not have that kind of land. At least, my daddy did not so he never farmed. As a family, we never worked on a farm of our own. My father and mother and one sibling at the time moved to Columbus County—Hallsboro—where there was work other than farming. There was a paper plant. At that time, it was known as North Carolina Lumber Company, and we had a lot of virgin timber. That timber was harvested and brought to the mill where it was turned into veneers, like the veneer of this table. Both my parents worked [00:11:00] there. That is how we got to Hallsboro, which is in Columbus County. Columbus County is one of the most southeast counties of North Carolina. It borders South Carolina and just a few miles in from the ocean. At this point, since tobacco is a taboo and people should not smoke, the government has restricted the raising of tobacco for health reasons. So Columbus County has turned into one of the poorest counties in the state. All of that timber has been harvested. The mill is closed. It has gone from North Carolina Lumber Company to a new incarnation of W. Ritter Lumber Company into a new incarnation of International, [00:12:00] which is still in the states but a little bit farther east than where I grew up.

That is how I got to Columbus County. I was probably about four when we moved to Columbus County. At that time, schools were little neighborhood schools, like one and two rooms. It had grades one through eight and maybe two teachers for those. There were just a lot of those all over the county. By the time I got to be eighth grade, the county got wise and said, "We are not going to have all of these schools around. We are going to consolidate this." We had the first consolidated school the year that I was in the eighth grade. About five of these little one room schools were consolidated into what [00:13:00] we thought then was the most beautiful well equipped schools with labs and a home classroom. That was my eighth year and my first male teacher, which was quite an experience. He was the basketball coach, a fantastic basketball coach, and we had walls and walls of trophies that his team won. But he was my homeroom teacher, Mr. J. J. Evans.

THOMPSON: Still remember his name.

WARD: Absolutely. I realize now his memory was horrible so all of the girls were "Miss" and all the boys were "Sir."

THOMPSON: Because he could not remember the names?

WARD: Because he could not remember the names. I later worked for a dentist many, many years later that had the same problem. All of his female patients were "Miss," and all of his male

patents were “Sir.” [00:14:00] Mr. Evans taught us all to do cursive writing. That was his thing. He was an artist. In the eighth grade, we started making circles and doing cursive writing, and later on in high school, my homeroom teacher said, “I know everybody that was in the class of 1955 when I get a card because I recognize their writing.” He was quite an experience when we got to Artesia [High School].

I enjoyed school. We had a teacher, Ms. Katie Powell, and as you can see there [referring to materials in the Delois Burney Ward Papers], I had five siblings. For whatever reason, none of them quite applied themselves, and I remember Mrs. Powell told my mother, “I have taught many families of children, but I have never seen a family where there [00:15:00] was only one student in the bunch.” You’d say that to my momma? When I was growing up, my family attended Mount Hebron AMEZ African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which is where I went to school, church, and Sunday school every Sunday until I finished high school. I never had the formal membership, but it was where my family went to church. I have a sister who lives there now, and it is still the church she goes to. We still have lots of family in Bladen County where my parents originated from, and there is a church there that is also an AMEZ, [00:16:00] and we call it the family church because everybody in that church is named Burney. If the name is not Burney, it is because they married somebody else. When I go there, it is like going back in the womb because everybody knows everybody—your momma and your grandmomma and your great grandmomma before. It is really a good feeling to be in that kind of environment.

Now, back to Artesia High School, which is the consolidated school. When I finished, I really wanted to go to college, but my parents did not have any money to send anybody to college. We were doing good to get through high school. Even before I finished high school, let me back up, to the [00:17:00] year that I was a junior in high school, we had the great misfortune of our house burning down to the ground. It was in December. In fact, I think it was the nineteenth of December of 1953. My parents were going to allow us to go back to Bladen County and live with extended family until they could rebuild a house. My math teacher came to my mother and said, “Mrs. Burney, would you let Delois stay with me? She is too good a student to disrupt her in the middle of the year.” She said, “You would be doing me a really, really big favor.” Her name was Marjorie Spaulding [Jones].

Marjorie became a sort of surrogate mother. I stayed [00:18:00] with her for about a year and a half. Now, my parents were only three or four miles away so I was there every weekend so it was not like I really left home. But I spent a lot of time with Marjorie. Marjorie had three sisters and a brother, and her three sisters and she graduated from Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, which is the school supported by the AMEZ Church. The year that I finished high school, Marjorie said to me, “Okay. Work as much as you can and save your money, and I will see you in August.” Well, I did because everybody worked on whoever’s farm had tobacco, and if you made fifty dollars during the summer working in tobacco, you had enough money to buy most of your school clothes for the following year, and that is what we did growing up. This year after [00:19:00] I finished high school, I worked, and fifty dollars does not look like much to send you to college so in August, I left. I went to live with a very distant cousin in New Jersey.

THOMPSON: **This is after your junior year of high school?**

WARD: No, no, I finished high school.

THOMPSON: **Oh, you finished high school.**

WARD: Living with Marjorie.

THOMPSON: Okay, okay.

WARD: This is after high school.

THOMPSON: This is after high school.

WARD: So I went to New Jersey and lived with a very distant cousin, got a job working in a sweater factory making sweaters and went to school at night, Drake Secretarial School, which was about as interesting as counting sand. I came home for Christmas—I was in New Jersey from August to December, not very long—and I came home to see my family, supposedly for the holiday. Well, [00:20:00] I hardly got my bag in the door before here comes Marjorie. “Where the hell have you been?” And I could not tell her I was embarrassed not to be able to go to college, and all my classmates were going to college. I did not have any money to go to college. She said, “Okay, don’t you leave this house until tomorrow.” Well, she goes home, and she calls her older sister, Clarisse. Clarisse lived in Washington, DC. She taught at Fairmount Heights High School [in a Maryland suburb of DC], math teacher. She said, “I am sending this child to you, and I want you to get her in school.” That is how I got to Washington. I became the live-in maid for Clarisse and her husband and her one child. I went to nursing school at night so it was not so much that I decided that I wanted to be a nurse. It was free. [00:21:00] It was part of the high school curriculum. I went to nursing school for twenty-four months and became a licensed practical nurse and worked over a seventeen-year period. During this seventeen years, I got married and had two babies in the interim so I was home five of those seventeen years. Toward the end of that time, I realized that unfortunately, my marriage was reaching a culmination, and I needed to be able to educate my children. So I decided to go back to school, and that coincided with the beginning of Federal City College, which was [00:22:00] a land grant school that was just an absolute godsend. I enrolled at Federal City College, I worked full time, I went to school full time, and I raised two pre-teenage sons.

THOMPSON: My goodness.

WARD: For eight years. I went to school twelve months, six of them I took two summers off and not to brag, but finished with a 3.5 average.

THOMPSON: Wow.

WARD: I look back at it and wonder, “How did I do that?” When the divorce happened in 1973, my oldest son really had adjustment issues of not having a father in the house. So [00:23:00] at this point, Bishop Walker had become sort of a surrogate father. When we talked about Terence and his problems, he said, “Well, let us put them in private school.” I looked at him. “Have you lost your mind?” I said, “I am trying to put bread on the table!” And he said, “I think we can do it together.” So he called Canterbury, which is no longer in existence. It used to be at Christ Church in Accokeek, Maryland. It is the country cousin to the cathedral schools. Bishop Walker provided me with half tuition. They first started at Capital Day School which was on Capitol Hill, [00:24:00] and I think that church is Christ. too. It is on G Street, Southeast Washington. So they finish elementary school there and then fed into Canterbury, which was a parochial academic high school. With his help, they got an excellent education at academic high school because we are talking class

size of eleven and twelve. In the meantime, I am plodding along, and I get my undergraduate degree, and Bishop Walker says, “Okay, now what are you going to do?” I said, “Well, I would like to go to graduate school, but I do not have any money!” This is a song, “I do not have any money.” He said, “Well, I think we can get you through graduate school.” He said, “Put an application in with [00:25:00] UTO, and use me for a reference.” UTO, United Thank Offering, paid for my master’s. As I was finishing, they wrote me a letter and asked if I’d like to work on my Ph.D., and I said no.

THOMPSON: **That was an easy decision.**

WARD: I need to go to work. So I never see one of those little blue envelopes without putting money in it. I will support UTO as long as I am alive. I am so appreciative of that. Once I started graduate school, I will never forget the day that the telephone rang, and it was Bishop Walker, [00:26:00] not Cheryl, his administrative assistant. It was Bishop Walker. By then, he had gone from Canon to Suffragan to Coadjutor. “Delois.” “Yes sir.” “Time for you to go to work.” He did not say it in those terms, but “I have a job for you. I need you to be the chair of the resolutions committee.” I was like, “What do they do?” He said, “I am going to give you some help, but I need you to chair it. I need your ears. I need you to have my back.” That was the beginning.

THOMPSON: **Wow.**

WARD: I did that for two or three diocesan conventions and, from there, to diocesan council. Let me back up. I skipped a whole lot of stuff. [00:27:00] While I was living with Clarisse and in nursing school, Clarisse and her family—she had a husband and daughter—were visiting the Episcopal Church of the Atonement, and I started visiting with them and just felt at home. The thing that attracted me most was probably not the most complimentary thing that I could say. But I was impressed when I found out that they had an annual meeting once a year, and if you did not want to hear people beg for money every Sunday—sing me another song, we need to raise another five dollars—if you did not want to hear that, you just did not go to the annual meeting. You could stay home and not go to that. [00:28:00] But I did learn about stewardship, and that was just a whole new phase to find out what it means to be responsible and that stewardship really was not about let us raise a hundred dollars. Stewardship was about giving thanks for the blessings that you have received. It is not about anybody else. It is about my relationship to my God and the blessings and the glory that He has bestowed upon me.

This thing about people doing pocketbook control has never been an issue for me. What my pledge is is about me and my God. What the vestry does with it is between them and their God. So that— [00:29:00].

THOMPSON: **Go ahead. Finish your thought. I have another question.**

WARD: Go ahead.

THOMPSON: **You talked about what was attractive about Atonement. What are some of the differences that maybe stood out in your mind between, say, worship in your AMEZ church back in North Carolina and Atonement. Was it very similar, or was it very different?**

WARD: The initial was really the finances. It was the way collections and offerings were done. I am talking I was nineteen and so that was the biggest, and of course, using the book. Many,

many years later ,when I have visited the church that I grew up in, and since now the AMEZ [00:30:00] has seminary trained ministers. They do not have these folks that— Most of them go to Hood,which is in Salisbury [Hood Seminary is now independent but for many years was part of Livingstone College, Salisbury, NC]. In the back of the Methodist hymnal is a prayer book, and they have the same responsive readings that we have in the Episcopal Church because they both have Anglican origin. And especially, in the black Episcopal Church, it goes back to Philadelphia when Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were worshipping in the white Episcopal Church. When they were asked to leave, one became Methodist, and one became Anglican [St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, PA, the church begun by Absalom Jones]. So the roots are very similar. It is not as formal as the Episcopal Church. It was not really that foreign, but I did not realize how much the back of the hymnal was akin to [00:31:00] the Prayer Book until many, many, many years later. I have always had a desire to delve into what I have become a part of. The chancellor for the diocese at the time was David Booth Beers, and he has been on the board here a hundred years.

THOMPSON: **At what time?**

WARD: At the time that I was at Atonement. When I came to Atonement in my earlier years. David was a wonderful historian, and for someone so illustrious, he was always available. I could call David and say, “David, could you do this workshop?” And he was right there. He was a wonderful historian, and that got me to want to understand the Episcopal Church going back to [00:32:00] Henry VIII and moving through. I have been referred to as someone who has some history on church polity. I have done a few workshops on that. That was significant because I needed that. That is just who I am. I need to understand how we got to be. Maybe not the most illustrious beginning, but it is what it is. That has always been a real, real interest to me. I was primed to say yes to anything that was informative so when I was at Atonement at the age of nineteen, I became a church school teacher [00:33:00] for Vacation Bible School. That was the first at the parish level and, from there, to altar guild and den mother because I had two young boys and to get them in is how I became a den mother. I believe in paying your dues. If I want the benefits for my son, then okay, I am willing to do this. That turned out to be a blessing in disguise because I was everywhere so someone asked me to run for the vestry. By this time, I had been at Atonement ten years so I am in early thirties. The scout leader, Mr. Wallace Spears—oh, these names just come back—and I worked under him as a den [00:34:00] mother. When he found out that I had been nominated for the vestry, he put on a high political campaign. He had all the scouts handing out material for me. I was elected with the greatest plurality that Atonement had ever seen.

THOMPSON: **That is excellent.**

WARD: That was my introduction into the political side of the church.

THOMPSON: **Were you one of the first women to be on the vestry, or had there been lots of women on the vestry to your knowledge?**

WARD: There had been three I believe.

THOMPSON: **Okay.**

WARD: But my claim to fame was with the greatest plurality of votes that anyone had ever had. I served on the vestry at Atonement two terms and [00:35:00] was off for a long, long, long time. And in the interim was the relationship with John and so I kind of moved away from the

parish to the diocese and served on Diocesan Council after the Resolution Committee, then Diocesan Council and was elected to the Standing Committee and became the first lay African American female to be Chair of the Standing Committee in the Diocese of Washington. One of the hardest things I have ever done is resign when I moved to North Carolina. I just felt it was unfair to occupy such a significant position and not be available for [00:36:00] staff meetings. It just was not fair to the diocese and, of two hard decisions, that was one. The other one was when the Rev. Dr. Winston Charles, the rector of Christ Church Raleigh, said, “Dee, are you planning to go back to DC?” And I said, “No, I am here.” I had sold my house, and once I sold the house that I owned, I did not have enough money to buy another house in DC. He said, “If you are not going back, would you consider transferring your membership?” And I said, “Let me think about that.” I had been at Atonement for forty-seven years, and it just took a lot of soul searching. I do believe as you mature, you need to put roots down, [00:37:00] and you just do not leave yourself hanging out there. As Father Henri Stines used to say, the church is made for hatching, matching and dispatching, and as you get close to being dispatched, you need to have some roots. After I got to Christ Church and once I told Winston yes, I do not think it was two weeks before he had my membership transferred so he is trying to—well, I am really not integrating the church—but he was just so pastoral.

I said to him, [00:38:00] “I would like to find out what I need to do to be interred in the Memorial Garden.” He said, “You have done it. You are a member. You have done it.” One of my good friends who is administrative assistant for pastoral care said to me, “Dee, if you are serious we have the plan to have you fill out.” So she gave it to me, and I filled it out, and I filled in everything except who is going to do the eulogy. The reason I did not fill it in is because my first choice could leave before me. My very good friend Bishop Harris is who I would like to have do it, although Barbara keeps telling me, “You asked me to do this crap, and it does not last.” Because [00:39:00] she married me this last time. She said right in the middle of service, she said, “Now, people I put together do not stay married so if you all do not stay together I am going to come get you.” Barbara is eighty-three so I did not fill that in. Everything else is filled in except that.

We got a new rector at Christ Church about three years ago. I love him. He is wonderful. He is just such a great preacher. He is always talks about getting old, and I said, “You need to shut up. You are younger than my youngest son.” I did take him aside last summer, and I said, “Now, you have a plan. Everything is filled in but eulogist.” He [00:40:00] said, “You asking me to do that?” I said “Yes,” and he said, “As long as I do not have to do it any time soon.” While his name is not there, he knows it is his job.

THOMPSON: I am going to ask you to back up a little bit. You mentioned Bishop Walker quite a bit so I am wondering if you would talk about how you first met Bishop Walker. He was not Bishop when you first met him, but how did you first meet him?

WARD: As I said, I have this interest and thirst for history. While at Atonement, I was elected as a delegate from the parish to the diocesan convention. That was my first introduction, [00:41:00] and Bishop Walker, in visiting and seeing people active, introduced three or four of us to Maria, his wife, and said she needs friends. She was considerably younger than him. He used to tell the story that he was doing some work as a young clergy in Costa Rica where she was from, and he fell in love with this pretty little young thing, and he asked her to marry him. They went to do the license to get married, and he did not know she was that young! So he was always fatherly and supportive of her. [00:42:00] I was one of a few women he encouraged to be social friends.

THOMPSON: Was he the—

WARD: He was the canon. He was at the cathedral. He had been a headmaster in Uganda, and he had been a headmaster in New Hampshire. He had had a parish, I believe, in Michigan. I think his family was from the Detroit area, before he got to the cathedral. When I met him was when he was the canon at the cathedral. A few years later, he was elected Bishop Suffragan. When I was confirmed in 1956, the Bishop of Washington was [00:43:00] Angus Dun, and he confirmed me. When Bishop Dun retired, we had Bishop Creighton, and after Bishop Creighton, it was under Bishop Creighton that John was elected Coadjutor. I always vacillate when I say John because I need to say bishop. The night before his consecration, there was a gathering of out of town folks and in town folks at the Reverend Doctor Carleton Hayden's home. I was there but not particularly trying to buttonhole John, and so I was talking, and someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around, and it was John. [00:44:00] He said, "Why are you ignoring me?" And I said, "Well, these people do not get to see you. I see you all the time." He said, "That is not how my friends go." And the same thing with the name. I kept trying to say Bishop Walker. He said, "I was John when I was Canon. I was John when I was Suffragan. I was John when I was Coadjutor. I am still John." But just out of respect, publicly I always tried to get "the bishop" out.

THOMPSON: Sure.

WARD: It was at the first thing I ran for at the diocesan convention because I was always at convention. I am a convention junkie. Wherever I am, I am a convention junkie. I went to every General Convention from 1981 to 2003, sometimes official, sometimes just because I am nosey and I want to [00:45:00] see how things go, what the history is. After sitting through three conventions and hearing the General Convention debate inclusion and ordinations both for sexuality and both for women, I thought I would crack up when Bishop Harris was elected, and there was so much hullabaloo. I think you should not have let them in the door, once they are in you cannot keep them down. The same thing about the bishop, the openly gay bishop. Somebody is going to get through. What is the hullabaloo? The time was nine years ago when you were voting. It has always been an interest to me to see how the process works [00:46:00] and who the players are. I was very fond of Doctor Lawrence who was the first lay president of the House of Deputies. He has since died. I read church history, and I say, "I knew all these people, and I am as old as the furniture." Rodman, Ed Rodman in Massachusetts wrote a book, a short book, *History of the UBE*, and I do not think there are three people in it that I did not know at some point, toward the end of their ministry. But it is kind of a nice feeling to reflect back. I think I sent you a picture of Tollie L. Caution. People would say, "You knew Tollie Caution?" [00:47:00] "Uh-huh." It is like we have the fundraisers for Dr. Pauli Murray. Well, she was a frequent guest at Atonement. She did not go in because it was a second career for her. So we had a recent fundraiser over in Durham because her ancestral home is in Durham, and we have gotten permission to turn it into a community center so we are in the fundraising phase now. The Rev. Dr. Brooks Graebner, who has his doctorate from here, is one of the members of the trustee board for getting that done. Because I am the only one around that knew her when she was alive, I was invited to sit at his table. You do not need to pay for a ticket. It is kind of an honorary senior position.

I met John through activity [00:48:00] first with my parish sending me to the diocese. The first thing I ran for, I believe, was Diocesan Council, and this is the first time I have ever run for anything. There was a casting of the ballots, and then, there was a break, and John left the podium and was going back. He came up, and he said, "You will get it the next ballot. You will get it the next ballot." And I said, "How do you know?" And he said, "I know how these things go." And

he was right. I never ran for anything at the Diocese of Washington that I did not get, but I learned how to be a politician.

THOMPSON: When you first started going to diocesan conventions, what was the level of African American participation and involvement at [00:49:00] that level? Were there a lot of other folks who participated?

WARD: No. One person I remember distinctively—it was during the time of tokenism that we need to have a balance on whatever, and Bishop Walker had reserved the right for appointments. He would appoint three people to council, and if the election at the convention did not give him the balance he wanted, whether clergy, lay, race, female or male, he could balance it out that way. I remember a friend of mine who will remain nameless had a different philosophy [00:50:00] from me, which was, “If I am there, it is integrated.” My position was, “If I am there, who can I bring in? Who else can I bring in?” It was small and moving somewhat but usually the same people because they were the people known to the people appointing. Those of us that were included worked like dogs.

THOMPSON: How did you see that change over the years? Actually, before that question, you said you were at Atonement for forty-seven years so in those forty-seven years, [00:51:00] how did you see things change at the diocesan level in terms of black participation?

WARD: Not a great deal. Not where I would like to have seen it. The Standing Committee, which was the last thing I was elected to, and the chair, had two African Americans out of about thirteen or fourteen. So there was not a big, big change, and that is one of the reasons that it was very difficult to consider saying no. Ten years ago, when I went to North Carolina, I said I am retired. I [00:52:00] am through being the token. I am finished. I never expected to be so busy in retirement. Bishop Curry appointed me to the Commission on Ministry, and I had seven years because I filled the unexpired term for one year of someone who left on medical conditions. Then, I had two three-year terms. You can serve for three years and be reelected for three years. Then, there is a mandatory year off. My mandatory year started January 2013. January 2014, back on the Commission. Because there is nobody [00:53:00] else of color on the commission. In North Carolina a year ago, about a year and a half ago, we split the commission into two separate focuses. Half of the commission serves the diaconate, and half serves the priesthood. It feels kind of isolating because you do not get to know everybody. For whatever reason, Bishop Curry has assigned me to the priesthood track, but there is nobody else there, and we are still struggling to get people of color ordained in the Diocese of North Carolina. It is just a mindset, and [00:54:00] there have been some times that I have said some things that are not so nice because it was the elephant in the room. It has been effective in getting some folks through. I pulled Bishop Curry to the side, and I said, “Listen, I cannot do this by myself. I need some help.” He said, “Do not worry. The troops are coming. The troops are coming.” Well, they got lost. But the struggle continues.

THOMPSON: During those years that, as you said, you were politicking to make things happen, what really kept you going?

WARD: Love of the Episcopal Church. [00:55:00] The thing that motivates me is Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me.” To me, that is the backbone of social ministry. That is a clarion call. If we are going to be the Church, we have to get in and wade where we need to wade. I am exhilarated to be a part of the Episcopal Church. Since 1956 to now, there has been very little time that the Episcopal Church is not advocating for the rights of somebody.

Everything from the new Prayer Book in 1979 [00:56:00] on to the potential split now. I am so happy to be a part of a church that cares about people, some that cannot care for themselves. That is what motivates me, that is what keeps me going. When Bishop Robinson was consecrated, I have a friend that has been a friend for more than fifty years. We started nursing school together in 1956. She is Pentecostal. She called me and said to me, "How can you call that a church that you go that would allow somebody like that to be in it?" I said [00:57:00] to her, "Well, it is very easy. There is not a single person that I know in the Episcopal Church that has the role of Messiah." I said, "That role is already taken. We all know we are not the Messiah, and therefore, nobody is able to condemn anybody else because that is all of us. You will not find anybody in the Episcopal Church doing that kind of condemnation." That has been probably ten years ago. She has never mentioned it to me since, and I have said to her we do not do religion. We have been friends for over fifty years, but we do not do religion. I know she thinks I am going to die and go straight to hell.

[00:58:00]

THOMPSON: That is a very powerful story, very powerful.

WARD: That is what keeps my engines running, and to make a difference, and anything that I can add to that allows me to think and believe that I am being true to Luke 4. It is also in Isaiah, but I can find it easier in Luke 4.

THOMPSON: You have talked about Bishop Walker quite a bit. You also mentioned any number of people who really helped you in your journey along the way [00:59:00]. It sounds like you really had such a group of faithful people around you. Are there other folks that you would want to mention along those lines?

WARD: Yes. The very first person that was a mentor for me was my maternal grandmother. She was also Pentecostal and had some social beliefs that did not always serve her well, but she was true to her faith. One of them was medical because she did not believe in going to doctors so that did not serve her well toward the end of her life. She, to me, was the personification of an angel or a saint. She was just a sweetheart, and [01:00:00] I had her for a long time for a grandmother. She died when I was pregnant with my second child who is now fifty-something so I was in my thirties, late twenties when she died. She never stopped being an advocate for her grandchildren. I remember—I must have been two or two and a half—mother was going out. She was going to leave me with my grandmother. So like a good mother she was telling Momma, "Now, Delois will not eat this. She will not eat that and the other," and Momma said, "You go on about your business. She will eat anything I give her." My mother was given to being pretty outspoken and in a kind of fiery, passionate way. When my grandmother was over, she would say, "Stop [01:01:00] lying to those children, and they might believe some of what you say." She was just an absolute saint so she was my first mentor. It is the way she lived. It was not the doctrine. It was just the compassionate and caring person that she was.

As I moved along, one priest that I had at Atonement that really was not there that long, but he was absolutely the best teacher that I have ever known as a pastor and teacher about the Church and that was Henri Stines. [01:02:00] He was only with us three years. Atonement just was not big enough for him, but he was the one that taught me about stewardship. I remember the Daughters of the King at Atonement was a very senior group, and there was a little lady who was pretty much homebound that lived near me. When I discovered that she did not go to church because she did not have transportation, I started calling her on Saturdays to see if she wanted to go to church, and I would pick her up and take her. After a year or two, she said, "You need to be a Daughter. The

things that you do are what Daughters are supposed to do.” I decided, “I do not need to be in that group. I do not have a full-length mink coat. I do not [01:03:00] have this or that.” I went to Father Stines, and I said, “It has been suggested to me that I ought to be a Daughter.” I said, “I do not think I have anything to offer that group.” Father Stines said, “That is not the question. Do they have anything to offer you?” I became a Daughter. I must have been thirty-five, and I do not think there was anyone in there younger than sixty-five. I was treated like a pariah. I was ostracized. There was such resentment until I just became inactive. I understand that once you are a Daughter, you are always a Daughter, but I was never accepted in that group. Okay, I will do something else. I think it had to do at that point with my [01:04:00] diocesan activities. That there was a “who does she think she is?” thing. My fear was on target.

THOMPSON: **Would you say a little bit more about Atonement in those early days when you were there? You’ve now talked about Father Stines and Daughters of the King, but what are some of the other memories that you have in those early days of that community?**

WARD: One of the things that was new and attractive to me was that people were people. That there was not this hierarchical thing where the clergy was put up here and not human and did not have problems [01:05:00] that others had. There was a real fellowship that I found very attractive. The first Vicar of Atonement was Quinland Gordon, and Quinland Gordon’s widow is now ninety-six, and she lives in Atlanta. The year I moved in the house that I live in now, she was eighty-nine, and she drove from Atlanta to my house. Now that is not the last time she has been, but that was the last time she drove. We would talk about once a month, and she is like a surrogate momma, and when Rob [the Rt. Rev. Robert C. Wright] was consecrated, he was the rector at St. Paul’s, which is [01:06:00] her [Mrs. Myrtle Gordon’s] church. When Rob was being consecrated she said, “I got your ticket. What day are you coming?” So I went down for that and went to all these wonderful activities. The thing about being so old in the church is you have a lot of play sons, and I have more play sons then I can shake a stick at. Rob is just one of them because Rob’s background is children, too. He used to work for the Children’s Defense Fund.

THOMPSON: **I did not know that.**

WARD: I introduced him to Kanuga. I was doing a conference, and I bought him in to preach. All kinds of connections and he is just one. So Father Gordon’s widow is now ninety-six, and they had three children, and all three of them are dead so she has grandchildren. Father Gordon was a very human [01:07:00] person. He did not isolate himself in a personal [superior] way as most Episcopal clergy do. That was one thing that was attractive. I absolutely loved the social connections, not that I was so much in it, but I would see these people at church on Sunday and read about them in the *Afro* on Saturday. It was that kind of knowledge of who is there, and Father Gordon was very, very supportive of getting you involved and moving through all levels of the church. That was one of the things that I remember. The church was huge. At one point, we had eleven hundred people at Atonement, which is really, [01:08:00] really big. When I left, we probably had about four hundred and fifty active members. That is not counting the little children. Since Jocelyn [the Rev. Jocelyn Irving] has come, she has done so much in building and putting that church in a growth mode. She is so good for them. I went to church at Atonement probably during her first year. Had not met her at all. Just went to church as I frequently do when I am in town. When I got to her, she went, “Hello, Delois Ward.” I have never seen this woman before. She said, “I shocked you, didn’t I?” [01:09:00] She said, “The first three months I was here, I learned the directory.” She said, “I intended to know my members.” When I see her, I introduce her as my DC rector. Atonement gave me my foundation. It anchored me. It gave me a base. With the

exceptions of the Daughters of the King, I never felt stymied, and I felt useful. For example, in the Lay Leadership Development Class on Experiential Bible Teaching—I do not remember who the rector was then but whoever it was—when they found out that I had taken this course, [01:10:00] I was asked to teach it. It has been a wonderful family to be launched from. The Diocese of Washington has been a wonderful base to be launched from. I did not know until I went on the Coalition for Human Needs and the National Commission for Social and Specialized Ministries, the Black Women’s Task Force, the Children Advocates, I did not know that all dioceses did not have cathedrals like Washington. It has been a privilege.

THOMPSON: I am going to ask you one more question, and then we will wrap up. I wanted to ask [01:11:00] you again about Atonement and the area that it is in in Washington, DC. Did you live near the church during the time you were a member there? How has that changed over the years, and how has the church’s relationship to that area changed?

WARD: I am smiling because I was on the vestry when we had a rector who shall remain nameless that came to the vestry and said, “I do not wish to live in the rectory anymore.” The rectory was two blocks from the church. He said, [01:12:00] “There is a city bus stop in front of the rectory, and it is annoying when it comes through all through the night and making stops. There are several trees in the yard, and birds nest in the trees with their droppings. The house was built on two lots, and that is too much grass to cut, and my furniture does not fit in the house.” We are talking thirty years ago, and I remember the four things that he said to us as if it was yesterday. Nobody on the vestry said anything to him about staying in the rectory. We appointed a subcommittee to research what housing allowances were being paid to different rectors so we could be in the ballpark [01:13:00] of compensating him with a housing allowance. By the time the sun went down that Saturday, a core group of parishioners knew that he did not want to live in the neighborhood with them, and that was the beginning of a split that lasted thirty years. He got in the pulpit, and he denied wanting to leave the house, and the relationship between the vestry and the rector just went down. Because those of us on the vestry said that man is telling a blatant lie, he is just [01:14:00] up there lying. Well, it went from there down to the toilet. It got so bad that when I was walking out of the church—I do not know about the other vestry members—but when I was walking out the church with my two children, who were eleven and thirteen, his wife, standing beside him, would turn her back so she did not have to speak to my children. They asked me, “Mommy, how come she does not speak to us?” Well, I swept it over as much as I can. But because of that man and his wife, my children were confirmed at St. Timothy’s. My children are not members of Atonement. I decided she will not run me away. I was here when you came, and I will be here when you go.

[01:15:00] It got to the point that a very senior member of the vestry, Dr. William Collins, was the senior owner of the bank on Minnesota Avenue, and we started meeting in Turner Whitehead’s house. People who call themselves the Committee to Save Atonement. There were so many people coming that we outgrew Whitehead’s house, and Bill said, “Come to the bank. I have a conference room.” We started meeting at Bill’s bank on Minnesota Avenue and finally got to the point that said we need this man gone. We need to meet with the bishop. So the senior warden [01:16:00] was there, very conflicted because his loyalty was to the rector. He was dispatched to contact Bishop Walker and get an appointment for us to meet with him. He came back the next week and said he could not get through. Dr. Collins said, “Delois, you know Bishop Walker. Do you think you can get an appointment?” The next week, we had Council meeting, and I asked Bishop Walker, “How come you will not meet with us?” And he said, “Nobody asked me.” I said, “We need to meet with you.” He said, “Call Cheryl, and tell her to put you down for four-thirty Thursday.” This is Tuesday. I called Dr. Collins, and I said, “We have an appointment for four-

thirty Thursday,” and he said, “You do not need to do anything else. We will take it from here.” I got to the Cathedral at four-thirty. The conference room was so full that people [01:17:00] were out in the hall. Bishop Walker said, “I ought to give you a towel and let you cry in it because when you called this man, you did not run him past me. I would have told you he was not going to be a fit. He was not going to work for you. But these are the grounds by which you can separate, and they were basically moral grounds.” Well, the senior warden went back and told the rector what Bishop had said and what folks were seeking was how do we separate. He stood in the pulpit that Sunday and called those dissidents that are lying and you do not have to worry about getting rid of me because I quit. That [01:18:00] split lasted thirty years. There were people that did not speak to me and the members of that vestry for thirty years. Finally, a lady came in—she was also a member of the Daughters of the King—but after thirty years, she said, “I do not know why I do not speak to you.” I said, “I do not either because I truly will speak to you.”

So there is a lot of history, and unfortunately, so many of those people are gone. One of the things that I enjoy about visiting Atonement now is that Jocelyn is such an inclusive person. When [01:19:00] The junior warden at Atonement, about three years ago, is the son of a youngster I taught at Vacation Bible School when I was nineteen.

It is that kind of history to go back and to see this young man. I call them my grandchildren, and it is just wonderful to sit back and see that when I get to visit now, it is like old home week, so good you come home and some people do not know that I ever left!

THOMPSON: **They think you live in DC?**

WARD: Yes, yes. “I have not seen you in a long time. Where have you been?” “Oh, I live in Raleigh.” It will always be basic home.

THOMPSON: **Well, I want to first of all thank you for blazing [01:20:00] all the trails that you have blazed and for being such a gift to the Church and for taking the time to come and share some of those remembrances with us. As we discussed before the tape actually started rolling, I invited you to come back and share more because obviously we have just begun to scratch the surface of all of the memories that you have. I am going to get you on record saying that you will come back and talk to us again.**

WARD: Sure, because we did not even get to the national Church committees.

THOMPSON: **No, we have not so there is a lot that we still need to talk about, and I just thank you for being here today. Thank you for a very rich interview.**

WARD: You are very welcome, and as I said in my email to you yesterday, [01:21:00] it was so helpful for you to just sketch out some of the things because it allowed me to begin to think a little more about it. It is not something I think about every day.

THOMPSON: **Sure.**

WARD: That was really helpful. Every now and then, I run into someone—one of my really, really good friends that was on the National Commission for Social and Specialized Ministries with me from Atlanta, he really was a trailblazer. The last two or three times I saw him, he would say, “Dee, you need to write a book about all we did,” and I say, “Well, you did it, too. Why don’t you

write the book?” “We need to write this book,” but bless his heart, he died a year ago. I still have a message on my cell phone that I refuse to [01:22:00] delete because the last time I saw him was at Rob’s consecration. He called me the next morning and said—he had been really ill—and he said, “Dee, it was good to see you yesterday, but my body is telling me I cannot do it today so when you get home, give me a call.” That was October 2012?

THOMPSON: I believe, yes, he was consecrated in October.

WARD: Well, he was in and out of the hospital all of November, and I kept calling him and calling him. I just felt panicky, trying to get to him, and I never did really talk to him, but he called and left this message. He went home from the hospital. Two days before Thanksgiving, they discharged him, and his wife picked him up [01:23:00]. They went to the bank, and when she came out of the bank, he had had a stroke in the car, and he died the day before Thanksgiving. His wake was the most hilarious thing I have ever—he had such a full life, and it was a celebration. I remember one of his best friends said—this was back in the late 1960s or 1970s when integration was a “thing”—he said Gene [Eugene Harold Bowens] said, “Let us go in the pool!” And he said, “Man, you know we cannot go in the pool.” And Gene went up, and he picked his bush out and standing up. He said Gene was the first one to get on the diving board with his bush. He said we were crazy, we went up behind him. Gene dove in the pool, and he said, “When we came up, there was not a soul in the pool but us.” That [01:24:00] is just typical of who he was. He built over two thousand units of affordable housing with the Interfaith Coalition in Atlanta. He was just a great, great man. He knows we are doing something.

THOMPSON: Thank you again.

WARD: You are most welcome.

THOMPSON: Enjoy the rest of your weekend in D.C.

WARD: I will. I will.

THOMPSON: We will look forward to installment two of your oral history.

WARD: Okay, yes, it will be good to talk about some formal and effective—I really was very sad when some of the social ministry stopped, but I guess there is a time and place for everything. I thought that is really the Church. [01:25:00]

THOMPSON: Well, we will address it soon. Thank you!

WARD: You are very welcome.