

“Recommendations to the
Dexter Avenue Baptist Church
for the Fiscal Year 1954–1955”

[5 September 1954]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

King presents his vision for the future growth of Dexter and his plans for accomplishing it. The first two paragraphs stress the importance of pastoral authority, particularly in his interactions with the deacon board: “It is therefore indispensable to the progress of the church that the official board and membership cooperate fully with the leadership of the pastor.” King assigns to the Social and Political Action Committee—“established for the purpose of keeping the congregation intelligently informed concerning the social, political and economic situation”—several members of the congregation who, in 1955 and 1956, would be crucial in initiating and sustaining the Montgomery bus boycott: Jo Ann Robinson, Rufus Lewis, and Mary Fair Burks.

When a minister is called to the pastorate of a church, the main presupposition is that he is vested with a degree of authority. The source of this authority is twofold. First of all, his authority originates with God. Inherent in the call itself is the presupposition that God directed that such a call be made. This fact makes it crystal clear that the pastor’s authority is not merely humanly conferred, but divinely sanctioned.

Secondly, the pastor’s authority stems from the people themselves. Implied in the call is the unconditional willingness of the people to accept the pastor’s leadership. This means that the leadership never ascends from the pew to the pulpit, but it invariably descends from the pulpit to the pew. This does not mean that the pastor is one before whom we must blindly and ignorantly genuflect, as if he were possessed of some infallible or superhuman attributes. Nor does it mean that the pastor should needlessly interfere with the deacons, trustees or workers of the various auxiliaries, assuming unnecessary dictatorial authority. But it does mean that the pastor is to be respected and accepted as the central figure around which the policies and programs of the church revolve. He must never be considered a mere puppet for the whimsical and capricious mistreatment of those who wish to show their independence, and “use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness.” It is therefore indispensable to the progress of the church that the official board and membership cooperate fully with the leadership of the pastor.

Pursuant of these underlying principles, I respectfully submit the following recommendations:

1. In order that every member of the church shall be identified with a smaller and more intimate fellowship of the church, clubs representing the twelve months of the year shall be organized. Each member of the church will automatically become a member of the club of the month in which he or she was born. Those born in January will be members of the

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- “January” Club. Those born in February will be members of the “February” Club, etc. Each month club shall choose its own officers. Each club shall meet once per month, with the exception of the month for which the club is named. In the month for which the club is named, each club shall meet weekly. So the December Club, for example, shall meet once monthly until December. In December it shall meet each week. Each club shall be asked to make a special contribution to the church on the last Sunday of the month for which it is named. Also, on the Church Anniversary each club shall be asked to contribute at least one hundred dollars (\$100.00). All of the money raised by these clubs shall be placed in a fund known as the building fund. The work of these clubs shall be to supplement that of the Building Fund Committee. (This committee will be discussed subsequently).
2. That the church shall begin a four year renovation and expansion program. Immediate renovations for 1954–55 shall include: carpeting the main auditorium; public speaking system; electric cold water fountain; new pulpit furniture; Communion table; and painting the basement. Renovations for 1955–56 shall include: new pews; and a new heating and cooling system. Improvements for 1956–57 shall include: new baptistry, and a general improvement of the basement. The remaining year of this four year program shall be spent adding large sums of money to the Building Fund for the construction of a religious education building. It is hoped that by 1959 a religious education building will be under construction. Obviously many emergency renovations will arise which are not included in the present list.
 3. That a Building Fund Committee be formed consisting of the following persons Mr. J. H. Gilchrist and Mr. M. F. Moore, co-chairmen; the chairman of both boards; the clerk of the church; the superintendent of the Sunday School; all members of the Finance Committee; Mrs. E. M. Arrington; Mrs. Thelma Anderson; Miss Verdie Davie; Mr. Roscoe Williams; Mr. R. W. Brown, Mr. J. T. Brooks, and Dr. W. D. Pettus. Dr. H. C. Trenholm shall serve as advisor to this committee. The responsibility of this committee shall be twofold: (1) To seek to determine the advisability of expanding on this particular spot; (2) To formulate a systematic approach to the problem of raising the necessary funds for expansion of the church plant. This committee shall be requested to report its results to the pastor within six months. After the findings of this committee shall have been reported, the trustees under the sanction of the church, will be on the lookout for the purchasing of property necessary for the expansion program.
 4. That a New Member Committee be formed consisting of the following persons: Mrs. B. P. Brewer, chairman; Mr. Julius Alexander, co-chairman; Mrs. R. E. Harris, secretary; Mrs. Mary Morgan, Mrs. E. M. Arrington, Mr. Epreval Davie, Sr., and Mrs. J. T. Alexander. The following shall be the duties of this committee:
 - a. To welcome all new members into the Church on the Sunday that they join.

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- b. To interview all new members concerning their particular areas of interest in the church. If they have no particular interest, be sure to give them one. Place them in the particular department or circle of the church where they can exercise their maximum spiritual and intellectual potentialities. Also ascertain the month of the new member's birth, and assign him to his proper Month Club.
 - c. Explain the financial system to each new member. See that each new member has a box of church envelopes.
 - d. All names and vital statistics should be written plainly and turned over to the office secretary the following week in order that she may make an orderly transfer of such information to the permanent files of the church.
 - e. Request the chairman of the deacon board to assign a sufficient number of deacons to visit all new members within a week after they have united with this church. The president of the Month Club receiving new members shall also be requested to make a visit of welcome or assign some qualified member of the club to do so.
5. In order that there may be a reliable and orderly record of the church's origin, growth and future development, a Committee on the History of Dexter shall be organized consisting of the following persons: Mrs. Leila Barlow, chairman; Mr. N. W. Walton, Mrs. Mary Moore, Mr. C. J. Dunn, Mr. John Fulgham. This committee shall be requested to present a summary of the history of Dexter each year at the church anniversary. This committee shall also be requested to keep on file at least three weekly church bulletins, and look into the possibility of having them bound at the end of each church year. These records shall be carefully preserved by members of the committee until it is possible to develop a church library.
6. A Scholarship Fund Committee shall be established consisting of the following persons: Mrs. Thelma Morris, chairman; Mr. P. M. Blair, co-chairman; Mrs. Ive Pettus, Dr. Edward Maxwell, and Dr. H. L. Van Dyke. It shall be the responsibility of this committee to choose each year for a scholarship award the high school graduate of Dexter possessing the highest scholastic rating as well as unusual possibilities for service to humanity; one who has been actively engaged in some phase of church life and one who plans to attend college. The scholarship award for this year shall be one hundred dollars (\$100.00). The awards may be increased in proportion as the church may grow and prosper.
7. A Cultural Committee shall be established consisting of the following persons: Mr. J. T. Brooks, chairman; Mrs. Coretta King, co-chairman; Mrs. C. K. Taylor, Miss Agnes Jette, Mr. Cleveland Dennard, Miss Grace Jackson. This committee shall invite two big cultural events to Dexter per year, one in the spring and one in the fall. They should seek to make one a group event (a school or church chorus) and present an individual artist in the other. Such an undertaking will have a fourfold purpose:
 - a. To lift the general cultural appreciation of our church and community

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- b. To give encouragement to our school groups
 - c. To give encouragement to promising artists
 - d. To give financial aid to the church
8. In order to coordinate the efforts and aims of the musical units of the church a Department of Music shall be established. Mr. J. T. Brooks will serve as head of this department. The directors of all musical units shall be members. Other members will include: Miss Grace Jackson, Mrs. Corretta S. King, and Mrs. Edna King. The members of this department shall meet with the pastor once quarterly to discuss ways to implement the technical, artistic, and worship aims of the master.
 9. In order to implement the program of religious education, a Board of Religious Education shall be organized. This board shall consist of the following members: Mrs. E. M. Arrington, chairman; Dr. W. E. Anderson, co-chairman; Mr. C. C. Beverly, Mrs. JoAnn Robinson, Mrs. Sadie Brooks, Mrs. Queen Tarver, Miss Dean (Olivet), Mr. William Thompson, and Mr. Cleveland Dennard. The immediate work of this committee shall be to study the need for the revitalization and reorganization of the B.T.U. and the Sunday School. Findings of this study are to be submitted to the pastor. This board will also plan for a two or three week Daily Vacation Bible School next summer. Obviously this should be one of the strongest boards in the church.
 10. A Social Service Committee shall be established consisting of the following persons: Miss Marguerite Moore, chairman; Mrs. Verdie Davie, co-chairman; Mrs. Sallie Madison, Mrs. J. H. Gilchrist, Mrs. R. E. Harris, Mr. S. W. Wilson, Mr. Julius Alexander, Mrs. Mary Moore, Mrs. S. S. Austin. The duties of this committee shall be as follows: The care and visitation of the sick and needy. All appeals for help will come before this committee. This does not mean that the missionaries and deacons will be freed of their responsibility to visit the sick. It simply means that all financial aid to the sick and needy will be made through this committee by official checks of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. This system of helping the needy will discourage unbusiness-like practices, and prevent much duplication.
 11. Since the gospel of Jesus is a social gospel as well as a personal gospel seeking to save the whole man, a Social and Political Action Committee shall be established for the purpose of keeping the congregation intelligently informed concerning the social, political and economic situation. This committee shall keep before the congregation the importance of the N.A.A.C.P. The membership should unite with this great organization in a solid block. This committee shall also keep before the congregation the necessity of being registered voters. Every member of Dexter must be a registered voter. During elections, both state and national, this committee will sponsor forums and mass meetings to discuss the relative merits of candidates and the major issues involved. This committee shall consist of the following persons: Mrs. Mary Burks, chairman; Mrs. JoAnn Robinson, co-chairman; Dr. R. T. Adair, Mr. F. W. Taylor, Sr., Dr. W. D. Pettus, and Mr. Rufus Lewis
 12. Mrs. W. E. Anderson and Mrs. Zelia Evans shall comprise a committee

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- to organize a strong and dynamic Women's Council. All the women in the church will automatically become members of this organization. Although this organization will have the liberty to elect its own officers, the pastor is recommending that Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Evans become President and Vice-president, respectively, for the first year. Literature and suggestions for organization can be obtained from the pastor.
13. Mr. P. M. Blair and Mr. J. H. Gilchrist shall comprise a committee to organize an active and dynamic Brotherhood. This organization will include every man in the church. Mr. Blair and Mr. Gilchrist shall serve as President and Vice-president respectively for at least the first year. Literature and suggestions for organization can be obtained from the pastor.
 14. Mr. Cleveland Dennard, Reverend Porter, and Mrs. Athalstein Adair shall comprise a committee to organize a strong and functional Youth Council. This Council will have three divisions: (1) Children, (2) Youth, and (3) Young Adults. The organization of a Young Married Couples Club shall grow out of this Council. The pastor will meet with this committee to make suggestions.
 15. In order to increase the feeling of real fellowship in the church and make the visitors feel a hearty welcome, a Courtesy Committee shall be organized. It will be the purpose of this committee to make its way to the visitors on Sunday and give them a sense of real welcome. Also, this committee shall sponsor coffee hours at least once monthly immediately after the morning service. At this time both visitors and members shall be invited to the basement of the church for a moment of fellowship and getting acquainted. This committee shall consist of the following persons: Mrs. C. K. Taylor, chairman; Mrs. Fressie Maxwell, co-chairman; Mrs. C. D. Alexander, Mrs. L. H. Whitted, Mrs. Roscoe Williams, Mrs. Verdie Davie, Mrs. Clarene Sankey, Mrs. Fannie Motley, Mrs. Thelma Morris, Mrs. Fannie Doak, and Mrs. Rosa Dawson.
 16. That a Sunday Nursery be established in the basement of the church, which will take care of the children of parents who wish to worship in the morning service. The following persons shall serve as a committee to set up this nursery: Mrs. Fressie Maxwell, chairman; Mrs. Sadie Brooks, co-chairman; Mrs. Rebecca Nesbitt, Mrs. Thelma Morris. This committee should also pursue the possibility of opening a Day Nursery.
 17. That the following annual special days and events be enacted in the church calendar:
 - a. Church Anniversary Second Sunday in December
 - b. Youth Day Second Sunday in March
 - c. Spring Lecture Series Week after Fourth Sunday in April
 - d. Men's Day Second Sunday in July
 - e. Women's Day Fourth Sunday in September

It is hoped that a week of activities shall lead to each of these special days. Speakers for each of these events will be secured by the pastor. This, however, does not mean that suggestions cannot come from members.
 18. That at a very early date all officers of the Missionary Society will meet

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- with the pastor to discuss ways and means of revitalizing the Missionary Society.
19. The chairman of the Deacon Board shall call a meeting of the deacons once monthly. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss and seek ways to help the pastor improve the spiritual life of the church. Also the chairman should lead the deacons in a course on the major doctrines of Christianity and the duties of deaconship. The Deacon Board shall not be a legislative body. All legislation shall come through the official body, composed of deacons and trustees, called only by the pastor.
 20. That all members and officers of the official board, and all officers of the various auxiliaries of the church will be recommended annually by the pastor.
 21. That the Church Membership Roll shall be divided into an active and an inactive list. Those members who fail to register for the year and who contribute nothing to the financial upkeep of the church, shall be placed on the roll as an inactive member, unless some satisfactory explanation be given to the officers. An inactive member shall have no voting privileges in the church.
 22. The membership shall be divided into groups of twenty-five persons, and each deacon will be responsible for the spiritual care of one of these groups. As far as possible this division will be worked out on the basis of geographical convenience. It will be the duty of the deacons to constantly call and visit members in his group. Members that are slack in church attendance and general church responsibilities should be persuaded to improve. At the end of every two months each deacon shall receive from the office secretary the names of members in his group who might be behind in their pledges. It shall be the duty of the deacon to persuade the member to catch up his or her pledge.
 23. In order to revamp the financial system of the church, a Unified Budget Plan shall be established. This plan will do away with all rallies. Instead of giving haphazardly to this or that collection and to this and that auxiliary the individual, through this method, pledges a simple weekly contribution to the Unified Budget of the church. At the beginning of the church year, each member will receive a pledge card on which he states the amount of his weekly pledge toward the overall budget of the church. Each registered member will in turn be given a box of envelopes covering the fifty-two Sundays in the year in which he will place his weekly contribution. With the enactment of this plan, only one collection will be taken in the church. This plan will be explained more fully when we come to a discussion of the budget.
 24. In order to implement the above financial plan as well as any business like plan, it is imperative that we have a Central Treasury. Therefore, I recommend that all money in the treasury of each auxiliary be turned over to the general church treasurer by November 1, 1954. The budget for each of these auxiliaries will then be incorporated in the Unified Budget of the church.
 25. All bills shall be paid in checks.

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26. All checks will be made out by the Financial secretary.
27. No checks will be paid out without the O.K. of the pastor.
28. The honorarium for guest speakers will be left to the discretion of the pastor.
29. In addition to the two check signers, there shall be a third signer in the person of the chairman of the Finance Committee.
30. All money shall be deposited on the day that it is raised, and the deposit slip shall be returned to the church office on the following day so that an accurate record can be kept at all times of the money on hand.
31. All money will be counted in the secretary's office in the basement of the church.
32. An accurate record of receipts and disbursements as well as financial statement of each individual contributor shall be placed in the hands of every member at the end of each quarter of the church year.
33. That the fiscal year of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church shall be from October 1, to September 30. Although the present recommendations if accepted, will not be enacted until around November 1, 1954, this change in fiscal policy will be retroactive to October 1. Elections will be held as usual the last of December. But it means that those elected will occupy their offices only nine months or until September 30, 1955. Elections should be held sometime during the first two weeks in September and those elected shall assume their office on the first of October. The annual meeting shall be held on Wednesday Night before the First Sunday in October and the Installation of Officers shall take place on the First Sunday in October at 3:30 P.M.
34. In order to implement this overall program, a full time Office Secretary shall be hired. The job of this person would be: (1) to mimeograph all programs and bulletins for the church; (2) to keep an accurate record of the financial standing of each member and of all receipts and disbursements; (3) to make out all checks and mail them if necessary by the O.K. of the pastor; (4) to be responsible for all correspondence for the pastor and church, (5) to receive money from members who desire paying pledges during the week or desire mailing them in; (6) to present a quarterly statement to each member of the church concerning its financial status; (7) to be on hand for calls into the church and for the giving of information to all in need of such, etc. This person should be a member of Dexter, having a familiarity with the overall program of the church or willing to be trained in such. In order to have a stable and well organized church, this office is indispensable.

This ends my recommendations. If every member will assume an equal responsibility in the implementation of this program, success will be as inevitable as the rising sun. It is quite true that there can be no great followship without great leadership, but it is equally true that there can be no great leadership without great followship. There must be mutuality on every hand. With this persistent reciprocity and the determination to keep God in the

9 Sept 1954 forefront, Dexter will rise to such heights as will stagger the imagination of generations yet unborn, and which even God himself will smile upon. This is our profound challenge. This is our overwhelming responsibility.

TD. MLKP-MBU: Box 117.

Notes on Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.,
at Woman's Auxiliary, National Baptist
Convention on 9 September 1954

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On 9 September 1954, King delivered the noonday message to the Woman's Auxiliary, National Baptist Convention. The brief minutes of the convention show that King, introduced as the "son of the organist of the Woman's Convention," exhorted his audience to do more than simply pay lip service to the spiritual life. The minutes included only these few lines from the speech.

We must rediscover that all reality has spiritual control. It is possible to affirm there is a God with our lips but deny it with our lives. Most of us unconsciously leave God behind. He admonished us to pick up these values so we can move forward to the New World.

Record of the 74th Annual Baptist Convention, 1954; copy in SBHL-TNSB.