1. Courteous treatment by bus drivers.
2. Seating of Negro passengers from rear to front of bus, and white passengers from front to rear on “first-come-first-serve basis with no seats reserved for any race.
3. Employment of Negro bus operators in predominantly Negro residential sections.

The above proposals, and the resolutions which will follow, were drafted and adopted in a mass meeting of more than 5,000 regular bus riders. These proposals were denied in the meeting with the city officials and representatives of the bus company.

Since 44% of the city’s population is Negro, and since 75% of the bus riders are Negro, we urge you to send a representative to Montgomery to arbitrate.

The Montgomery Improvement Association
The Rev. M. L. King, Pres.
The Rev. U. J. Fields, Sec’y.

The resolutions ratified on 5 December 1955 did not specifically approve the three demands.

“Statement of Negro Citizens on Bus Situation”

[10 December 1955]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

Two days after the deadlocked talks on 8 December, King and the MIA submitted this statement to their adversaries and the press. The next day the Montgomery Advertiser quoted portions of it, attributed to King, in a front-page article. The bus company had argued that Alabama law required segregation; King and the MIA, however, cite the relevant statute and argue that it authorized such a policy but did not require it. They also point out that Rosa Parks was charged with violating the state law because the Montgomery City Code did not require a black person to relinquish a seat unless another one was available in the part of the bus reserved for African Americans. The MIA argues that the state law was flexible enough to permit the group’s proposed seating arrangement, which would not eliminate bus segregation.

We have heretofore stated the position of the Negro Citizens of Montgomery with reference to the local bus situation. As good citizens we want to comply with the law until the law is changed or is over-ruled. However, we feel that we have the right to insist that the law be fairly administered.

In answer to our request that the Montgomery City Lines adopt a policy of
loading busses from rear to front with colored passengers and from front to rear with white passengers and that all passengers be permitted to retain their seats on a “first come—first served” basis, without reservation of seats for any particular race, the bus company contends that such an arrangement would be in violation of the law and particularly the Act of July 18, 1947, (General Acts of Alabama, 1947, #130, Page 40).

In answer to this contention we would like to call attention to the pertinent provision of Section 1, of this Act, which reads as follows:

“Section 1. All passenger stations in this state operated by or for the use of any motor transportation company shall be authorized to provide separate waiting rooms, facilities, or space, or separate ticket windows, for the white and colored races but such accommodations for the races shall be equal. All motor transportation companies and operators of vehicles, carrying passengers for hire in this state, whether intrastate or interstate passengers, are authorized and empowered to provide separate accommodations on each vehicle for the white and colored races. Any officer or agent of such motor transportation company or operator, in charge of any vehicle, is authorized to assign or reassign each passenger or person to a division, section or seat on the vehicle designated by such company or operator or by such officer or agent for the race to which the passenger or person belongs...” (italics supplied).

We believe that this Act was not intended to apply to busses operating within a single municipality, but only to those under the jurisdiction of the Alabama Public Service Commission. However, it should be noted that under the provisions quoted the method of handling the seating of passengers is left entirely to the transportation companies themselves. They are authorized and empowered to provide separate accommodations but are not directed or required to take any action whatsoever.

The Legislature, it seems clear, wisely left it up to the transportation companies to work out the seating problem in a reasonable and practical way, subject to the limitations of reasonableness and equality of treatment to all passengers, regardless of race.

It should be further noted that even under the City Code of Montgomery (Chapter 6, Section 10 and 11) no person, white or colored, can be required to give up a seat unless there is a vacant seat in the portion of the bus to which the passenger is assigned.1

1. Section 604 of the Montgomery City Code reads: “All operators and other employees while in charge of busses are hereby invested with the police power of a police officer of said City, to carry out said provisions, and any passenger refusing or failing to take a seat among those assigned to the race to which he belongs—if there is such seat vacant—at the request of the conductor or employee in charge of said bus, shall, upon conviction, be fined not less than one nor more than one hundred dollars” (The Code of Ordinances of the City of Montgomery [Montgomery: Wilson Printing Co., 1938], p. 217).
We feel that there is no issue between the Negro citizens and the Montgomery City Lines that cannot be solved by negotiations between people of good will and we submit that there is no legal barrier to such negotiations.

Respectfully submitted,
THE MONTGOMERY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
M. L. King, President

TD. RGP.

From H. Edward Whitaker

12 December 1955
Niagara Falls, N.Y.

On 30 November King had written his Crozer classmate a letter praising Whitaker's newly constructed New Hope Baptist Church and announcing the birth of his daughter, Yolanda Denise. In his reply Whitaker says that he hopes King will visit in spring 1956. King wrote "Answered" on the letter and replied affirmatively on 28 December.

Dear Mike,

Thanks a lot for your letter a few days ago. I am glad you feel that our building is satisfactory. It is certainly one that was badly needed in our city. And so far things are going quite well. But we have some hard folk to work with from the point of understanding what Church work is all about. But they are gradually coming around.

We are now in the process of building a 6 room house for the pastor. Since we have been here, we have lived in an apartment. Of course this house will be personal property. I have been able to swing a mortgage mortgage for $13,000 with no money in my pocket, merely on community standing as a result of the building of the church. The Lord is certainly with us. If all goes well, we hope to be in it by the time we hope to have you up here just before Easter. So far I have not discussed to any great extent with any of the Church officials the matter of a spring preaching mission, but I am sure it will find no opposition. Therefore I would appreciate it very much if you could put in on your calendar for the whole week just before Easter. I don't know how this would work out with your own program in view of the fact that you would not have much time to get back to your Church by Easter Sunday morning. But I guess I am going too far. That's

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2. The Calendar of Documents provides complete citations for documents referenced in headnotes.