

A Tribute to Pat Sanders on his 90th Birthday

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

May the record reflect, on that last Great Day, that I was a stranger and the Rev. & Mrs. Patrick H. Sanders took me in; and that I was in prison and Pat & Elaine visited me.

I first met Pat in 1984, right after I was released from prison. He was the newly installed rector at St. John's Episcopal Church in Laurel, Mississippi. I recently had been paroled to my mother's home in rural Jones County. The Episcopal Church had done the major work on my faith-formation for the previous nine years in which I had been in prison, so I naturally sought-out the local Episcopal parish priest!

Pat and I were both starting new phases of our lives. It turns out that Pat and I had both been at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Jackson in the 1970s, and Pat had been well-acquainted with the principals in my criminal case. Looking back, I know that my presence at St. John's must have been a difficult thing for Pat!

Not too long prior to Pat's arrival, St. John's Church had experienced a schism of sorts among its parishioners. As the troubleshooter priest for the Episcopal Church, Pat had specifically been sent to St. John's. He was an expert at healing fractured parish relationships: so my presence at the church was quite appropriate indeed!

Pat's approach to this problem was to give the parishioners large doses of Scripture, thus allowing the Holy Spirit to convict and correct us of our shortcomings in order to allow the healing process to take place.

I did not have a successful reentry into the free world. I was returned to prison by my own father two years after I met Pat. However, Pat continues to minister to me to this day. He has long since retired from active parish ministry, but I stay in touch with him via the U.S. Postal Service. When I was housed at the private prison in Meridian in 2004-2005, Pat & Elaine visited me at this facility.

I still have hopes of a successful reentry into the free world where I can be released and receive the outward sign of Christ's forgiveness through a Governor's pardon. My case is tied-up in legal knots in the Mississippi courts, and a Governor's pardon will be an appropriate remedy to my situation. May God, who has given me the grace and the imagination to envision my expected end, also give me the grace and the opportunity to realize it in my life!

Pat has now reached the age of 90. He enjoys a reasonable, religious and holy hope; he is in communion with Christ's Church; and he is in favor with God and mankind.

During this, his 90th birthday celebration, I would say to Pat, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21, 23)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

Amen!

May 30, 2011