



Fred Lee Shuttlesworth

March 18, 1922 - October 5, 2011

Birmingham, Alabama

The Rev. Fred Lee Shuttlesworth, the Birmingham preacher who survived a bomb under his bed and kept walking into the city's segregated places anyway, died on October 5, 2011, at Princeton Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham, Alabama. He was eighty-nine and had been in frail health since a stroke four years earlier.

He was born on March 18, 1922, in Mount Meigs, Alabama, and grew up in rural Jefferson County. He drove a truck and worked at a military airfield in Mobile while studying for the ministry at night. In 1953 he became pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in the Collegeville neighborhood of North Birmingham.

When Alabama outlawed the NAACP in 1956, he organized the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights within weeks. On Christmas night that year, dynamite exploded beneath the Bethel parsonage while he lay in bed. The floor and walls were torn apart; he walked out of the wreckage with barely a scratch and told the crowd outside that the movement would go on. The next morning he led riders onto Birmingham buses in defiance of the seating laws.

In 1957 a mob beat him with chains and brass knuckles when he tried to enroll his children at all-white Phillips High School; his wife, Ruby, was stabbed during the same attack. That year he joined Martin Luther King Jr. and others in founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was Shuttlesworth who pressed King to bring the campaign to Birmingham in 1963, and during those spring protests a blast from a fire hose slammed him against a wall and sent him to the hospital.

He moved to Cincinnati in the early 1960s and served congregations there for decades, including the Greater

New Light Baptist Church he founded, while returning to Alabama whenever the struggle called. In 2008 Birmingham renamed its airport Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport.

Notice Nearby keeps October 5 for a pastor whom King called one of the nation's most courageous freedom fighters.

Services

Died at Princeton Baptist Medical Center, Birmingham, Alabama, October 5, 2011. Pastor of Bethel Baptist Church; co-founder of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Presidential Citizens Medal, 2001. Portrait: cropped from a public-domain Birmingham Campaign press-conference photograph (Library of Congress), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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