

Churches remember Rosa Parks's courage: "She recognized a law higher than human law"

News in the [November 15, 2005](#) issue

Rosa Louise Parks, a woman of faith whose soft-spoken refusal to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, launched the civil rights movement, was hailed widely last month at her death.

"Surely Mrs. Rosa Parks was sent to us by God, because few among us were so well prepared to play such a momentous role in history," said Coretta Scott King, widow of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Parks died October 24 at age 92 in Detroit, where she had lived since 1957. The Alabama native in 1999 received the nation's highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal, and was named by *Time* magazine that same year as one of the 100 most important people of the 20th century.

Over the years—despite threats from diehard segregationists—Parks spoke to scores of student, civic and church groups, gave dozens of interviews and saw streets and schools—and a rap song she disapproved of—named after her.

Before Parks's arrest, the Women's Political Council in Montgomery had been looking for the opportunity to launch a boycott. But several other women who were arrested for refusing to comply with Montgomery's bus rules were not deemed suitable candidates around whom to organize a protest.

Still, historians and analysts consider Parks's quiet act of defiance on December 1, 1955, to be the civil rights movement's major catalyst. It led to a highly effective mass protest and a successful court challenge of Alabama segregation laws. And in Alabama and elsewhere, it gave blacks additional confidence that the system could be changed.

"She was a heroine in our midst—one who taught our nation about courage and determination," said a statement from the National Council of Churches.

"She saw her participation in the struggle for justice as integral to her being a disciple of Jesus," said Peter Gathje, a professor at Christian Brothers University in

Memphis, Tennessee. "Because she recognized a law higher than human law, she knew that breaking an unjust human law was perfectly consistent with her Christian faith."