

Episcopal Diocese of Chicago elects first African American, first woman diocesan bishop

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [January 13, 2021](#) issue



(Photo courtesy of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago)

The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago has elected Paula E. Clark as its next bishop. She will be both the first African American and the first woman to serve as diocesan bishop in Chicago.

“I am overwhelmed. I’m humbled and filled with so much joy, people of the Diocese of Chicago. I can hardly believe it,” Clark told the convention in a video posted later on the diocese’s search and transition website.

Clark, a native of Washington, DC, is canon to the ordinary and chief of staff in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.

She was baptized at age ten by Bishop John Walker, the first Black dean of Washington National Cathedral and first Black bishop of the Diocese of Washington, according to a press release. As a child, Clark wrote, she equated Walker with God. As an adult, she added, she has patterned her ministry after his.

“His gentle spirit and dedication to love and justice inspire me today,” she wrote.

She began attending National Cathedral School in seventh grade and first felt the call to priesthood during its weekly chapel services. Her mother didn’t approve of women’s ordination, though, and Clark did not pursue it until after her mother’s death.

Clark worked for nine years as public information officer for the DC mayor’s office and the parole board. She then earned her master of divinity degree in 2004 from Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia.

She served at St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, and St. John’s Episcopal Church in Beltsville, Maryland. She then joined the staff of Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde in the Diocese of Washington as canon for clergy development, multicultural ministry, and justice and then as canon to the ordinary and chief of staff.

Clark told the Diocese of Chicago, “You have really captured my heart.”

She is scheduled to be consecrated as bishop on April 24.

“We Episcopalians are strong people who can model for the rest of this country and the world what it looks like to walk the way of love, and I look forward to ministering with you, Diocese of Chicago, meeting you all. After all those Zoom webinars, I can’t wait to see your faces,” Clark said.

“God is truly calling us to a new day and a new way of being.” —Religion News Service