

# Rev Shuttlesworth, Civil Rights Icon, Dies at Age 89

Leader endured a 1956 bombing, several protest injuries and countless arrests

**BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) --** The Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, who was bombed, beaten and repeatedly arrested in the fight for civil rights and hailed by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. for his courage and energy, has died. He was 89.

Princeton Baptist Medical Center spokeswoman Jennifer Dodd confirmed he died at the Birmingham hospital Wednesday morning.

Shuttlesworth, a former truck driver who studied religion at night, became pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., in 1953 and soon was an outspoken leader in the fight for racial equality.

"My church was a beehive," Shuttlesworth once said. "I made the movement. I made the challenge. Birmingham was the citadel of segregation, and the people wanted to march."

In his 1963 book "Why We Can't Wait," King called Shuttlesworth "one of the nation's the most courageous freedom fighters ... a wiry, energetic and indomitable man."

He survived a 1956 bombing, an assault during a 1957 demonstration, chest injuries when Birmingham authorities turned fire hoses on demonstrators in 1963, and countless arrests.

"I went to jail 30 or 40 times, not for fighting or stealing or drugs," Shuttlesworth told grade school students in 1997. "I went to jail for a good thing, trying to make a difference."

He visited frequently and remained active in the movement in Alabama even after moving in 1961 to Cincinnati, where he was a pastor for most of the next 47 years. He moved back to Birmingham in February 2008 for rehabilitation after a mild stroke. That summer, the once-segregated city honored him with a four-day tribute and named



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its airport after him; his statue stands outside the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

And in November 2008, Shuttlesworth watched from a hospital bed as Sen. Barack Obama was elected the nation's first African-American president. The year before, Obama had pushed Shuttlesworth's wheelchair across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma during a commemoration of the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march.

In the early 1960s, Shuttlesworth had invited King back to Birmingham. Televised scenes of police dogs and fire hoses being turned on black marchers,

including children, in spring 1963 helped the rest of the nation grasp the depth of racial animosity in the Deep South.

"He marched into the jaws of death every day in Birmingham before we got there," Andrew Young, the former Atlanta mayor and U.N. ambassador who was an aide to King, said Wednesday.

Young said it was Shuttlesworth's fearlessness that persuaded King to take the fight for equality to Birmingham.

"We shouldn't have been strong enough to take on Birmingham ... But God had a plan that was far better than our plan," Young said. "Fred didn't invite us to come to Birmingham. He told us we had to come."

Referring to the city's notoriously racist safety commissioner, Shuttlesworth would tell followers, "We're telling ol' 'Bull' Connor right here tonight that we're on the march and we're not going to stop marching until we get our rights."

According to a May 1963 New York Times profile of Shuttlesworth, Connor responded to the word Shuttlesworth had been injured by the spray of fire hoses by saying: "I'm sorry I missed it. ... I wish they'd carried him away in a hearse."

While King went on to international fame, Shuttlesworth was relatively little known



The Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth

outside Alabama. But he was a key figure in Spike Lee's 1997 documentary, "4 Little Girls," about the September 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four black children.

Shuttlesworth was born March 18, 1922, near Montgomery and grew up in Birmingham.

As a child, he knew he would either be a minister or a doctor and by 1943, he decided to enter the ministry. He began taking theological courses at night while working as a truck driver and cement worker during the day. He was licensed to preach in 1944 and ordained in 1948.

It was 1954 when King, then a pastor in Montgomery, came to Birmingham to give a speech and asked to stop by Bethel Baptist and meet Shuttlesworth. Shuttlesworth already knew the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, who became a key aide to King, as they both attended Alabama State College, later known as Selma University.

Meanwhile, in Montgomery, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus in late 1955, prompting the boycott led by King that gave new life to the civil rights movement.

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