

Hagiography

Nelson Wardell Pinder was born in 1932 in Miami, Florida. He grew up in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, was baptized and confirmed at Miami's historic St. Agnes Episcopal Church. After serving in the Army during the Korean War, Pinder earned a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from Bethune-Cookman College as well as 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 and attended 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 where he was designated Rector Emeritus on his retirement. Upon his arrival at the Orlando airport he was denied a cab. While he awaited a segregated cab, for Blacks only, he was denied a cup of coffee. At this point he would later say "I knew this was a great opportunity for me for great missionary work."

During the 1960s, his organizing and participation in sit-ins and protests to advance the civil rights movement in Orlando earned Fr. Pinder the reputation as the "street priest" or "hoodlum priest." He could have also been called the "Traveling Priest" as he would for several years conduct morning mass at St. James Episcopal Church in Daytona Beach, then drive the sixty plus miles to a second service at St. John the Baptist in Orlando. His role in leading and mentoring young people during the 1960's lunch counter sit-ins are chronicled in the 2007 play "Pinder's Kids," written by Orlando local playwright, Barry G. White. Many people in Orlando would later say that his training of these young people in the principles of non-violent protest may have single-handedly prevented devastating riots that racked many other cities throughout the nation.

In 1969, Fr. Pinder was installed at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Orlando, as a Canon of the Diocese of Central Florida. He was assigned to The Awareness Center, an experimental ministry dealing with street people, the homeless and 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. In addition to having served as the 2010-2014 Chaplain to the Order of the Daughters of the King®, Diocese of Central Florida, Fr. Pinder was most recently 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.

In a 2022 interview with the local press, looking back on his career in what was once one of the most segregated cities in the country, Canon 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.”

Commemoration of Nelson W. Pinder July 10, 2023

Collect

Almighty and compassionate God, you kindled the flame of your love in the heart of your servant Nelson W. Pinder to manifest your compassion and mercy to those who are poor, persecuted, hungry, sick, imprisoned and oppressed. Set us free, heavenly Father from every bond of prejudice and fear and show forth in our lives the reconciling love and true freedom of the children of God, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with your and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Readings

Isaiah 6:1-8

6 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

12 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.

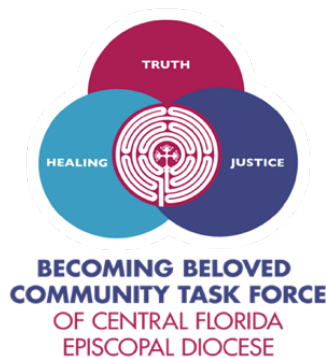
Gospel Matthew 25:35-40 NRSV

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 helped to form 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.