

Telling Our Stories

Blessed Henry Beard Delany: Bishop, Educator and Church Planter 1858-1928

Upon Archdeacon Pollard's death in 1908, Bishop Cheshire named the Ven. Henry Beard Delany to the post. Delany already had extensive experience working with Black congregations. In the 1890s, he had launched St. Matthias', Louisburg; All Saints', Warrenton; and St. Simeon's, Satterwhite; in addition, he assisted at St. Ambrose in Raleigh and supplied throughout the Diocese. He was also vice principal and chaplain at St. Augustine's School, teaching a range of subjects from classics to vocal music and masonry.

As archdeacon, Delany quickly saw to the organization of new congregations in Greensboro (Redeemer, 1909), Rocky Mount (Holy Hope, 1909), Durham (St. Titus', 1909) and Henderson (Resurrection, 1910). In Henderson and Durham, Delany was building upon work that had been started earlier but had floundered. In all four instances, he utilized the network of St. Augustine's students and alumni to good advantage



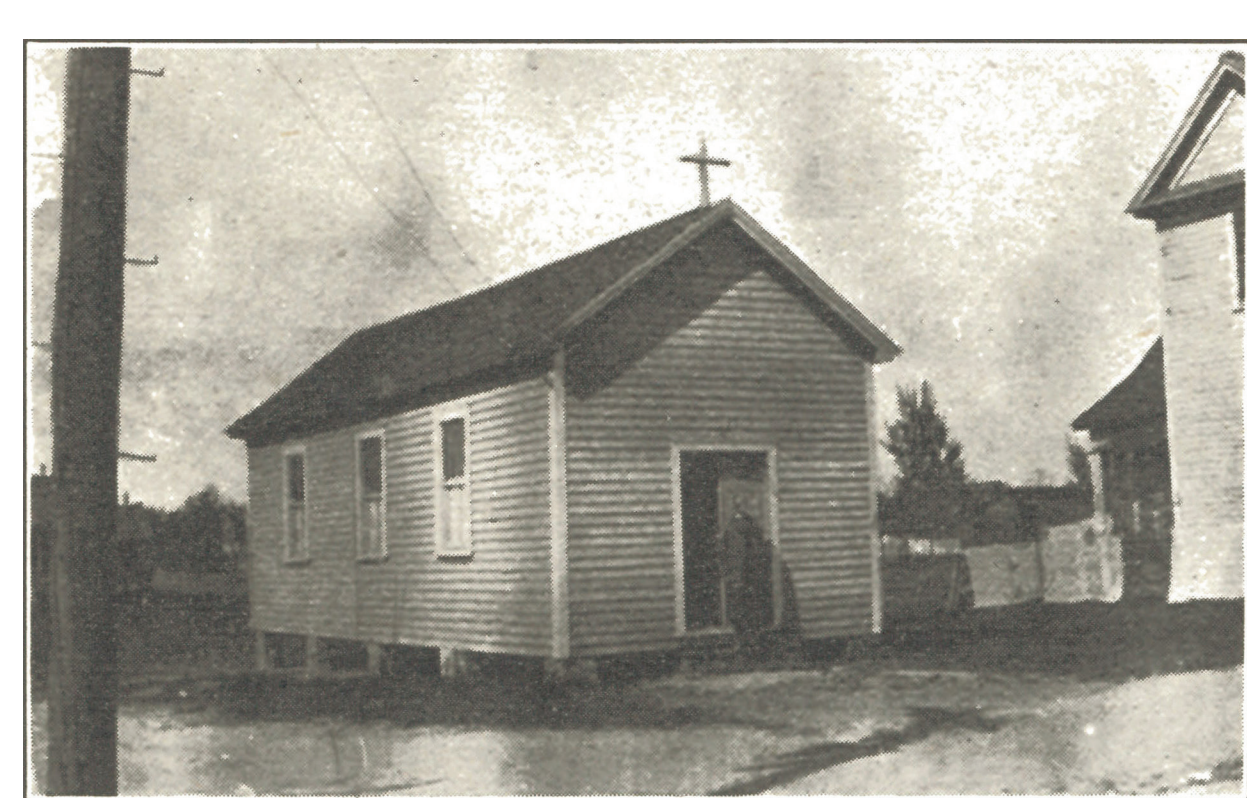
The Rt. Rev. Henry Beard Delany



St. Titus', Durham



Resurrection, Henderson



Church of the Redeemer,
Greensboro



All Saints', Warrenton

The initiative closest to his heart was the building of a church in Warrenton. This new building would be a memorial to the Rev. Thomas White Cain, a Warrenton native who perished in the 1900 Galveston Flood. The plans were ambitious, and it took from 1912 to 1918 to raise the funds to complete the structure.

At the same time, Delany was involved in the national effort to secure a missionary bishop for Black congregations in the South. The plan to have the House of Bishops appoint such a bishop was defeated in 1916 in favor of a plan to provide bishops suffragan instead. Delany and other Black leaders were disappointed, but, when it came time to elect a bishop suffragan, he was the unanimous choice of all clergy and delegates, Black and white, and he was consecrated on November 21, 1918, at St. Augustine's Chapel. Fittingly, his first visitation outside Raleigh was the opening service for All Saints', Warrenton.

During the remaining 10 years of his life, Delany would continue to serve as our archdeacon, as well as provide Episcopal oversight for Black congregations here and in the other four Carolina dioceses. This meant extensive travel and conducting more than 120 services annually. Delany worked himself to exhaustion, his health suffered, and he died in 1928. Delany is remembered in our Calendar of Saints on April 14.

A Fallow Period

For all intents and purposes, the period for developing Black congregations in the Diocese of North Carolina was now at an end. Rather than call for the election of a new bishop to succeed Delany, Bishop Coadjutor Edwin Penick took up Episcopal oversight for Black congregations in the Diocese, and the entire convocational system was overturned in favor of a centralized administration. Henceforth all diocesan mission work, regardless of race, would fall under the purview of a single department that would answer to Diocesan Council.

There was something commendable in this effort to normalize mission with African Americans and to do away with parallel structures. But, in hindsight, the defects of this policy are also apparent. For in dismantling the structure that had supported Black ministry for almost 40 years, the Diocese made no alternative provision for Black congregational support and development. After Delany's death in 1928, we would wait 40 years before calling another African American to serve on diocesan staff.