

Reverend Anthony “Alann” Johnson

By Bob Krajewski

I first met Rev. Johnson 3 years ago while preparing for a history-making 2008 Freedom Ride to Nashville TN, Huntsville and Birmingham AL. In Birmingham I planned with Operation New Birmingham, Civil Rights Institute, Civil Rights Movement churches, and public schools. ONB introduced me to Rev. Johnson who assumed a major volunteer role, garnering Birmingham leaders to form a several month working committee to plan history-making events for us on a Saturday 1) the first Birmingham CRM march since April 1963 when Rev. Martin Luther King was jailed and wrote his famous ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’, and 2) a tribute to Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth—with speeches by veteran and future CRM leaders, Birmingham dignitaries and religious leaders, Civil Right Institute Director, legislators, a 6-yr old CRM phenom, and myself—at CRI. In Sunday services we performed SAT skits in the largest Black CRM church for more than 2000 parishioners, and in another CRM church too. (On Friday SAT performed for large audiences at an all-black high school, and in (renovated) Phillips elementary/middle Academy (former high school) where in 1957 Dr. Shuttlesworth tried to integrate his children in the then all-white high school and was badly beaten by whites in the street in front of the school and his wife was stabbed—and those startling pictures made news around the world.

Rev. Johnson is a product of Birmingham schools, has a BA in History Pre-Law from Alabama’s Talladega College, a Master of Divinity from Atlanta’s Morehouse School of Religion, a post-graduate certificate in Counseling from Atlanta’s Emory University where he was a resident chaplain, is a part-time student at Birmingham School of law, and a full-time community/social spokesperson and leader, and budding political activist. Examples of his involvement include:

- GA and FL House of Representatives Legislative Assistant
- President of Magic City (Birmingham) Kiwanis Club, YWCA, YMCA, etc
- Advocate for inner-city, domestic violence, youth, drug, and senior concerns
- Member-Community Education Advisory Council, Central Alabama Sickle Cell Board, Birmingham Library Board, P.E.A.C.E. Birmingham Advisory Board, etc
- Roles in Southern Christian Leadership Conference, NAACP, Urban League, National Baptist Convention, Rainbow Push Coalition, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Congressional Black Caucus, etc
- Organizer Re-dedication Ceremony of ‘Kneeling Ministers’ Statue at Kelly Ingram Park recognizing Rev. John T Porter, Rev A.D. King, and Rev. Nelson H. Smith
- Founder NAACP ‘Torch Bearers & Trailblazers for Outstanding Youth’

A 3rd generation civil/human rights visionary leader, and a proven economic and social justice advocate emphasizing education, Rev. Johnson is rapidly becoming Birmingham’s contemporary Civil Rights Movement Leader. As the eldest grandson of/having trained under Rev. Smith (a Birmingham Civil Rights icon, Past Progressive National Baptist Convention President, and Pastor of Birmingham’s CRM New Pilgrim Baptist Church for 53 years until his death in 2006), Anthony deserves that leadership role. I am pleased that he accepted our SAT invitation to visit us and share his social justice/role responsibility ideas. Further I am pleased that BSU, Campus Climate, ERS, and Bernard Black’s AACA is collaborating with SAT for Rev. Johnson’s visit.

Explanation of the importance of the Re-dedication Ceremony: Kelly Ingram Park is a block square park where CRM marchers gathered in the early 60s. On one corner is the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (1873, first black church in Birmingham, organizational headquarters/mass meetings place for CRM—Shuttlesworth was local organizer/passionate speaker for rallies there, Martin Luther King spoke there during rallies, and the bombing in fall 1963 that killed the four girls). Across from 16th Street Baptist Church, and adjacent/parallel to the park is Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Fred Shuttlesworth's statue stands in front of it. Close by is Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame, Tuxedo Junction, and 4th Avenue (black) business district.

MLK, Fred Shuttlesworth and Ralph Abernathy were jailed on Good Friday April 12, 1963. On Palm Sunday, Revs. N. H. Smith (Anthony's grandfather), A.D. King (MLK's brother) and John T. Porter led 2000 people in a downtown march to support their jailed colleagues. After the march the three knelt to pray at the corner of Kelly Ingram Park when they were confronted by Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner Eugene 'Bull' Connor and police officers with billy clubs and police dogs. Former mayor Richard Arrington (whose office presented me with a key to the city on one of my Freedom Rides) wanted a statue commemorating the three's braveness and it was erected in 1992, coinciding with the opening of the adjacent BCRI. It is a huge statue that faces the black business district--but there was no indication of names. In 2005 Anthony began campaigning to get a plaque designating the names and he succeeded after a long struggle. Finally in January 2009 an official ceremony was held and the plaque installed. I was invited to be a part of the ceremony but was not able to go.



In this picture of this enormous statue, you can see the Romanesque/Byzantine designed 16th St Baptist Church across the park (right side of statue). Over the left side of the statue is the BCRI.

*Rev. Johnson's schedule includes: BSU sponsored church service Sunday evening Feb 7, visit to ERS and EFN classes Monday Feb 8, AACA sponsored lecture at Franciscan Spirituality Center Monday evening, BSU hosted discussion of the award winning movie **The Great Debaters** in Port O Call Tues. evening, several luncheons, and ERS hosted reception on Wed.*

Thanks. If you have any questions, contact me, Barb Martin Stanley, Barb Stewart, Carol Oyster
Bob