The Reverend George M. Murray, ’48

Murray was born April 12, 1919 in Baltimore, Maryland, to Gerard Archibald Murray and Emma Winston, and moved to Alabama at an early age. He graduated in 1940 from the University of Alabama with a Bachelor of Science degree in commerce and business administration. He worked for two years for the General Electric Credit Company in North Carolina and then served four years in the U.S. Naval Reserve during World War II, two years of which were spent aboard the U.S.S. Pintado submarine in the Pacific.

His first wife, Elizabeth Malcolm Murray, preceded him in death. He married Margaret MacQueen in 1983. She survives him.

Murray graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) in 1948 with a Master of Divinity degree. He was ordained a deacon and then priest in the Diocese of Alabama in 1948 by the Rt. Rev. Charles C. J. Carpenter. Murray was Episcopal chaplain at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa for five years. Murray was bishop suffragan of Alabama from 1953 to 1959. He then served as bishop coadjutor of Alabama from 1959 to 1969 and became Alabama’s bishop in 1970.

In both the diocese of Alabama and Florida, the problems of adequately caring for parishes became greater over time as congregations in Mobile, Alabama, and Pensacola, Florida, at the far edge of each diocese, had grown. Bishops Murray and Hamilton West of Florida agreed that joining the southern counties of Alabama with the western portion of the Diocese of Florida was the best solution to the problem. The 1970 General Convention agreed and created the diocese. Meeting at Christ Church, Pensacola, in December 1970, the Primary Convention of the new diocese adopted canons and elected officers with Murray becoming the diocese’s first bishop. He was invested in 1971 and served until his retirement in 1981.

Murray was vice president of the House of Bishops from 1978 to 1980. In 1979 he announced his intention to retire. The Rev. Charles Farmer Duvall, from South Carolina, succeeded Murray.

The Rev. Coleman Inge told the Mobile Press-Register said that Murray was friendly and a good listener. Inge is chaplain of the Murray House, which is an assisted living home in Mobile named for Murray. Inge said he was a college student in the 1940s when he first met Murray at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

Inge said he admired Murray and how he handled the civil rights movement, which was under way while Murray was a bishop in Birmingham.

As the bishop of the Diocese of Alabama, Murray was criticized by both sides of the civil rights movement, the Rev. S. Albert Kennington, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Mobile, told the Press-Register.

Some thought he was too involved and others thought he needed to do more, he said.
"Bishop Murray chose to work very quietly and very effectively behind the scenes," Kennington said.

Murray and others gathered black and white leaders so they could get to know each other better and in a more personal level, he said.

"It was a slow, hard path," Kennington said.

Murray was one of eight white Christian and Jewish clergymen, and the only Episcopalian, who issued a letter, entitled "A Call to Unity" in April 12, 1963 deploping the civil-right marches being led in Birmingham by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely," they wrote.

Four days later King replied in his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail that African-Americans had waited 340 years for their constitutional and God-given rights. "I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience," he wrote in part.

Margaret Murray fought for civil rights and integration and drew death threats from the Ku Klux Klan.

"It was a very painful time for him," Murray told the Birmingham News July 17. "My husband was a very strong, quiet, wonderful man who worked quietly for integration here and helped to integrate many things in Alabama."

Bishop Murray also faced criticism in the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast after he ordained a woman to the priesthood shortly after women's ordinations were approved by the 1976 General Convention. When the House of Bishops passed a resolution in October 1977 saying that members of the Episcopal Church who disagree with or repudiate the 1976 actions need not regard themselves as disloyal Episcopalians, Murray managed to amend the resolution so that it also applied to those who supported the decision.

In 1978 Murray joined with seven other bishops in the state of Alabama to call for the end of capital punishment.

Services for Murray are set for July 22 at 11:00 a.m. at Christ Church Cathedral, Mobile.

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