

Episcopalians join post-inauguration women's marches

By Sharon Sheridan

In the U.S. and around the world, Episcopalians joined street demonstrations the day after President Donald Trump's inauguration to voice support for human rights.

With signs and chants, they promoted women's rights and equality for all people while raising concerns about potential Trump administration policies affecting marginalized groups, the environment, education and health care.

An estimated half a million demonstrators joined the Women's March in Washington, D.C., while hundreds of thousands more participated in "sister marches" elsewhere. Some members of the Episcopal Women's Caucus Facebook group marched carrying the names of other members who couldn't attend in person.

Debi Post and her husband Brian Malcolm arrived at their parish, Church of the Redeemer in Morristown, N.J., at 4 a.m. on Jan. 21 to travel by bus to the nation's capital for the day's march.

"I just felt called to go to have my voice be heard and to participate and hopefully make a difference," Post said. "I've never participated in a large march

before, so it was important for me not only to put my faith into action but also as a citizen of the United States to exercise my rights. ... It's just a beginning of being more active, of really what it means to be a citizen in our country: to be engaged and to participate, because democracy requires participation."

Malcolm said he wanted to participate because "I do not like the direction that this country is heading, or potentially could be heading in. I personally am not willing to just lay down and let it happen. Fear is a wonderful motivator, but I'm mad, too."

For him, the march was a chance to demonstrate his faith in a loving God. "It's so bizarre, the situation right now," he said. "It's the absolute antithesis of the faith I believe in."

Malcolm was one of three men out of about 40 people on the bus from Redeemer. "I was made an honorary 'nasty woman' for the day," he said. (Some women opposing Trump began calling themselves "nasty women" with pride after Trump referred to his rival Hillary Clinton that way during a presidential debate.)

Those they encountered on the march were anything but nasty, Post



Photo/Sharon Sheridan

Louise Hannibal-Boyce, left, and Mabel D. Wernham, members of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in New York's Harlem neighborhood, joined an estimated 400,000 demonstrators in the Women's March in New York on Jan. 21.

and Malcolm each said. Malcolm said he saw no tension or animosity between demonstrators and police. Post commented on the friendliness of everyone they encountered in a day of long delays created by the crowds. She also lauded the hospitality at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, New Carrollton, Md., which provided snacks and a place of respite on the group's way in and out of Washington.

In New York, a crowd the mayor's office estimated at 400,000 overwhelmed the parade route, with some participants standing for hours waiting to march. Signs ranged from the humorous ("We shall overcomb" — referring to Trump's hairstyle) to the political ("Democracy is not a spectator sport") to the inspirational ("For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love" — Carl Sagan").

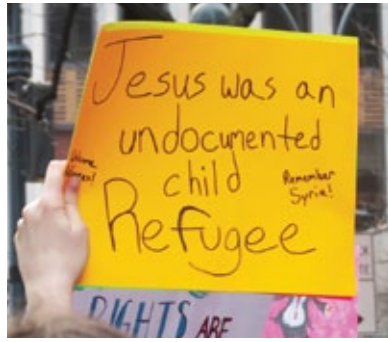
Mabel D. Wernham and Louise Hannibal-Boyce of St. Philip's from New York's Harlem neighborhood, joined the crowds. Asked why she was marching, Wernham said succinctly: "Equal rights."



Photo/Cynthia Black

A poster carried by Church of the Redeemer, Morristown, N.J., member Colleen Hintz stands out above the crowd at the Washington, D.C., march.

“We need to stand up for who we are and what we believe in,” said Hannibal-Boyce, president of the New York chapter of the Union of Black Episcopalians. “It’s not just women’s rights,” but issues such as health care, child care, education and Social Security, she said.



Photo/Sharon Sheridan

A poster seen at the New York march.

It’s important for the church to make its voice heard, she said. “That’s where a lot of people get their energy from. We can’t be quiet about it, and our [presiding] bishop isn’t quiet.”

The Rev. Margaret Otterburn, rector of Church of the Messiah, Chester, N.J., commented on the positive tenor of the speeches preceding the New York march. “The banners were all anti-Trump. But the speeches weren’t really about Trump at all. It was about, now we’ve got to work together; we’ve got to do all we can to be sure the civil rights that we’ve worked for are not lost.”

Otterburn said she marched to show her support for “all the civil rights ... which people are feeling are in jeopardy right now,” as well as to hear what people were thinking.

Another New Jersey rector, the Rev. C. Melissa Hall of St. James Episcopal Church, Upper Montclair, attended a 2,000-person march in Pompton Plains, N.J., organized by two women in their 80s who, according to news reports, had marched in Washington, D.C., rallies in the 1960s but didn’t feel up to the journey there for the Women’s March.

Approaching the venue, “all you could hear was laughter,” Hall said. The event was joyous, drawing “all types of people” supporting an array of issues, she said. “I loved watching the news about New York and so forth, but I have to say, being in a small town that never does anything like this ... it was amazing. ... There was a just a feeling as if for the first time it wasn’t what car do you drive or what house do you live in or what school does your child go to. It was really, we’re here as women, but we’re here really as Americans, to say, ‘We have a voice and need to use it.’”

Participants also felt a strong sense of connection to marchers in other cities,

she said. “Everybody had a sense that it wasn’t just being in that one place. It was being connected in an incredible way.”

In Charlotte, N.C., Holy Comforter Episcopal Church members were among an estimated 10,000 marchers, reported parishioner Mary

Cox. “My overwhelming impression, from the moment we squeezed into the already overcrowded train to ‘uptown,’ was of joyous energy. ... It was a fairly diverse crowd, notably intergenerational, and I saw a few signs in Spanish. ... It was the antithesis of the dark vision of America outlined in [Trump’s] inaugural address.”



Grau

Marion Grau, former associate theology professor at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, Calif., and now professor of systematic theology and missiology at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo, Norway, participated in a march in Oslo.

“I felt listless and depleted the day before the inauguration,” she said via e-mail. “One way to combat the sense of isolation and defeat was to get together with others who experience the same and move from defeat to empowerment. ... I went to the march in Oslo to stand with Norwegians locally and with many others around the world, with my faith community and those of diverse faiths, ethnicities and nationalities. I went to stand up for the good forces in the universe, to support women, work for climate justice and action, and to network with other local activists.”

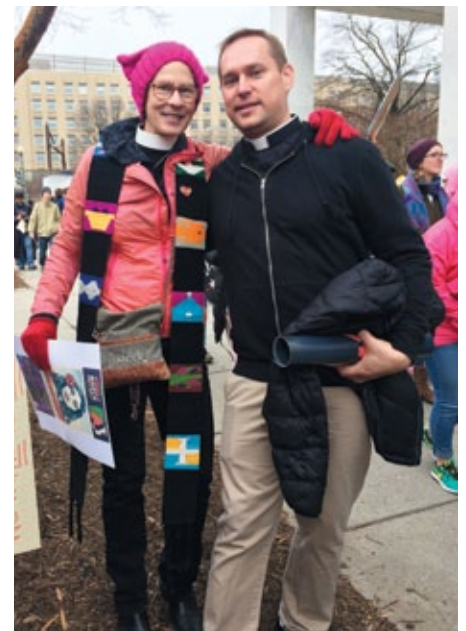
The Oslo event, which drew about 2,000 people, began with speeches from members of women’s groups and political-action groups. Then, she said, “we lighted torches and walked to the Norwegian parliament for another set of speeches.” Afterward, participants watched a livestream of the Washington march from a nearby sports bar. “I went home refreshed, strengthened and ready to take the fight further.”

Romy Overstreet, a member of Christ the King Anglican Episcopal Church in Frankfurt, Germany, joined 2,100 participants in a three-hour Women’s March at Frankfurt’s Alte Pern (Old Opera Square).

“It was great to see so many men, women and children representing so many cultures and faiths gathered together to make themselves heard. We were there to present a unified front that all lives should count and matter to our governments because we have had enough of being left out of the dialogue, and today we wanted to be the ones who defined the dialogue!” she said via e-mail.

Multiple church members, including a march organizer, participated. “Perhaps it would be easy to say we were marching to protest the new government,” Overstreet said, “but in the spirit of our congregation and [its rector] Father John Ferris, I know that we were all marching for respect, equality and love for our Muslim brothers and sisters, the LGBT community, immigrants and anyone who feels marginalized by the comments and actions of President Trump over the past several months.” ■

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Photo/Anne Brown

The Rev. Lee Crawford, Episcopal priest, and the Rev. Paul Moberly, transitional deacon, both of the Diocese of Vermont, participated in the Women’s March in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 21.