

Welcome to our parents, past parents, alumni, former faculty and friends of Grace on this special day when we take time to celebrate our founding -- also known as our school's birthday. As we approach a milestone birthday of 60 years and as we celebrate Black History Month, it seems like a good moment to give thanks to a person of great importance in the journey and success of Grace back in the early 1980's, Bishop John T. Walker.

As many of you know, our current home is the site of a former public school called Larchmont Elementary. Sometime in the 1970's due to declining enrollment, Montgomery County Schools decided to close Larchmont and give it to the County for its own use. Jane Wood, our founding head, toured the site in the early 1980's and thought it would be a wonderful future home for our growing school. She and members of the Board began negotiations to lease the school from the County. What unfolded from there was a very contentious battle to block Grace from using the site. Members of the County Council and school board didn't understand Grace's mission to be a school for all students, no matter what race or religion they were. They thought Grace would become a racially segregated school, like many other schools were becoming at that time. So - as you can imagine - we needed some champions to come to our aid and help tell our **real** story.

At the time, the Bishop of Washington (who is the top priest in all of the Episcopal Churches in our area) was John T. Walker. He was Bishop from 1977-1989 and he was the first African American to be admitted as a student to the Virginia Theological Seminary in 1951. He earned a worldwide reputation for social activism and was a good friend of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was fighting for equality in South Africa. In fact, Bishop Walker was once arrested at a protest rally against apartheid at the South African Embassy, so he was definitely "walking the walk." Bishop Walker stepped up and advocated on Grace's behalf before the Council. In his time as Bishop, he was a strong supporter of all the Episcopal Schools in the Washington Diocese, and Grace was no exception.

Bishop Walker cared for the schools he served and he believed in the power of our institutions to help students enter their world as agents of change. He was such a

believer in this mission that to honor the legacy of the first African-American Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and all of his contributions, he got a whole school named after him! The Bishop John T. Walker School opened in September 2008 as a tuition-free, kindergarten through fifth grade school for boys in Southeast, Washington, D.C.. It was founded by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington in response to the serious educational challenges facing African American boys in the low-income communities east of the Anacostia River. I'm proud to be serving on the Board of Trustees for the Bishop Walker School. I should also note that Ms. Kelliher was a teacher there before she came to Grace.

And so on this day - when we celebrate the champions of our past who have helped us become the school we are today, we give thanks to Bishop Walker for his leadership, his faith, and his willingness to tell our story and help us to secure our permanent school home here on Connecticut Avenue.