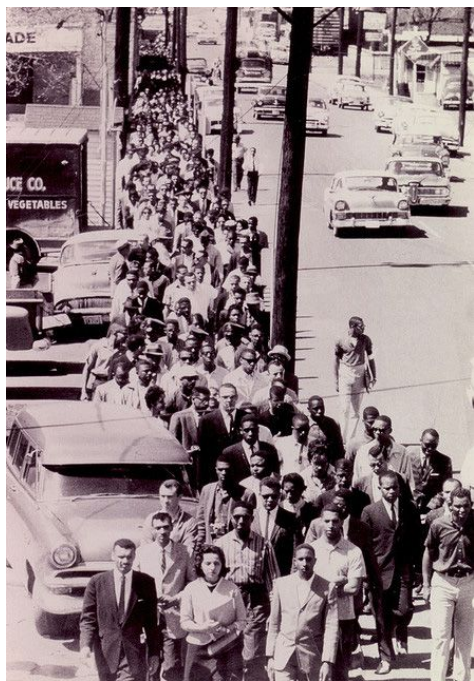


Walk in Love:

Recalling the Untold Story of Our Brother in Christ, Atty. Z. Alexander Looby

Written by Natasha Deane and Sara Eccleston on behalf of the EDTN Beloved Community Commission



Students march in response to the bombing of Looby's home in 1960.

In the early morning of April 19th, 1960, white supremacists threw a bomb into the home of Z. Alexander Looby, a prominent Nashville-based civil rights attorney and member of Holy Trinity Episcopal church. The bomb was so powerful it blew out the front of Looby's home, as well as the windows of a Meharry Medical College dormitory across the street. Looby and his wife were in the back of the house and survived the blast, taking shelter in the rectory of the chapel next door. After the bombing, thousands of students from Tennessee State University, Fisk University, and Meharry Medical College gathered at the site and began a spontaneous silent march up Jefferson street, past the State Capital to Public Square. There, leaders of Nashville's Non-Violent Student Movement (including Diane Nash and C.T. Vivian) confronted then Mayor Ben West to demand changes to the policies of racial segregation that shaped the city. This famous march, included in most narratives about the national Civil Rights movement (including the display in the Nashville Public Library and a recent exhibit at the Frist), is largely credited with desegregating the city of Nashville. While many know this story or have seen the famous picture, few people, particularly within our own diocese, know that Z. Alexander Looby was Episcopalian.

Who Was Z. Alexander Looby?

Z. Alexander Looby (1899-1972) was a lead attorney in the desegregation of public schools across the state of Tennessee. Looby was also a principle lawyer for the Non-Violent Student Movement in Nashville in the late 1950s. While students planned and conducted sit-ins at downtown Nashville lunch counters, it was Looby who defended them after their arrest. Attny. Looby was an Episcopalian from the British West Indies, who faithfully attended Holy Trinity Church in Nashville.

In the midst of the struggle for justice that characterized his mature life, Looby donated a plot of land adjacent to his home on Meharry Blvd. to the Diocese of Tennessee to be used to erect a chapel for students who attended the nearby Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, and Tennessee State University). It was in that chapel that Looby and his wife hid on April 19th, 1960, when their home was bombed in an act of cowardly terror. The chapel on that land is now known as St. Anselm's Episcopal Church. St. Anselm's is the only predominantly African-American parish in the Diocese of Tennessee today.



Looby in court

Along with Thurgood Marshall (our nation's first African-American U.S. Supreme Court Justice, who was also Episcopalian), Looby was a principle lawyer defending African-

Americans who were arrested and tried following the deadly 1946 “Mink Slide” race riot in Columbia, Tennessee (a riot instigated by an attempted lynching). It was Looby who rescued his colleague at the banks of the Duck river where Marshall was forcibly taken to be lynched following his successful defense of those who had been accused in that trial, held in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee.



Looby testifies regarding the bombing of his home

Looby’s legacy—largely erased from our diocesan memory—is a crucial piece of history not only for the city, but also for our own faith community. His courageous work for racial equality was undergirded by his Episcopal faith. As a community, we must remember all the pieces of this story, not just the easy parts—that he survived a profoundly violent act of racial terrorism; that he protected and defended student activists who similarly faced violence from white segregationists; that he demanded constitutional rights and racial equality for the Black community; that he invested deeply in the HBCU community of Nashville by donating land for the St. Anselm parish; and that he drew on his Episcopal faith to sustain his work of racial justice.

Z. Alexander Looby, one of our own, was threatened and targeted for his part in the Civil Rights movement, and yet courageously continued. Today we celebrate and honor his legacy—may we aspire to follow his example, may we bravely resist oppression, even under threat, may we care for and support others who work for justice, and may we draw on our faith to guide us in the journey.

Remembering Alexander Lobby: The “Walk In Love”

Organized in 2016 by local activists Kwame Lillard and Mary Murphy for the past five years we have honored the life of Z. Alexander Looby in an annual interfaith commemorative prayer walk. The “Walk in Love” is a 2.2 mile walk beginning at St. Anselm’s church, leading up Jefferson Street, through the middle of the Bicentennial Mall, up the hill past the “Witness Walls” at the Courthouse and ending in the Public Square.

Since the original “Walk” of 15 or so participants, the event now typically draws about 100. It currently commences at Tennessee State University, stops briefly and joins with others at St. Anselm’s as dictates historical record, and continues on to the courthouse steps. For the 60th Anniversary this year, a series of events were planning to honor and remember this powerful story. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, these plans have been cancelled. Instead of joining together for a walk, we offer this brief article, along with a litany of witness to Z. Alexander Looby, for use in your churches and personal devotion. Please visit the [EDTN Beloved Community Website](#) to access the litany. To support the efforts of [Walk in Love](#), please email Mary Murphy at: chaplainmarymurphy18@gmail.com.

To learn more about Z. Alexander Looby:

Civil Rights Digital Library: [WSB-TV newsfilm clip of an interview with Looby](#)

Black Past: [Z. Alexander Looby \(1899-1972\)](#)

Journal of African American History: [Looby, Williams, Jr., and the Legal Fight for Civil Rights in TN](#)

The Tennessean: [Diane Nash: Organizing a silent march after attorney Looby's home was bombed](#)

[A Force More Powerful](#): Watch minutes 26:10-51:05 about the Nashville Non-Violent Student Movement.

