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Pro-life 'freedom rides' this summer in Birmingham

by Catholic News Service

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -- Calling for an end to the nation's "enslavement to legal abortion," Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life announced April 27 that a series of "freedom rides" for the unborn would begin this summer.

The rides will be nonpartisan, interdenominational and nonviolent and will involve a diverse cross-section of people, Pavone said at a news conference in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park.

"Like the freedom rides of five decades ago, these freedom rides symbolize the principle ... that justice and equal protection of human rights belong to each and every human being, regardless of size or age or any other condition," he said.

Among those joining Pavone in the announcement was Alveda King, director of African-American outreach at Priests for Life and niece of the late civil rights leader, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Her father, the Rev. A.D. King, is depicted in a statue of praying ministers at Kelly Ingram Park.

"When I lived in Birmingham, when our home was bombed in this very city, when my classmate was part of the group of four little girls killed in the bombing of historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church across the way, I dreamed of a world when life would be better, when freedom would prevail for all," King said. "Now, today, almost 50 years later, we pay tribute to the freedom riders of 1961."

The pro-life freedom rides are to begin with a July 23 send-off concert and rally at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center, followed by a ride to Atlanta through July 25. Father Pavone said dozens of rides in all parts of the country could be scheduled over the next year.

The rides commemorate the civil rights rides protesting forced segregation in public transportation in the South, despite Supreme Court rulings that such segregation was illegal. The first ride left Washington on

May 4, 1961, headed for New Orleans; hundreds of riders were beaten and/or arrested during the rides.

"We join our lives and hearts together with those who have gone before us," King said at the Birmingham news conference. "We take to the bus, to the streets of America, riding for justice and freedom for all, from conception till natural death."

Although "a woman has a right to choose what she does with her body," King added, "the baby is not her body."

"Where is the lawyer for the babies whose civil rights are violated by the act of abortion?" she asked. "How can the dream survive if we murder our children."

Pavone said the rides would be preceded by a period of intense prayer to end abortion, beginning on Pentecost Sunday, May 23, and continuing until July 4.

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Others participating in the Birmingham news conference were the Rev. Clenard Childress, a Baptist minister from New Jersey who is director of the Life Education and Resource Network; the Rev. Stephen Broden, senior pastor of Fair Park Bible Fellowship in Dallas and a candidate for Congress; Fr. Michael Deering, vicar general for the Diocese of Birmingham; members of Catholics United for Life of Huntsville, Ala.; and Bishop Demetrios Roscoe, founder of Living Church Ministries in Birmingham.

Members of the Priests for Life pastoral team at the news conference included Janet Morana, executive director and co-founder of the Silent No More awareness campaign; associate directors Fr. Peter West and Augustinian Fr. Denis Wilde; and Dominican Fr. William Scott Daniels and Theresa and Kevin Burke, founders of Rachel's Vineyard, a healing ministry for women and men after an abortion.

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