

# After the Death of a Martyr

A collection of memories in honor of the  
Episcopal Theological School classes of 1965, 1966, 1967

*Edited by the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Mae Magill '02*  
*Coordinator of Community Life, Episcopal Divinity School*



# They Were Thirsty

**The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Mae Magill '02**, Coordinator of Community Life, Episcopal Divinity School (EDS)

Jonathan Daniels did not die during a protest, nor while tutoring students, in a jail cell, or while attempting to integrate an all-white Episcopal church. Instead, following an unexpected release from jail into the sweltering Alabama sun, Jonathan and three companions headed toward a nearby store for a drink—a place they knew permitted integrated shopping. On August 20, 1965, Jonathan Daniels was killed simply looking for a Coke.

In a 2005 interview with the Civil Rights Movement Archives, Ruby Sales '98 spoke about the moment she faced the gunman, Tom Coleman. She recalls him snarling, “Bitch, I’ll blow your brains out,” before she was pulled back and fell to the ground. When she regained consciousness, she saw blood everywhere and wondered if she was dead. Nearby, Father Richard Morrisroe—one of their companions who had been shot in the back while attempting to flee after the bullet intended for Ruby found Jon instead—lay moaning for “water, water, water.”<sup>1</sup>

*What is there to do after the death of a martyr?*

In the immediate aftermath, Ruby Sales risked her life once more to get water to the wounded Father Morrisroe. Soon after, she traveled to New Hampshire to accompany Jon’s body back to his family. She struggled to say the right thing to his mother. She was moved as his coffin was lowered into the ground. She attended his memorial service at the Episcopal Theological School (later Episcopal Divinity School) before embarking on a speaking tour and facing Tom Coleman’s trial to testify. Her journey eventually led her away from “Bloody” Lowndes County, back to Episcopal Divinity School, this time as a student, and finally to Washington, D.C., where she founded The SpiritHouse Project.

*What is there to do after the death of a martyr?*

For Jonathan’s classmates at Episcopal Theological School, the answer was a return to the same: the same classes, the same homework, and the same papers. They sat for exams that their classmate and friend Jon would never take. Life on campus remained outwardly the same, yet it was fundamentally altered.

<sup>1</sup> Interview by Jean Wiley and Bruce Hartford, Oral History/Interview Ruby Nell Sales, Civil Rights Movement Archive, September, 2005. <https://www.crmvet.org/nars/rubysale.htm>.

*They Were Thirsty, continued*

In January 1966, the students published a supplement to Volume 10 of The Episcopal Theological School Journal. These collected writings—preserved in a raw, honest typewriter font—reveal a pained and occasionally unfiltered directness. They are the voices of young adults wrestling to find meaning and clinging to their faith as the chaos of the era was brought near.

What brought our school and our nation to this place?



(Above) The cash store where Jon was murdered

Source: William J. Schneider's *American Martyr: The Jon Daniels Story*

(Below) Pilgrims stand outside the site of Jon's murder holding posters with the photos of all of those killed in the struggle for civil rights in Alabama at the annual Jonathan Daniels and the Martyrs of Alabama Pilgrimage on the 60th anniversary of his martyrdom in 2025

Photographer: Andi Rice Mediaworks



# Youth & Service: The Cost of Conscience & a Coke

*By Julianne Johnson, Ph.D.*

The Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century was intense, youthful, and dangerous. Many of the protesters and advocates were college students involved in raising public awareness through grassroots organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In many cases, SNCC activities focused on spirited, creative means of protest. Lunch counter sit-ins and student marches highlighted the youth culture of the age, deliberately targeting ordinary spaces of consumer life in the United States. Diners, bus terminals, and public libraries, where young people frequently appeared, became a visible battleground for issues of equality. Ella Baker, one of SNCC's founding organizers, wrote powerfully in 1960 that what the movement demanded was "something bigger than a hamburger or even a giant-sized Coke."<sup>2</sup> The youth of the Civil Rights movement demanded equality at every level. Because of this extraordinary expression and protest, many thoughtful young people around the country answered the call for service to the Civil Rights cause.

They were willing to put everything on the line to end racial terror and fight for justice. For these thoughtful young people, the practicalities of protest sometimes intersected with the most common conveniences of daily life.

The summer of 1965 was no ordinary season of U.S. history. On March 7, in what journalists would call "Bloody Sunday," marchers were beaten by state troopers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. An entire generation of young people watched in horror as violence erupted throughout the South. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called on religious leaders and people of conscience to join the fight for freedom. Many young people came to understand that the comfortable distance between belief and action was a moral luxury they could no longer afford.

This was the summer the Voting Rights Act was signed into law. The Voting Rights Act, like the 1964 Civil Rights Act before it, was a legislative triumph wrested from the suffering of prior Civil Rights protests. Both pieces of legislation took paths to outlaw

<sup>2</sup> Ella Baker, "Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement -- Bigger Than a Hamburger," [carmvet.org](http://carmvet.org), 1960, <https://www.carmvet.org/docs/sncc2.htm>.

## *Youth & Service, continued*

segregated practices in public places and voting regulations. Progress was being made, but the de facto experience of Black Americans did not reflect that progress. It was often still impossibly difficult to simply buy a hamburger or a Coke. Federal legislation did not end the practicalities of everyday danger. There was much work to be done. Advocates and allies flocked to the Deep South, often at great personal sacrifice, to fully articulate their belief in racial equality. Jonathan Daniels was not an anomaly. He was the movement's truest expression. He was a faithful, young idealist, trained in the language of justice, and utterly serious about the cost of service.

Ella Baker and SNCC wrote of the Black youth movement, "We want the world to know that we no longer accept the inferior position of second-class citizenship. We are willing to go to jail, be ridiculed, spat upon, and even suffer physical violence to obtain First Class Citizenship."<sup>3</sup> When Jonathan Daniels answered the call to serve alongside other advocates in the Civil Rights Movement, he was fully committed.

On August 20, Jonathan Daniels walked alongside his friends to buy a cold drink on a

hot Alabama afternoon. Still, with all the progress and promises of equality, in 1965, a young white seminarian could be murdered in broad daylight for the act of walking alongside Black neighbors toward an open door.

Ella Baker was right. It was never really about the hamburger. It was never really about the Coke. It was about whether every child of God could walk through the same door, in the same heat, and be served.

---

*Julianne Johnson, Ph.D., is a historian, author, and professor of history at College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita, California. A committed advocate for historical literacy and civic engagement, she is Chairperson of the League of Women Voters of Santa Clarita Valley and a parishioner at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Santa Clarita, California.*

*(Right) Jon with "Judy" Upham, both ETS seminarians, pictured with children they tutored at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Selma. They both responded to the Rev. Dr. King's call for clergy to come to Selma.*

Source: Schneider, *American Martyr*

<sup>3</sup> Baker, "Bigger Than a Hamburger."

# The Freedom Movement & The Episcopal Church

*By the Rev. Emilee Walker-Cornetta,  
Executive Director, EDS*

In 1965, Jonathan Daniels, Judith Upham, and their classmates were studying theology at Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They wrestled academically and spiritually with questions of freedom, faith, and human dignity. When the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked clergy across the country to come to Selma, they knew they were called to respond.

Episcopal leaders across the country were not as sure. Presiding Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill affirmed the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, and called on Episcopalians to accept it. But the church was largely silent to the white rioting that began when African Americans challenged segregation laws. In April of 1963, eight white clergy leaders in Alabama, including the Episcopal Bishop, wrote "A Call for Unity," calling the protests unwise and untimely, and the work of outsiders, prompting Dr. King's response from the Birmingham jail.



## ***The Freedom Movement & The Episcopal Church, continued***

In 1958, two white priests, the Revs. Arthur Walmsley and Neil Tarplee, urged Episcopal General Convention to be more active in the struggle for freedom, but it instead affirmed the dignity of all people and cautioned against applying theological ideals to “special and local situations.” The church said Christians can have honest differences in their view on desegregation.

Disappointed by the church’s refusal to fully endorse civil rights for Black Americans, Tarplee and Walmsley, now joined by the Rev. John Morris, organized a meeting of one hundred lay and ordained Episcopalians committed to the cause of racial integration in December 1959. Together they formed the Episcopal Society of Racial and Cultural Unity (ESCRU). ESCRU’s goals included the elimination of single-race parishes, ending racial discrimination in any church-run institutions, supporting Episcopalians working locally for integration, amplifying the church’s prophetic witness in overturning racial barriers, and fostering conditions of racial harmony. By adopting the tactics of peaceful protest and civil disobedience used by other civil rights protesters, ESCRU hoped to rouse the

consciences of Episcopalians throughout the country and expose the ways the racial practices of the church were out of line with its stated ideals.

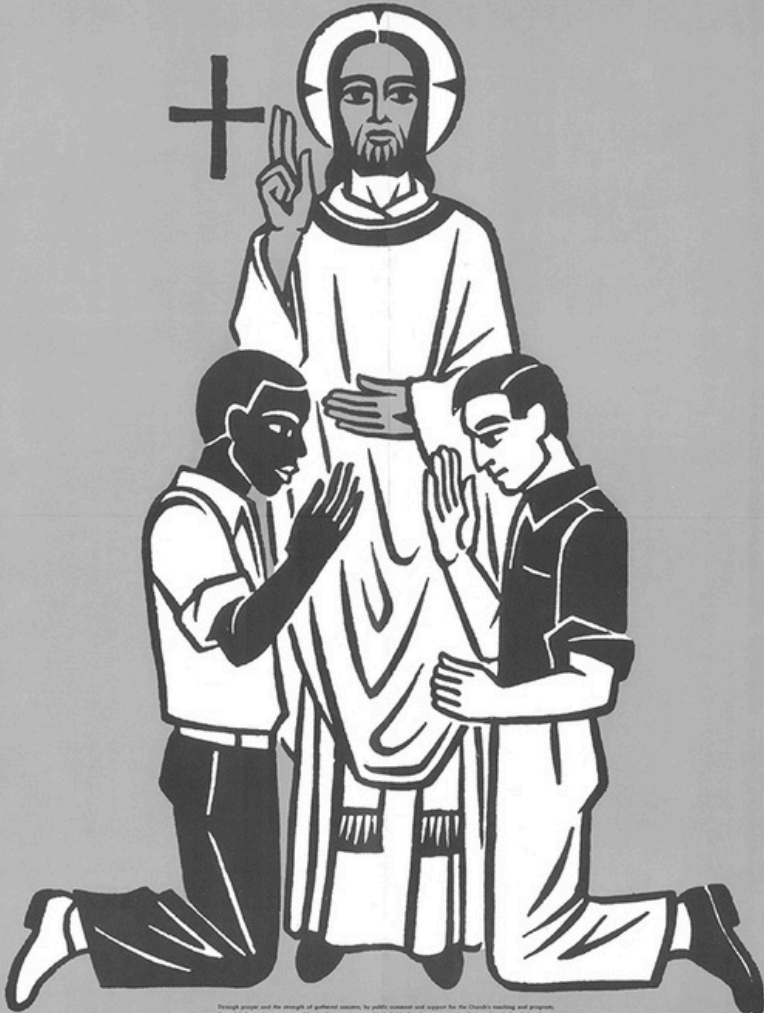
In one of its early and most memorable actions, ESCRU led an interracial prayer pilgrimage (its version of a Freedom Ride) into the South in 1961. The group of twenty-eight priests began the pilgrimage in New Orleans, destined for the 1961 General Convention in Detroit. At their first stop in Jackson, Mississippi, fifteen of the pilgrims entered a segregated bus terminal and were promptly arrested, jailed, and sentenced to four months in prison. Others included protesting segregation at St. John’s Episcopal Hospital in Queens; protests at Sewanee: The University of the South over its awarding of an honorary doctorate to a well-known segregationist, its resistance to integration, and its affiliation with a restaurant that refused to serve Black customers; picketing the Episcopal-affiliated Lovett School in Atlanta after it denied admission to the children of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the basis of race; and burning Episcopal educational materials that contained racist images or stereotypes and imposing them on penitents’ foreheads on Ash Wednesday of 1969.

*(Right)* A poster featuring the ESCRU logo

At its peak in 1966, the organization consisted of 5,000 members in 29 chapters, two-thirds of whom were lay leaders. Its membership was highly concentrated in northern cities, but Atlanta,

Texas, and Maryland also had robust chapters. Though Black Episcopalians participated in ESCRU, the majority of its membership and its early leadership were white.

*Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*



Through prayer and the strength of gathered voices, by public witness and support for the Church's teaching and program, through educational courses and leadership resources and by individual and corporate action by members in their churches we seek the greater wholeness of the Church and general community, and an awareness of separation and injustice, so that brethren may dwell together in unity and as 50% of those Churches that in any state of our own time. A statement of Purpose and membership application form may be obtained by writing: The Episcopal Society of North 100, 11 North 90, N.W., Atlanta 3, Ga.

**The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity**

(Below) This anti-segregation poster was produced in the 1960s by ESCRU. It was inspired by anti-apartheid posters in South Africa. © Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of The Episcopal Church



## ***The Freedom Movement & The Episcopal Church, continued***

Students from Episcopal Theological School (ETS), later Episcopal Divinity School, joined ESCRU and local leaders for the thwarted march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. ETS students returned to Cambridge, but Jonathan Daniels and his classmate Judy Upham stayed to join an ESCRU action that Sunday morning. Led by Malcom E. Peabody of Boston, former national president of ESCRU, an integrated group arrived to worship at the 11am service of the local Episcopal Church in Selma. They were turned away by the ushers and held a morning prayer service on the sidewalk instead.

When Daniels and Upham returned to Selma shortly after this initial visit, ESCRU sponsored their trip. During his time in Alabama, Daniels worked as a representative of ESCRU and continued efforts to integrate St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Selma. He and Upham met and corresponded with the Rt. Rev. Charles Carpenter, the sixth Bishop of Alabama, several times, expressing concern over the racial discrimination practiced at St. Paul's, arguing it contravened the Gospel and the church's canon law. When they did not receive a satisfactory response, Daniels and Upham joined other ESCRU members to

picket outside diocesan offices in Birmingham. As Daniels reported in a letter to his mother, the group's signs read, "Slave Gallery Revived," "Bishop Sanctions Segregated Slavery in Selma Church," and "Church Camps Still Segregated." He and Upham carried signs with large crucifixes separating two bodies, one White and one Black, with a barbed wire fence intersecting the cross and the words "Segregation... Separation."

## **The Students Respond**

### ***Magill '02***

Segregation and separation were on the minds of the ETS students who started the new school year without Jonathan. Some of their written reactions are in the January 1967 Supplement to the *Episcopal Theological School Journal*.

Ray Worthington '66 focuses on the way that segregation is separation, separation from each other and separation from God. He wonders how to love our enemies, and yet how can we not love our enemies? The Black marchers, after being beaten, with every reason to hate, instead sang of their love of George Wallace and others after Bloody Sunday.

## ***The Students Respond,*** *continued*

Worthington laments, "When an oppressed people can love and pray for their oppressors and we here at E. T. S. cannot, there is something terribly wrong with us."<sup>4</sup> When faced with the death of a martyr, he calls on the community to love their enemies and to pray for those who are separated from us.

To even use the word "enemy" to describe others, Craig Hammond '67 writes, "is an invention of human frailty arising from our fall from Grace." Instead we must "recognize at the other extreme that love was made manifest in Christ Jesus, and is therefore no human invention but rather from God and of God in the very living reality of His Presence."<sup>5</sup> None of the writers identify "the enemy"—is it Tom Coleman, the worshipers at all white Episcopal churches, the justice system, the entire South?

*What is there to do after the death of a martyr?*

Overwhelmed by the poverty he saw in the South, Everett Wenrick '68 imagines that the power to vote is the power to give up poverty. He declares, or perhaps hopes, a time is coming when confrontation is no longer needed. He dreams

of a change in approach, that perhaps the "old struggle for civil rights is levelling (sic) off, and the new struggle for human rights is taking its place. And with it comes the struggle for economic and political freedom." At the same time, Wenrick recognizes the backlash from the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, and the White Citizens' Council. "Just as the new wave of the movement is here, so too is the counterwave of desperation." His response is a promise to continue to work on poverty. "Certainly there is little I can do alone. But the church has offered a union of militants - not a strong voice but a small working hand."<sup>6</sup>

*What is there to do after the death of a martyr?*

The January 1967 Supplement is not full of hope; it's too soon after Jonathan's death. They describe actions they will take, and seek theological meaning, but the students do not speak with confidence for the future. Judith Upham '67 notes that she and Jonathan had serious questions about the probability of any action being effective and so focused their energies more on faithfulness than on results.

She writes that Jon "had many serious doubts about what was happening in the Movement, in ESCRU, in the churches, in this

<sup>4</sup> P. S. M. Selby, Ed, Supplement to Vol. 10, *The Episcopal School Journal*, January 1966, page 26.

<sup>5</sup> Supplement, pages 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Supplement, page 41.

seminary, in his life. Nevertheless he acted (as we all must) in faithfulness and in the expectant hope of God's mercy."<sup>7</sup> There is a sense of despair in the world, to be met with what right-action they could muster.

In the dark and cold of Massachusetts winter, Peter Selby '66 writes that, "Life can never be the same again." And then, with sadness, "It does not seem to mean very much. Life goes on in much the same old way: we attend classes, services, and meals just as we always did ..." It seems that the world should have changed in response to Jonathan's death, "[b]ut it is, frighteningly, abominably, dreadfully the same."<sup>8</sup>

### *What is there to do after the death of a martyr?*

Initially, Judith Upham's reaction to Dr. King's call to action was to pull out her check book. She was going to donate to, not attend, the Freedom Marches. But Jonathan encouraged her to come along.

She worked with Jonathan for a semester, tutoring, marching, and meeting with the members of St. Paul's Church in Selma to encourage integration, and then returned home for the summer.

In the aftermath of his death, she offered reflections on Jonathan's humanness, his imperfections. "As Jon himself was fond of remarking, men's motives are always mixed and life itself is, at best, an ambiguous business."<sup>9</sup> She wanted people to know that he was just like us.

In their efforts to integrate St. Paul's Church, Jonathan and Judith met often with members and leaders, trying to call them to welcome the inter-racial group they brought to the doors each Sunday morning. Over and over again, they were turned away, until Easter brought the smallest of victories: they were permitted to attend only the early service and to sit in the back, six rows behind the nearest white members.

He had many serious doubts about what was happening in the Movement, in ESCRU, in the churches, in this seminary, in his life. Nevertheless he acted (as we all must) in faithfulness and in expectant hope of God's mercy. Perhaps the essence of his witness lies in the reminder that God requires not extraordinary people, but ordinary people with an extraordinary commitment as channels for His grace-full action in the world.

Judith Upham

The full text of the ETS Journal Supplement quoted here is available online by scanning the QR code below or by emailing [emagill@eds.edu](mailto:emagill@eds.edu).



<sup>7</sup> Supplement, page 22. (Also pictured above)

<sup>8</sup> Supplement, page 22.

<sup>9</sup> Selby, Supplement, page 16.

## ***The Students Respond,*** *continued*

Week after week, they practiced their listening skills with leaders and members of the congregation, worked to be patient, and were careful not to stereotype. Judith reports that Jon was articulate, and proclaimed the Gospel, but outside the negotiations she says we, “were uncharitable at best, unprintable at [our] worst. To be as completely loving as we are called to be was impossible.”<sup>10</sup>

Upham writes that Jon was sometimes impatient and snappy with the kids he was helping. Once, Jon and Judith were out at a bar with their host family and he got distracted talking to SNCC volunteers. When the scene started to get unruly and they wanted to leave, John was oblivious to their pleas for his help. He later admitted he had not been aware of any of it. He was late for everything. Forgot to get gasoline. Judith noted that both of them had difficulty with the food they were served in the households that welcomed them, and so created excuses to go to Montgomery to eat in integrated restaurants once or twice a week. “[O]ur bondage to our middle-class background remained somewhat embarrassing.”<sup>11</sup>

The point is that Jonathan Daniels, already at this time being called a saint, was human. He was the same as each of us. “Perhaps the essence of his witness lies in the reminder that God requires not extraordinary people, but ordinary people with an extraordinary commitment as channels for His grace-full (sic) action in the world.”<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Upham writes, “For through the bramble bush of doubt and fear and supposed success we are groping our way to the realization that above all else, we are called to be saints. This is the mission of the Church everywhere.”<sup>13</sup>

## **Passing the Torch**

### ***Magill '02***

*What is there to do after the death of a martyr?*

What does it mean to be called to be saints as individuals and as a church? Today is a completely different time, and yet the parallels are obvious. We are faced with new violence, chaos, and new questions of how to proceed. Our guidance comes from those who have been part of this movement for freedom. When we are most frustrated,

<sup>10</sup> Supplement, page 19.

<sup>11</sup> Supplement, page 20.

<sup>12</sup> Supplement, page 41.

<sup>13</sup> Schneider, page 14.

we can turn to the wisdom of those who have done this work before.

Jonathan writes to a friend, after a frustrating talk with a couple who were part of refusing to integrate St. Paul's Church: "I am convinced that in the long run the 'strategy of love' is the only one that will bring real health and reconciliation into this mess."<sup>14</sup>

Like Jonathan, many of us bring many levels of privilege to this work of preaching a Gospel of love. Like Jonathan, we work hard to be a participant, rather than the leader of other people's emancipation, and work also to speak to others with privileges like our own.

In a 2017 interview with Harvard University, Ruby Sales suggests that this is central to Jonathan's witness: "Jonathan Daniels thought that part of his journey was to redeem the soul of white America because he understood that racism was not something that simply happened to [B]lack people. It also happened to white people because it contained them in isolated communities where they lived in fear, so his journey south was not only an attempt to understand and connect with the humanity of others — it was also to connect with his own humanity."<sup>15</sup>

Freedom is more than access to a Coke and a burger, but it includes enough to eat.

Freedom is about our ability to hope, but is not wishful thinking. Freedom is the ability to connect to our own humanity: to save ourselves, and in doing so, to save the world.

In this time, like in 1966, we are called to see what is happening around us and to figure out what to do. The writing of the students at ETS after Jonathan's death seems focused on grappling with just that. Peter Selby notes that not knowing what to do is a cause of despair. We despair that the cause of freedom may fail. He writes, "Our optimism has been shattered," which reminds us that our assurance of victory is not bound to any particular project, but to the hope of Easter. "Our commitment was meant to be one of faith first, and action only in faith."<sup>16</sup>

The students could see the hopelessness of the struggle in that moment— the killer is freed, our classmate is dead, and the people who have registered to vote have lost their homes and their livelihoods. We, similarly, can see the hopelessness in our own time.

All that is left is faith in the resurrection and our call to embody it.

<sup>14</sup> Schneider, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Mineo, Liz, "For Ruby Sales, long road to hope," Harvard Gazette, April 17, 2017. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/civil-rights-legend-ruby-sales-sees-reason-for-hope-ahead-of-harvard-divinity-school-talk/>.

<sup>16</sup> Supplement, page 24.



*Episcopal Theological School, Class of 1965 | Archives of The Episcopal Church*



*Episcopal Theological School, Class of 1966 | Archives of The Episcopal Church*