

The passing of a preacher

By [William H. Willimon](#)

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When

you enter the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham—one of Alabama's great institutions—you are welcomed by Fred Shuttlesworth. You will be welcomed to this shrine of the Civil Rights Movement by a preacher. Fred bragged that his head was harder than the batons of the Birmingham police. For decades this straight talking, hard headed preacher not only preached but enacted the justice of Jesus Christ. In so doing, Fred was a model for all later generations of preachers in Alabama.

Fred

was not known as widely as some Civil Rights activists, mainly because he never stopped being a pastor who daily cared for an active congregation. He was a preacher first, a political activist second, basing his challenges upon his pastoral convictions. We knew him as a man who changed our state for the better by standing up, speaking up, and acting up for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Reading some of the

spurious biblical interpretation that appears on our Conference website in our current discussions about our state's Immigration Law, interpretation that picks out a couple of Bible verses (often from Romans 13) and uses it to justify all sorts of nontheological subserviance to the state, I give thanks that we live in Alabama. That is, we live in a place where, in a time when horribly unjust laws had been duly passed by our government, a few hard headed, straight talking preachers stood up for the higher law of God. What a blessing to serve God in a place where God raised up a faithful witness named Fred.

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