

Jonathan Myrick Daniels remembered with 50th anniversary pilgrimage, memorial at Washington National Cathedral

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Jonathan Myrick Daniels was 26 when he stepped in front of a shotgun blast meant for a fellow civil rights worker, Ruby Sales, 50 years ago in Hayneville, Alabama.

That act, and Daniels's summer of activism in Alabama, led the Episcopal Church to recognize him as a saint in 1991. An annual pilgrimage to Lowndes County is held in his honor.

Soon an eight-inch-high limestone carving of Daniels will be ready for viewing at the Human Rights Porch at the Washington National Cathedral, putting Daniels in the company of Mother Teresa and Rosa Parks.

Daniels was chosen in part because of his relative obscurity. "It was a deliberate choice to find somebody within our own ranks that we could lift up and memorialize," said Kevin Eckstrom, National Cathedral spokesman.

Daniels, originally from New Hampshire, was a student at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when he and several of his classmates answered Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for clergy to help finish the voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama in 1965, two days after state troopers beat marchers in what became known as Bloody Sunday.

Daniels stayed for most of the summer, living with the family of Alice and Lonzy West (two of the family's children appear in the photo above). He was with a group of activists arrested for protesting whites-only policies at stores. After a week in jail, on August 20, 1965, he and the others were released. They walked to a nearby store, where an armed segregationist, Tom Coleman, confronted them. Daniels moved Sales out of the way, and Coleman shot him.

The Episcopal Diocese of Alabama sponsored events August 14-16 honoring Daniels and other civil rights martyrs, including a pilgrimage from the jail to the site of the

store where Daniels was shot. Michael Curry, presiding bishop-elect of the Episcopal Church, was among 28 Episcopal bishops who took part in the liturgy and walk, which drew 1,500 people, Episcopal News Service reported.

“We are not here because we think good thoughts, or simply because we are nice people,” Curry said in his sermon, according to ENS. “We are here because we who have been baptized—we’re not simply baptized into church membership—we were consecrated to radical discipleship, into the Jesus Movement to change this world.”

That movement called Daniels and continues today, Curry said.

The cathedral is planning a dedication ceremony for the stone portrait of Daniels in October and expects Sales to attend, Eckstrom said.

When Sales met Daniels she was a 17-year-old secretary with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Lowndes County. Today, she is the founder and director of the SpiritHouse Project, an Atlanta-based nonprofit dealing with discrimination.

“Race relations today in the United States are an extension of that time period,” Sales said.

“Tom Coleman was able to kill Jonathan Daniels under the cover of the law . . . Despite the fact that it has been 50 years, we are still operating in a culture where police and vigilantes can murder African Americans.” —*USA Today*; *The Christian Science Monitor*; added sources