It would be a fine idea for you to consider tithing this year. This is a debt that we all owe to God. If your income is $300.00 per month, 10 percent is $30.00. This should be the minimum that you consider giving. Most of us, "out of speechless gratitude for the redemption of Jesus Christ," know that we should give more.

May I close by asking you to consider this question: Where else in all the world can a dollar buy so much?

May God bless you abundantly.

Yours in His service,
M. L. King, Jr., Pastor

MLK/ehr

P.S. Be sure to fill out the Information Card in detail, and return it to the church office with the Commitment Card. This information is of vital importance for our church records.


The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

Annual Report,
Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

1 October 1954–31 October 1955
Montgomery, Ala.

INTRODUCTORY EXPRESSIONS

As we come to the end of another church year and stand on the threshold of a new church year, we have much to be proud of. The horizons in the life of Dexter were greatly extended in 1954–55. The church year 1954–55 is history now, but for Dexter it is blessed history.

About thirty new members have joined the fellowship of Dexter this year. This group includes children, young people and adults. A great majority of these new members are now active participants in the life of the church. They have joined with other members in inspiring worship services each Lord's Day, and in other activities which make up the total work of the church.

Financially, we have done extraordinarily well. Receipts from all sources have exceeded twenty-two thousand dollars ($22,000.00). Of this amount we have given generously for benevolent purposes, missions, and education. Over one thousand dollars
This lovely communion table was a gift to the church from Mr. William J. Cole of Chicago in memory of his mother.

($1,000.00) has been paid into the building fund, and our debt of forty-five hundred dollars ($4,500.00) has been totally liquidated. These figures represent more than cold statistics; rather they express the soul of a church.

Several improvements have been made in the physical structure of the church. These include: carpeting the main auditorium; a public address system; a communion table;* and painting the basement. Under the leadership of a fine group of ladies from the church, a Sunday nursery has been established in the basement of the church.

Many other wonderful things happened in our church-life this year. Mention will be made here of only a few. For the first time in its history, the church employed a full-time secretary. The benefits from this undertaking have been so tremendous that every member has come to see the indispensability of this office for the general welfare of the church. Twelve month clubs, representing the twelve months of the year, were organized. These clubs have been a great blessing to the church both financially and spiritually. Under the direction of the Scholarship Fund Committee, a scholarship of one hundred dollars ($100.00) was awarded to one of the fine young members of our church who is now a freshman in college. The Cultural Committee brought to Dexter and the Montgomery Community the celebrated choir of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. This event was both culturally uplifting and spiritually stimulating. For the first time in several years, the church, under the dynamic leadership of the Board of Religious Education, undertook a Daily Vacation Bible School. This undertaking was a great success. A Social and Political Action Committee was organized at the beginning of the church year to keep the membership informed concerning social, political, and economic issues. The work of this committee has been superb, and every member of Dexter has felt its influence. Through the work of this committee many persons have become registered voters and Dexter has led all other church of Montgomery in contributions to the NAACP. The “special days” through the church year have been tremendously successful. Through these occasions we have been able to bring to Dexter some of the great minds and pulpiteers of our nation. The various auxiliaries of the church are alive and growing stronger; each of them stands ready to lend its cooperation to the overall work of the church. All of
these events speak loudly of the extended horizons of Dexter. We will always remember 1954–55 as the church year in which we reached great heights in fellowship and working together.

Words can never adequately express appreciation. Real appreciation must flow from the deep seas of the heart. But in my little way and with my stumbling words, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to each of you. The wonders that have come about at Dexter this year were not due so much to my leadership, but to the greatness of your fellowship. The Official Board has worked as a unit and has distinguished itself for peace and harmony and a higher spiritual life. The heads of the various organizations of the church deserve the highest praise. Most of them have worked indefatiguably and assiduously for the success of the overall program of the church.

Now, although these achievements are marvelous, and deserve our highest praise, we must not become so involved in passively idolizing them that we forget the tremendous responsibilities which lie ahead. Institutions, like men, can so easily fall into moribund conditions when they project their visions merely to past achievements rather than future challenges. There is nothing more tragic than to see a church drowning in the deep waters of spiritual stagnancy, and at the last moment reaching out for some thin straw of past achievement in an attempt to survive. We must take these noble achievements of the last church year as challenges to even greater achievements for the new church year. Those great yesterdays must inspire us to work courageously for more noble tomorrows. As we have worked so nobly in the past for this great church which is so near and dear to our hearts, and whose efforts God has so richly crowned with success, so let us work in the future; let each of us go out at this moment with grim and bold determination to extend the horizons of Dexter to new boundaries, and lift the spire of her influence to new heights, so that we will be able to inject new spiritual blood into the veins of this community, transforming its jangling discords into meaningful symphonies of spiritual harmony.

M. L. K., Jr. [ . . . ]

1. A page listing "Outstanding Events" is omitted here; the information can be found in the Chronology at the beginning of this volume.
Pastoral Chores

Sermons preached at Dexter 46
Sermons preached at other churches 7
Sermons and lectures at Colleges 13
Community and Civic Meetings attended 36
Pastoral visits 87
Sick visits 49
Baptized 12
Marriages performed 5
Funerals preached 5
Children dedicated 2
Personal Interviews and Conferences 22
Books read 26
Periodicals read 102
Represented the Church in District, State & National Conventions 10

Doctoral Dissertation completed
Title: A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman 343 pages. [. . .]²

Recommendations

The following are recommendations submitted by the pastor for the 1955–56 church year:

1. In order to increase the membership of the church as well as extend the spiritual influence of the church throughout the community, a serious evangelistic campaign shall be undertaken, extending throughout the church year. This campaign shall be carried out by twenty-five evangelistic teams, each consisting of a captain and at least three other members. Each team shall be urged to bring in at least five new members within the church year. The team that brings in the highest number of members shall be duly recognized at the end of the church year. Each captain shall call his team together at least once a month to discuss findings and possibilities. The pastor shall serve as general chairman of this campaign. The initial meeting of the

². Two sections, "Special Sermons and Lectures Away from Home" and "Members Added to the Church," are omitted; the sermons and lectures are listed in the Chronology.
campaign shall be held at the church on October 31, at which time the pastor will set forth the general outlay of the campaign to all team captains as well as all members of teams. The teams are as follows: [...]

2. In order to further strengthen the spiritual life of the church, the regular mid-week prayer services shall be rejuvenated. Each week some organization from the church shall be called on to lead the prayer service. At a very early date the pastor shall post a list of these organizations for the entire church year. The prayer service shall begin each Wednesday at 7:45 going thru 8:30.

3. The Men's Brotherhood shall be reorganized with Mr. J. H. Gilchrist serving as chairman. This organization will include every man in the church. It is hoped that this will be one of the most dynamic organizations in the church.

4. The Youth Council, as set up last year, shall be dissolved. All youth work shall now grow out of the missionary society. The youth work shall be divided into four groups: Sunshine Band Circle (boys and girls, ages 5–9); Red Circle (ages 14–18); Crusaders (ages 9–14); Young Matron's League (19 to 35). Each of these groups shall have a counselor from the missionary society. The counselors shall be as follows: Sunshine Band, Miss Cherrye Ballard; Red Circle, Mrs. Coretta King; Crusaders, Miss Verdie Davie; Young Matron's League, Mrs. E. M. Arrington.

5. That persons who join the church on Sundays shall no longer be voted in the church from the floor. As soon as a person joins the church, the chairman of the Deacon Board and the clerk of the church shall take him to the pastor's study in the first unit of the church and interview him concerning how he wishes to join and other important details. The person or persons joining shall wait in the study to be interviewed by the New Member Committee. The duties of this committee shall be the same as listed in the last year's recommendations. (See 1954–55 recommendations, p. 2). The following persons shall compose the New Member Committee: Mrs. B. P. Brewer, Chairman; Mr. Julius Alexander.

3. The names have been omitted.
Vice-Chairman; Mrs. R. E. Harris, Secretary; Mrs. Mary Morgan; Mrs. E. M. Arrington; Mrs. Mary Louise Williams; Mr. Jerome Morris. The names of the person or persons joining shall be listed in the Church Bulletin on the Sunday after they join, and they will be officially welcomed into the church on the First Sunday night with the right hand of fellowship. […]⁴

TD. MLKP-MBU: Box 77.

4. A listing of the church members and officers is omitted, as is the detailed financial report.

To Howard Thurman

31 October 1955
Montgomery, Ala.

King invites Thurman, dean of Boston University’s Marsh Chapel, to speak for Men’s Day.¹

Dr. Howard Thurman
Boston University School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Mass.

Dear Dr. Thurman:

I am in the process of setting up my program for the coming church year. The second Sunday in July is the date set aside for our annual Men’s Day. I

¹ Howard Thurman (1899–1981) received his B.A. from Morehouse College in 1923 and his M.Div. from Rochester Theological Seminary in 1926. After serving as pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Oberlin, Ohio, Thurman returned to Morehouse as professor of religion in 1929. He joined Howard University’s faculty in 1932 and three years later became dean of the university’s chapel. Just prior to his appointment as dean, Thurman and his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, traveled to India on a “Pilgrimage of Friendship” and met Mohandas K. Gandhi. Thurman resigned from Howard in 1943 to help establish San Francisco’s Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, one of the first churches composed of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Euro-Americans. In 1953 he became dean of Boston University’s Marsh Chapel, where he served until 1965. His many publications include an autobiography, With Head and Heart (1979); Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain of the Negro Spirituals (1946, rev. ed. 1955); The Negro Speaks of Life and Death (1947); Jesus and the Disinherited (1949); Deep Is the Hunger (1951); Meditations of the Heart (1953); The Creative Encounter (1954); Footprints of a Dream (1959); The Inward Journey (1961); The Luminous Darkness (1965); and The Centering Moment (1969).