Harris, Bravid Washington [1]

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Bravid Washington Harris, Episcopal [2]priest and bishop, was born in Warrenton, the son of Bravid Washington and Margaret Burgess Harris. After receiving his preparatory education in Warrenton, he attended St. Augustine's College [3], Raleigh. Following his graduation in 1917, he joined the U.S. Army, receiving the rank of first lieutenant. While on active duty in France during 1917–19, he was cited for "Meritorious Service" in the Moselle sector.

Upon returning to civilian life Harris enrolled in the Bishop Payne Divinity School, Petersburg, Va., from which he received the B.D. degree in 1922. He was ordained deacon on 18 Dec. 1921 and in August of the following year was advanced to the priesthood by Bishop Henry B. Delany, who placed him in charge of All Saints' Church, Warrenton. Harris remained there until 1924, when he moved to Norfolk to become rector of Grace Church. During the nineteen years he served that parish, Harris took an active part in community affairs. He was president of the Norfolk Community Hospital for ten years, director of the Norfolk Community Fund, and a district chairman of the Boy Scouts of America. From 1937 to 1943 he was the Archdeacon for Negro Work in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. His contributions as archdeacon received churchwide attention when, in 1943, he was appointed Secretary for Negro Work in the Home Missions Department of the National Council.

Harris's accomplishments as an administrator and priest were recognized when the House of Bishops on 1 Feb. 1945 elected him to be bishop of the Missionary District of Liberia. He was consecrated on 17 April in Christ and St. Luke's Church, Norfolk, by Presiding Bishop St. George Tucker, Bishop Edwin A. Penick [4] of North Carolina, and Bishop William A. Brown of Southern Virginia. At this time Harris was the only active African-American bishop in the Episcopal church. When he arrived in Liberia, he found four schools and one hospital operated by his church. All of them were understaffed and poorly equipped. One of his first actions was to improve the schools and establish new ones. Throughout his episcopate he emphasized the importance of education in any Christian program. He was responsible for the rebuilding and reopening of Cuttington College, Monrovia, which had been closed from 1929 to 1949. This project was jointly supported by the Episcopal church and the Liberian government.

After nineteen years of productive service, Harris retired from his work in Liberia. Upon returning to the United States, he was appointed acting director of the Foundation for Episcopal Colleges and continued in this position until his death. He served for several years as a trustee of the Bishop Payne Divinity School and of St. Paul's School, Lawrenceville, Va. In 1946 the Virginia Theological Seminary awarded him the D.D. degree, and in 1961 St. Augustine's College conferred on him the doctorate of humane letters. He was the author of "A Study of Our Work," published in 1937. On 23 May 1918 he married Flossie Mae Adams. They had no children.

Harris's burial service was held in the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, Washington, D.C., conducted by Presiding Bishop John Hines and three assisting bishops. On the day of his funeral President Tubman of Liberia ordered all schools, businesses, and offices closed and the flag of the republic flown at half-mast throughout the country. Harris was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

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