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NJT

Trusted Successor to Dr. King

Ralph David Abernathy

WHEN the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. crumpled with an assassin's bullet in his neck in front of his motel room in Memphis on Thursday, the man directly behind him was the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy.

Mr. Abernathy wrapped a towel about the dying man's wounded head and

Man cradled it as they
in the rode in the am-
News bulance to the
hospital where Dr.

King was pronounced dead. Yesterday, Mr. Abernathy, who has spent more than 10 years at Dr. King's side, was named president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

"From the beginning of the protest, Ralph Abernathy was my closest associate and most trusted friend," Dr. King wrote in his book, "Stride Toward Freedom."

"We prayed together and made important decisions together. His ready good humor lighted many tense moments."

Mr. Abernathy has been described by friends as Dr. King's alter ego. They were constantly together and even shared jail sentences in the course of their work for the civil rights movement.

Always Thought Alike

"Ralph and Martin always thought alike," one associate said. "You had the feeling that he [Dr. King] and Ralph functioned as one mind."

After late board meetings they would often sing hymns together and harmonize. In ways they complemented each other. Dr. King was the leader—eloquent and beloved by the crowds. Mr. Abernathy is calm, slow-talking and very polite.



Associated Press

Dr. King's alter ego

The friendship between the two men began in Montgomery, Ala., in the mid-fifties, when the civil rights movement was in its early stages. Both were pastors in the city—Mr. Abernathy was born in Montgomery on March 11, 1926 — and both threw their energies into a crusade to end segregation on that city's buses.

The crusade included a 381-day boycott by Negroes in Montgomery and ended with the Supreme Court decision that declared unconstitutional Alabama's laws on bus segregation.

During the course of the boycott, Mr. Abernathy's home and his church were bombed. Neither his wife, the

former Juanita Odessa Jones, nor his children was hurt. His children are Juandalynn, Ralpheda, Donzaleigh Avis, and Ralph David 3d.

Mr. Abernathy was graduated from the Alabama State College in Montgomery in 1950 and did graduate work at Atlanta University. He served overseas during World War II, and returned to Montgomery where he became pastor of the First Baptist Church. He was one of the organizers of the Montgomery Improvement Association in 1955, which led the bus boycott.

After the boycott, Dr. King formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He persuaded Dr. Abernathy to leave Montgomery and come to Atlanta to take an active part in the new organization. Mr. Abernathy held a succession of posts in the organization until he was designated president yesterday.

His enthusiasm and dedication to the work is evident. A white newspaperman attended a service once at which Mr. Abernathy spoke when the congregation had applauded repeatedly in the middle of the sermon.

"Isn't it a little peculiar," the journalist asked, "for people to interrupt the Scriptures in that way?"

"Yes it is," Mr. Abernathy replied. "Just as it is peculiar for people to walk in the snow and rain when there are empty buses available; just as it is peculiar for people to pray for those who persecute them; just as it is peculiar for the Southern Negro to stand up and look a white man in the face as an equal."