

People of Color Who Inspire: Additional Stories from the Communion of Saints

The Center for the Theology of Childhood

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An imaginative method for nurturing the spiritual lives of children

Bishop Barbara Harris

Extension Lesson



Introduction

People of Color Who Inspire is a collection of stories written to supplement the collection of stories about the saints in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*. In the collection of lessons on the saints found in Volume 7, there is a lesson called, “The Child’s Own Saint.” The lesson invites the children and Godly Play mentors in a Godly Play room to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. This story, and the others in this collection, serves as an example of this—a Christian person who inspires us all to strive for justice and respect the dignity of every human being.

These stories are for children, so they try to minimize the distance between the child and the adult we are talking about. Some of the ways this is done is to keep the relationship informal, such as calling the person by their first name and emphasizing things about the person’s childhood. This means that the stories are somewhat open and very personal to engage the child’s intimacy and wonder with these amazing people who inspire.

We are intentionally spare with the details of these stories so as not to obscure the core reality. However, we encourage Godly Play mentors to include children’s books on the shelves nearby, just as we do with the other heroes of the church.

Beautifully crafted materials for telling Godly Play stories, including this lesson, are available from Godly Play Resources. A link to the store is found at www.godlyplayfoundation.org.

Godly Play is an interpretation of Montessori religious education developed by Jerome Berryman. It is an imaginative approach for working with children that supports, challenges, nourishes, and guides their spiritual quest. It is more akin to spiritual guidance than what we generally think of as children’s education. It involves children and adults, as mentors, moving together toward fluency in the art of knowing how to use Christian language to nourish their spiritual lives.

Godly Play assumes that children have some experience of the mystery of the presence of God in their lives, but that they lack the language, permission, and understanding to express and fully enjoy that in our culture. In Godly Play, we show how to enter into parables, silence, sacred stories, and liturgical action in order to discover the depths of God, ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

If you are not an experienced Godly Play mentor, we strongly encourage you to first download and read *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*, available at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. This will explain the background of Godly Play, its methodology, and clear guidelines for its use. You will need this grounding before attempting to lead a Godly Play presentation, such as this one, or establishing a Godly Play program in your church or school. We also recommend attending a Godly Play Foundation training. A schedule of training can be found at www.godlyplayfoundation.org.

There are additional Godly Play resources available from Church Publishing Incorporated at the website from which this lesson was downloaded. You will find these at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. All of the stories can also be found within the printed eight volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, found at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplayprint. You will also find a number of books by Jerome Berryman about the spirituality of children, as well as the Godly Play method, at www.churchpublishing.org.

Enjoy the wonder of Godly Play, and blessings on you and the ones you lead in this transformative experience!

Extension Lesson

The Story of Bishop Barbara Harris

(Died March 13, 2020)

*Bishop Barbara Harris fought tirelessly for
“the least, the lost, and the left out.”
(Matthew 20:16, 25:40, 18:11)*

How to Use This Lesson

- Extension Lesson—to be used after the children are fluent in the Core Lesson called “Introduction to the Saints” (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7, Lesson 1*)
- Afterwards Lesson—stories about things and events that took place after the Biblical era
- It is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: The Mystery of Pentecost shelf, next to St. Patrick’s lesson (whom we also remember in March)
- Pieces: saint tray, piano, shepherd’s staff (crozier), chain, a piece of paper with the words “The Power behind you is greater than any obstacle ahead of you” written on it
- Underlay: purple felt

Background

We remember Bishop Barbara Harris on the day she died, March 13, 2020. She was born June 12, 1930, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the second of three children, and the great-granddaughter of an enslaved African American. Her family was very active at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, a black congregation in Germantown, a neighborhood of Philadelphia. Barbara’s mother played the organ at the church. Her father was a steel worker. After high school, Barbara studied advertising and journalism at the Charles Morris Price School, which led to her career as a public relations executive.

Even with her busy career, she remained active at St. Barnabas and then the Church of the Advocate (also Episcopal) in Philadelphia. She taught Sunday School, worked with the youth, served on the vestry, and worked at the national level of the Episcopal Church to fight for the real inclusion of African Americans and women in the church.

While this was going on, the Episcopal Church, together with the rest of the Anglican Communion around the world, was involved in a heated debate over the ordination of women priests. The debate rose to a new level of intensity when a group of women in the United States defied the Episcopal hierarchy in 1974 and were ordained by three retired bishops. The service for the “Philadelphia 11” occurred with Barbara leading the procession down the aisle as the crucifer.

Barbara volunteered to go to the deep south to support the civil rights movement. She led a group from the Church of the Advocate to join Martin Luther King Jr.’s march from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights and spent the summer of 1965 volunteering with Delta Ministries in Greenville, Mississippi, educating and registering voters. She was also active as a volunteer working in prisons through the St. Dismas Fellowship. All this led to her midlife calling to the priesthood at the age of fifty.

In 1988, Barbara Harris was elected bishop suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. This made her the first female bishop in the whole Anglican Communion, which was difficult for her on many levels. Many in the church were angry that she had been elected, and threatened her and her supporters. Her response was to spend her time as bishop traveling, witnessing, preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments. She had a particular heart for the young people she confirmed, as well as her sister priests and bishops. She was a gifted storyteller and known for her quick wit and gospel-centered preaching. Most of all she was an outspoken advocate, as she said, for “the least, the lost, and the left out” (Matthew 20:16, 25:40, 18:11). On the occasion of her death, reporter Harrison Smith of *The Washington Post* wrote, “For years she had taken to the pulpit with a mantra in her pocket, written on a slip of paper: ‘The Power behind you is greater than any obstacle ahead of you.’”

Notes on the Material

Bishop Barbara Harris’s story sits on a small, shallow tray about six inches square, with sides about two inches deep. It has a groove in the front to slide the “saint booklet” in so the children can see it when they approach the Mystery of Pentecost Shelf.

The booklet is 5" × 4.25". The cover has an image of Bishop Harris on it. It was painted in 2002 by Simmie Knox and is used with the permission of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. The second page has a map of the world with the United States highlighted as Bishop Harris's home. It also has an image of the flag of the United States. The third page has a timeline beginning with the year 1 CE and ending with the year 2500 CE. It has an arrow indicating when Bishop Harris lived. The rest of the book contains the story of her life.

Objects are placed behind the booklet to help us remember Bishop Harris's life: a shepherd's staff, a piano, a 10" piece of chain, and a piece of paper with the words "The Power behind you is greater than any obstacle ahead of you" written on it. The underlay is a 12" square piece of purple felt and is folded on top of the objects.

Special Notes

In the collection of lessons on the Saints found in Volume 7 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, there is a lesson called, "The Child's Own Saint." The lesson invites the children in a Godly Play Room to add to the lessons on the Saints' by writing the story of one of their own heroes. Bishop Barbara Harris is one such hero—not an official saint of the church, but a Christian person who inspires us all to strive for justice, and respect the dignity of every human being. We remember Bishop Barbara Harris on or near the day of her death in March, so we recommend you place the materials for this lesson on the Saint shelves next to the story of St. Patrick, who we also remember in March.

Movements

Go and get the material for Bishop Barbara Harris's story.

Unfold the purple underlay in front of you. Take the booklet from the tray and place it in the center of the underlay with Barbara's image facing up and toward the children.

*Place the **shepherd's staff** on the underlay.*

*Place the **piano** on the underlay.*

Words

Watch where I go to get the lesson for today.

This is the story of Bishop Barbara Harris. We remember her during the time of the color purple. Purple is the color of Lent, but it is also the color that bishops wear. It helps us remember she was a bishop.

A bishop cares for and guides the priests and people in a big place called a "diocese." Bishops carry a shepherd's staff, called a "crozier," to show that they are trying their best to be a Good Shepherd to the people.

Not everyone thought that a woman could be a bishop. Many others thought, "Why not?"

In those days it was still unusual in the United States for an African American to be a bishop, but again many thought, "Why not?"

This black, woman bishop worked as hard as anyone to care for and guide the people in her diocese. She cared most for those she called "the least, the lost, and the left out."

When Barbara was growing up, her mother played the organ at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, an African American Church in Philadelphia. The whole family loved music.

Her mother took care of other people's laundry to help pay for Barbara's piano and singing lessons. Barbara especially loved the old hymns she heard and sang in church.

Movements

Place the **chain** on the underlay.

Pick up the **piece of paper** and read the words, “The Power behind you is greater than any obstacle ahead of you.” Then fold it and place it on the underlay.

Guide the wondering about Bishop Barbara using these wondering questions.

Words

When Barbara grew up, she loved to play the piano and sing the hymns she now knew by heart. Even when she was just talking to people or preaching in a church, the words from hymns filled up her talking.

Barbara loved to go to church and helped teach Sunday school, work with the youth, and even took people from her church to march for freedom with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Alabama.

She also spent her Sunday afternoons praying and talking with people who were in jail.

Barbara didn’t become a priest until she was fifty years old, so what she said and did had been thought about for a long time. She was a small person who did big things.

Barbara carried with her a piece of paper to help her do what had to be done. It gave her courage and hope. It said, “The Power behind you is greater than any obstacle ahead of you.” She knew that with God she could do anything.

When Bishop Barbara became old and full of years, she died. People celebrated her life and remembered her as the first woman bishop in her part of the Christian church, but they also knew she always worked hard for others, especially “for the least, the lost, and the left out.”

I wonder what part of Bishop Barbara’s story you like the best?

Movements

Show the children the booklet. Point out the map of the world showing where Barbara lived, the flag of her country, the timeline showing when she lived, and the story printed in the booklet to help the children remember Barbara.

Model how to put the lesson back on the tray, and then carry it back to its spot on the shelf.

Words

I wonder what part of the story is the most important?

I wonder what part of the story is about you or where you might be in the story?

I wonder if we could leave out any part of the story and still have all the story we need?

Let me show you what is inside this booklet and how you can use it to remember Bishop Barbara.

Now let me show you how to put the story away. Here are **the words** that reminded her that God was with her to help her do hard things.

Here is **the chain** that reminds us that she cared for those in jail and all “the least, lost, and the left out.”

Here is **the shepherd’s staff**, called a “crozier.” It reminds us that Barbara was a bishop and tried very hard to be like the Good Shepherd to the people in her diocese and to everyone she met.

Here is **the piano** that helps us remember how she loved music and the words of the old hymns.

Here is **the booklet** that helps us remember Bishop Harris.

Movements

Return to your spot in the circle and begin to dismiss the children to their work.

Words

And here is **the purple underlay**, because we remember Barbara during the time of the color purple and because it is the color for bishops.

Now I wonder what work you will do today. You might want to make something about this story, or another story you heard, or something else. Only you know what is right for you.



Instructions for Printing Booklet

Print booklet on photo paper (8.5 × 14).

Print in booklet mode, portrait.

Fold both pages in half.

Trim to fit in stand.

- 1.5" off the bottom
- 1" off the top
- ½" off the right side

Staple on the fold in two places.

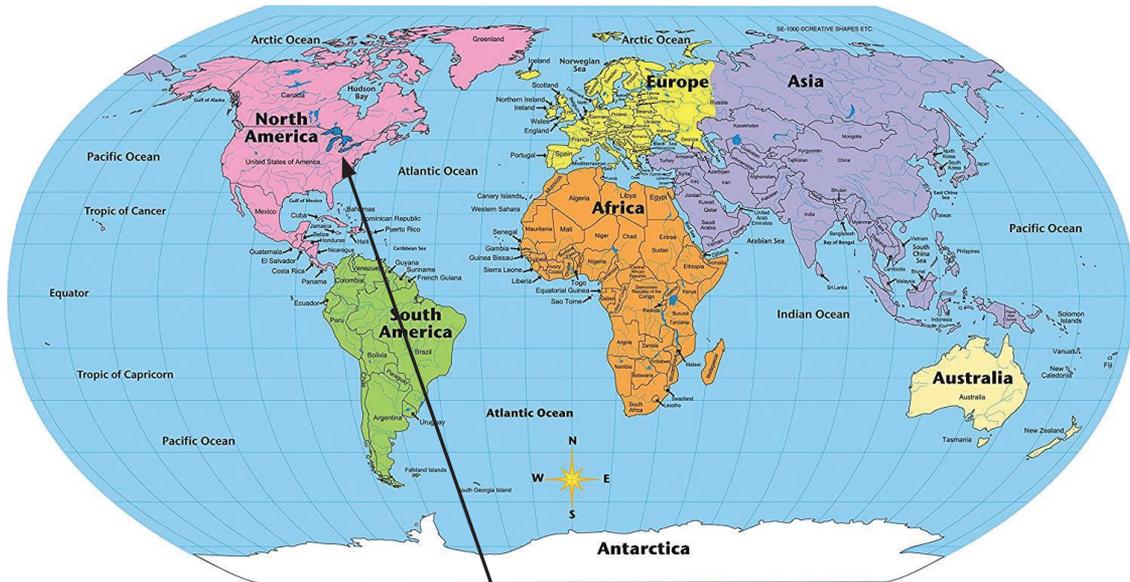


BISHOP BARBARA HARRIS

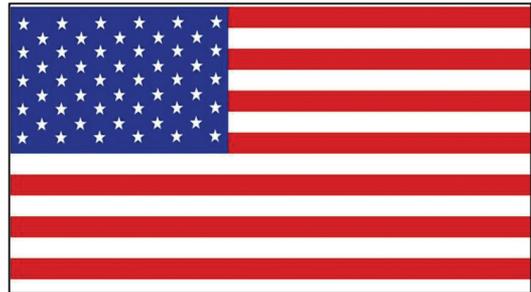
The Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris, 2002, Portrait in oil by Simmie Knox.

Used with permission, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

Bishop Barbara

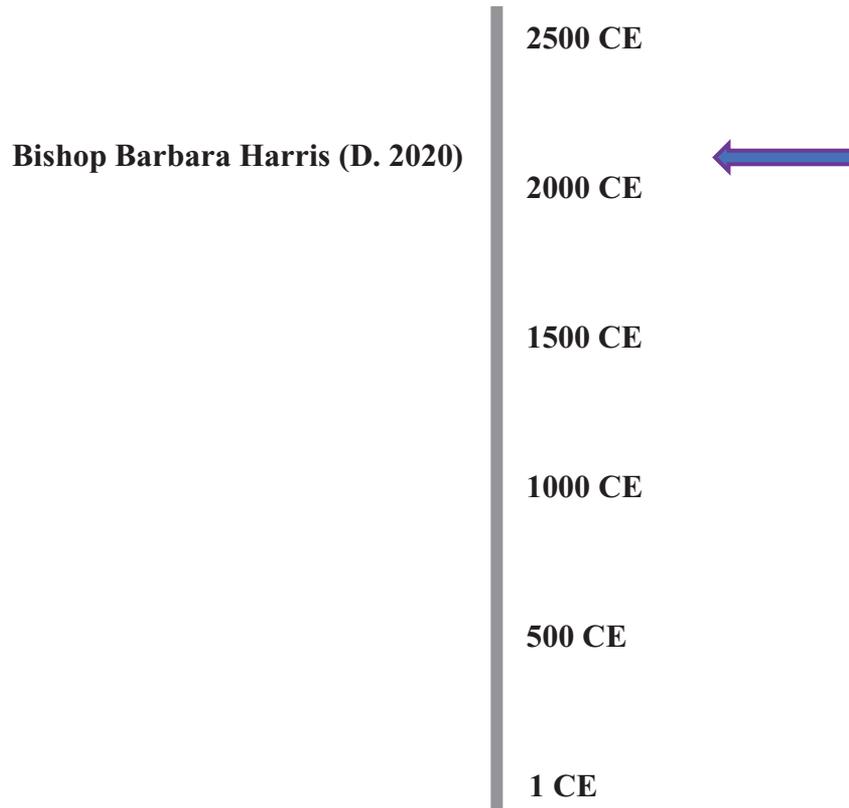


The United States, Bishop Barbara Harris's Country



The Flag of the United States

Harris



Bishop Barbara Harris

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