

Hagiography

Nelson Wardell Pinder was born in 1932 in Miami, Florida. He was baptized and confirmed at Miami's historic St. Agnes Episcopal Church. After serving in the Army during the Korean War, he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from Bethune-Cookman College and a Master's Degree in Education from Florida A&M University. Inspired by the example of young Episcopal priests working in urban ministries in Montgomery and Tuskegee, Alabama, he said, "Yes" to God, earning a MDiv from Nashotah House Theological Seminary, Nashotah, Wisconsin.

In 1959, Fr. Pinder was called to Orlando and began his ordained ministry as the first full-time priest of color at The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist. Upon his arrival at the Orlando airport, segregation met him. He was denied a "white only" cab. While he waited for a "Black" cab, he was denied a cup of coffee. He would later say, "I knew this was a real opportunity for me to do great missionary work."

During the 1960s, his organizing and participation in sit-ins and protests, to advance the civil rights movement, earned Fr. Pinder the reputation as the Orlando "street priest." He could have also been called the "Traveling Priest" because, for several years, he served at St. James Episcopal Church in Daytona Beach, then drove the sixty plus miles to serve at St. John the Baptist in Orlando. His role in leading, mentoring, and training young people in the principles of non-violent protest during the 1960s lunch counter sit-ins are chronicled in the 2007 play "Pinder's Kids," written by Orlando's local playwright, Barry G. White. Many credit his work with Orlando's youth to have single-handedly prevented riots that racked many US cities.

In 1969, Fr. Pinder was installed as a Canon at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Orlando, FL. He was assigned to The Awareness Center, an experimental ministry addressing the needs of the unhoused and their civil rights. Fr. Pinder served The Episcopal Church nationally as vice-chairperson of the Joint Commission on the Church in the Small Community, vice-chairperson of the National Commission on Social and Specialized Ministries, as well as the 15th National President of the Union of Black Episcopalians. He also served as the 2010-2014 Chaplain to the Order of the Daughters of the King®, Diocese of Central Florida, and as the Order's Province IV, Assistant Chaplain. He received nearly two hundred awards and honors including Honorary Doctorate of Divinity, Virginia Theological Seminary; Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Voorhees College; Preachers Hall of Fame, Morehouse College; and is in the First Class of Florida Religious Hall of Fame. On April 9, 2010, the Pinder's Kids monument was dedicated at Parramore Heritage Park, Orlando, FL. Fr. Pinder retired as rector of St. John the Baptist in 1995 and was later designated Rector Emeritus.

In a 2022 interview, reflecting on his career in what was one of the most segregated cities in the country, Fr. Pinder said, "So I felt that God has prepared me for this mission . . . a lot of people looked at me and thought I was crazy. White and Black thought I was crazy. Some of them thought I was going to be run out of town. Some of them told me you're going to get killed. I said, you know, I'm not 33 yet. My boss was 33 when he died. I've got a little time yet left."

The Rev. Canon Nelson W. Pinder died Sunday, July 10, 2022 at the age of 89.

Commemoration of Nelson W. Pinder

Collect

Almighty and compassionate God, you kindled the flame of love in the heart of your servant, Nelson W. Pinder, to provide bold leadership, manifested in non-violent action, with faith to combat the sin of racism. Inspire us to continue the cause of civil rights for all. Give us the grace to respect the dignity of every human being, for your Love's sake, Jesus the Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Readings

Old Testament Isaiah 6:1-8 NRSV

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Psalm 27:1-7

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? *
the LORD is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, *
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who
stumbled and fell.

³ Though an army should encamp against me, *
yet my heart shall not be afraid;

⁴ And though war should rise up against me, *
yet will I put my trust in him.

⁵ One thing have I asked of the LORD;
one thing I seek; *
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days
of my life;

⁶ To behold the fair beauty of the LORD *
and to seek him in his temple.

⁷ For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe
in his shelter; *
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling
and set me high upon a rock.

Epistle 1st Corinthians 12:1-11 NIV

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Gospel Matthew 25:35-40 NRSV

³⁵ “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

A Litany for the Commemoration of the Rev. Canon Dr. Nelson Wardell Pinder



This litany is suggested for use with the Propers for the Commemoration of Nelson W. Pinder, July 10.

The litany has five Headings, the first specifically commemorating Nelson Pinder, the remaining four representing the four quadrants of the Beloved Community labyrinth representing four interrelated areas of engagement and commitment.

These five headings may be used in print versions of the litany. They should not be read in the verbal praying of the litany.

Remembering the Prophet

We remember before you today, O God of Prophecy, your servant Canon Nelson Wardell Pinder, who dedicated his life to being a voice for the oppressed who live among us.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who was deeply committed to bringing people together in the love of God.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who was priest and rector of the Episcopal Church of Saint John the Baptist in Orlando, Florida for most of his career.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who was Orlando, Florida's "Street Priest."

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who didn't quit when his car was bombed.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who was a tireless warrior for social justice.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who was dedicated to youth and education, especially to Bethune-Cookman University, St. Augustine's University, and Voorhees University.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Who was a faithful Life Time Member and Past President of the Union of Black Episcopalians.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Whose loving wife Marian and his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, family and descendants followed and fostered his vision.

We give thanks to you, O God.

Repairing the Breach

We pray to you, O God who forgives us as we repent, empowers for ministry, and gives us strength to repair the breach and to foster truth and reconciliation in church and society, building Beloved Community by promoting racial reconciliation, equality, immigration reform, and social, economic, educational, criminal and eco justice.

Give us strength and courage, Empowering God.

Telling the Truth

We appeal to you today, O God of Truth, who has given us the truth to share, that we may raise up among us preachers like Nelson who will preach the Gospel with courage and power, who will tell the stories of faith and speak the truth in love.

Give us the inspiration to tell the story, O God of Truth.

Proclaiming the Dream

O God of dreams and inspiration, may we become the dream that Nelson and the great prophets of all times have hoped for and proclaimed. Guide us into the streets and neighborhoods, into homes and among the homeless, among the sick and disabled, the poor and the destitute, and those discriminated against to proclaim the good news brought to us by Jesus Christ.

Make of us powerful proclaimers, O God of the Gospel.

Practicing the Way

Lord God, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, help us to practice the Way, by living the truth in love, bringing healing where there is pain and injustice, and practicing dignity and respect for all people, that we may become the Beloved Community that Nelson Pinder envisioned and worked for his entire life.

Energize us for ministry and life, O God of Truth and Life.

The Collect for Social Justice

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom. Help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.