

# *Biographical Sketch* **Dr. Gwendolyn Denise Pierce**



GwendolynPierce

Dr. Gwendolyn Denise Pierce is a licensed, ordained minister and board-certified chaplain. She earned her doctorate at Wesley Theology Seminary in Washington, D.C.; a Master of Divinity Degree from Howard University School of Divinity; and a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Electronic Studio from Howard University in Washington, D.C. She also has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Marymount University in Graphic Design, with a minor in advertising design. She is a member of the American Psychotherapy Association, and Association of Professional Chaplains.

She is the pastor, founder, and executive director of Matters of the Heart Outreach Ministries, Inc., and executive director of P.R.A.Y.E.R. for the Youth, Inc., a Christian rites of passage mentoring program she designed for at-risk and disadvantaged youths. Many of today's youths have been deprived of adequate love and nurturing and are fearful of rejection and abandonment. This program addresses the developmental needs of youths whose parents have abandoned them, are deceased or incarcerated, are in drug addiction programs, are unwed or divorced, or are workaholics who allow television, video games, and other computer objects to raise their children.

A key message of the program for the youths was that it is better to have life in the valley of spiritual guidance and walk in love and peace instead of fighting among themselves in hatred and war. In developing the program, Dr. Pierce conducted a one-year study that showed the youths that someone does care about their behavior, self-esteem, well-being, spiritual growth, career enhancement, and life skills development. This study also demonstrated the power of education and motivation to determine their Purpose/Perseverance, Restoration, Attitude vs. Altitude (which determines how high or low you will seek deliverance), Yearning not to yield to temptation, Enhancement and Empowerment, and Respect within self, school, and the community. With enthusiasm and encouragement, she encouraged youths to take responsibility for the care of their minds, bodies, and souls to grow mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The program taught the youths to refrain from sex, smoking, drugs and alcohol, bad behaviors, attitudes, and gangs, focusing instead on loving themselves just as Christ loves them.

The youth met weekly to strengthen their behavior, self-esteem, homework, ethics, and life skills. This paradigm program was based on ten-week sessions, with the first two weeks enhancing spiritual growth. During the third week, the youths walked in the newness of life and were restored as new Christians. In the fourth week, the youths enhanced their life skills and behavior to match what they want out of life. They were encouraged that they can achieve whatever they want out of life and keep the "I Can" attitude – I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me. The youths were encouraged and empowered to pray the power of P.R.A.Y.E.R.™ as a pledge in the fifth week by working on their self-esteem. In the sixth week, youths were paired with a professional mentor of their choice to focus on their future. For example, a youth who wanted to be a doctor would have partnered with a doctor and participated in a shadowing activity with the doctor. Dr. Pierce included teaching about anger management, opportunities to work on increasing self-esteem, mentoring, and tutoring. The program concluded in the tenth week with an initiation ceremony in which the participants walked in the newness of their Christian lives, making a fresh start and a new beginning.

Dr. Pierce's vision is that this program will be introduced to communities, parents, churches, school administrators, hospital and health care professionals, and government officials such as police departments, mayors, and Congressmen throughout the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area to be used as a tool to save youths instead of leaving them behind. This program will interact with the "No Child Left Behind Act," which will strengthen the at-risk and disadvantaged youth in school, at home, in church, and in the community.

Dr. Pierce has designed and facilitated other workshops, conferences, and seminars for youths and their parents, including The Divine Connection Conference 2007; The Divine Connection Conference 2008: Taking Back What the Enemy Has Stolen!"; 2009 Mothers and Daughters Empowerment Summit; Daughters of Zion Conference; Celebrating Restoration, Salvation with Determination Seminar: How to Heal Your Mind, Body, and Soul (Mentally, Physically, Spiritually, Emotionally, Sexually, and Financially in God's Divine Power by Detoxifying the Poverty Spirit of the Mind); Youth 2009 Empowerment Summit; a prison ministry; and pastoral care/counseling and mentoring to the youths and young women of Christ. She is a self-published author of the book Nothing But the Truth and is now working on her second book, due to come out soon. She also writes a monthly electronic newsletter called "The Good News" – Discerning the Power of the Holy Spirit

Dr. Pierce is a native of Birmingham, Alabama. She settled in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area in 1986 after serving 15.5 years in the U.S. Army.