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Episcopal leader Gray, advocate for civil rights, dies at 89



In this Sept. 26, 2012 file photo, retired Episcopal Bishop Duncan Gray Jr., recalls for reporters some of the events surrounding the integration of the University of Mississippi, in Jackson, Miss. Gray Jr., a civil-rights advocate and retired bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, has died. The diocese says Gray died Friday, July 15, 2016, at his home in Jackson. He was 89. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis, File)

By Emily Wagster Pettus, Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — The Rt. Rev. Duncan Montgomery Gray Jr., a civil-rights advocate and retired bishop

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of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, died Friday. He was 89.

Gray died at his home in Jackson after having been in hospice care, said one of his sons, Lloyd Gray of Meridian. He said a funeral will be at St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral in Jackson, but plans were still pending.

As rector of St. Peter's Church in Oxford in the autumn of 1962, Gray called for calm as violence broke out in response to the court-ordered integration of the University of Mississippi in that city. Gray had been a chaplain on campus until 1961 and was known to students. According to Episcopal archives , Gray held onto the statue of a Confederate soldier near the main administrative building on campus and implored people not to riot.

In the pulpit of St. Peter's, Gray denounced racism.

"The seeds of anger and hatred, bitterness and

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prejudice, are already widely sown, and as Christians, we need to do our utmost to uproot and cast them out," Gray said in a sermon on Sept. 30, 1962, the day before James Meredith enrolled as the first black student, escorted by federal marshals.

A week later, Gray said in his sermon that all people in Mississippi should face up to their guilt in the violence that killed two people.

"You and I didn't go out there and throw the bricks and the bottles. You and I didn't go out there and fire the guns," Gray said. "Yet you and I, along with every other Mississippian, are responsible in one degree or another for what happened. We are responsible for the moral and political climate in our state which made such a tragedy possible.... The decent, respectable and responsible people of Mississippi have failed when events like those of last Sunday night can take place within our state."

Gray was the seventh bishop of Mississippi, serving from 1974 to 1993. His father, the Rt. Rev. Duncan Gray Sr., had been the fifth bishop, and one of his sons, the Rt. Rev. Duncan Gray III, was the ninth.

From 1991 to 1997, Duncan Gray Jr. was chancellor of University of the South, an Episcopal-run school in Sewanee, Tennessee. He was the subject of a 1997 book, "And Also With You: Duncan Gray and the American Dilemma," written by the Rev. Will Campbell.

Lloyd Gray, a former editor of the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal, said his father was a humble man who didn't seek attention for his work on civil rights.

"He just did what he thought a priest of the church ought to be doing," Lloyd Gray said.

Gray's wife, Ruth, died in 2011. Survivors include four children: the Rt. Rev. Duncan Gray III of New Orleans; Anne Finley of Adams,

Tennessee; Catherine Clark
of Nashville, Tennessee; and
Lloyd Gray of Meridian,
Mississippi; 11 grandchildren
and 10 great-grandchildren.



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