

# Birmingham church named U.S. landmark: Sixteenth Street Baptist

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Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the site of a 1963 bombing that killed four girls, has become a national historic landmark. U.S. Secretary of Interior Gale Norton, speaking from the church's pulpit, said the downtown church now serves as hope for churches destroyed recently in a string of arsons.

"This is one of the proudest moments in our nation's history," Norton said February 20 after signing the proclamation that gives Sixteenth Street Baptist Church the nation's highest historic distinction.

Norton was joined by U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales; Donald Murphy, the National Park Service's deputy director; and Arthur Price, the church's pastor, as she made the designation official. Relatives of the girls killed in the bombing attended the ceremony.

School desegregation was in its early stages in 1963 and racial tensions were high. The bombing attracted national attention and outrage, which helped to bring about passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Three former Klansmen were convicted (in 1977, 2001 and 2002) in the bombing. "We preserve landmarks because history provides insights that help us today," Norton said. *-Religion News Service*