**A New “First” – Meet a Trailblazer, The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray**

Pauli Murray will be recognized on a U.S. quarter as part of the U.S. Mint’s 2022-2025 celebration of the contributions and achievements of women. Do you know why s/he is being recognized? Do you know about Murray’s accomplishments? Do you know why they matter?

**“When I heard Yale University announce that they were naming a new residential college after Pauli Murray, I had no idea what an inspiring person Murray was. I soon learned about their many life achievements despite incredible challenges.” *The Rev. Annemarie Delgado***

With its “groundbreaking coin program, [the U.S. mint wants] to remind future generations what can be accomplished with vision, determination, and a desire to improve opportunities for all.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Thus, Murray, will be included among other strong and courageous women such as poet and writer Maya Angelou, astronaut Dr. Sally Ride, pilot Bessie Coleman, and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, as people whose lives inspire others.

**The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray was a civil rights lawyer, writer and poet, activist, and Episcopal priest.**

Like the other honorees in the program, the Rev. Dr. Murray is multi-faceted in their[[2]](#footnote-2) accomplishments. Born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1910 and raised in Durham, North Carolina, Pauli was ever challenging the status quo. Fifteen years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, Pauli was arrested for refusing to sit at the back of the bus. As a lawyer s/he helped craft the legal argument behind the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education ruling that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional. In a final paper while in Howard Law School, Murray had concluded that the previously accepted “separate-but-equal” premise could never be equal. Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and Ruth Bader Ginsburg both credited Pauli Murray with legal groundwork done in support of civil rights cases they argued. In 1977 s/he was ordained the first Black woman priest in the Episcopal Church. Today the Episcopal Church recognizes Pauli Murray on July 1st as an “early and committed civil rights activist and the first African American woman priest ordained in the Episcopal Church.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Murray broke the proverbial glass ceiling and walls of segregation over and over again.

Pauli Murray certainly faced discrimination as a Black woman; however, as someone who was also gender non-conforming s/he faced additional significant challenges. In the early 1930s, Murray legally changed their name to the gender-neutral “Pauli.” Over the years they sought medical treatment to help them address their identity; however, hormone therapy was repeatedly denied to them. S/he had a longtime relationship with partner, Irene Barlow, and was devastated when Irene died of cancer in 1973. Pauli Murray’s many accomplishments earn them the honor of being recognized as part of the American Woman Quarters Program, and with this recognition they achieve another “first” - that of the first known gender non-conforming person to be featured on a U.S. coin.

**“I was AMAZED at her life when I saw the documentary.” *The Rev. Dr. Mary Caucutt***

There is much more to Pauli’s life and legacy than we can cover here. We encourage you to continue learning about and discussing the amazing Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray’s life and achievements with your faith community using the following resources:

* The Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice ([www.paulimurraycenter.com](http://www.paulimurraycenter.com))
* The Religion News Service ([www.religionnews.com/2023/02/14/trailblazing-episcopal-priest-pauli-murray-will-be-featured-on-us-quarters](http://www.religionnews.com/2023/02/14/trailblazing-episcopal-priest-pauli-murray-will-be-featured-on-us-quarters))
* *Proud Shoes: Story of an American Family* (1956) – book by Pauli Murray
* *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (1987) – book by Pauli Murray
* The American Women Quarters Program ([www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/american-women-quarters](http://www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/american-women-quarters))
* “My Name is Pauli Murray” – a documentary available on Amazon Prime

As we draw inspiration from Pauli Murray’s legacy, please pray with us:

*Liberating God, we thank you for the steadfast courage of your servant Pauli Murray, who fought long and well: Unshackle us from the chains of prejudice and fear, that we may show forth the reconciling love and true freedom which you revealed in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

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1. https://catalog.usmint.gov/coins/coin-programs/american-women-quarters-program/?cm\_mmc=external+site-\_-infosite-\_-programpage-\_-category+name&cc=AWQ&\_ga=2.73937874.1310526106.1677550751-2061271146.1677550587 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Although it is not known what gender pronouns Pauli Murray would choose in today’s world, in respect for their known non-conformity to gender norms and consistent with the practice of the Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice, we use either they/them/their or s/he in this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2018: Conforming to General Convention 2018*. Church Publishing Incorporated, 2019, p 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Collect provided for Pauli Murray’s feast day in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2018*, 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)