

5 Mar  
1960

To Wyatt Tee Walker

5 March 1960  
[Atlanta, Ga.]

*Nearly eleven months after John Tilley's resignation as SCLC executive director, King offers Walker the position and expresses his hope that the Virginia minister will "bring into full grown maturity an organization that is presently a sleeping giant."<sup>1</sup> Shortly after Walker resigned from his pastorate on 29 May, King announced his hiring, describing it as SCLC's "most significant move since its beginning in 1957."<sup>2</sup>*

Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Minister  
The Gillfield Baptist Church  
Petersburg, Virginia

Dear Wyatt:

After careful and serious deliberations, the Personnel Committee of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has authorized me to offer you the position of Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. All of the members of the Committee were tremendously impressed with your interview, and strongly felt that you could give a leadership to the Conference which would lift it to one of the most significant movements in our nation today. The Committee was greatly impressed with your technical know-how, sincerity of purpose, general creativity, radiating personality, and willingness to stick with a job until it is finished, and felt that all of these factors coupled with your ability as a preacher and pastor would conjoin to produce the type of inimitable executive that is needed to carry on the challenging work of our organization.

We feel that the potentialities of the Conference are now greater than ever before. The recent developments with the student sit downs, and the centrality of the civil rights issue in Congress offer the SCLC a unique opportunity for leadership in the field of mass nonviolent direct action. People over the country are looking to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for this type of leadership, and they are expressing every day a new willingness to support our efforts.

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1. For Tilley's resignation letter, see Tilley to King, 13 April 1959, pp. 182-184 in this volume. King and Walker may have discussed the SCLC position when King spoke at a Richmond Emancipation Day rally organized by Walker (Program, "Second annual Pilgrimage of Prayer for Public Schools," 1 January 1960). Walker, who was also state director of CORE and president of the Petersburg NAACP, had led a number of protests directed at segregated schools and public accommodations. Two days after King's letter was written, Walker was among a group of eleven black protesters jailed for trespassing in the "whites only" section of the Petersburg Public Library (Robert Gordon, "11 Negroes Are Arrested at Petersburg Library," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 8 March 1960). King wired Walker words of encouragement: "Your determined courage and Christian methods are inspiring to all men of goodwill" (King to Walker, 8 March 1960).

2. Addressing a mass meeting on 1 June at Gillfield Baptist Church, King told the Petersburg Improvement Association that Walker "is not leaving Petersburg but is going to a larger job to serve a better Petersburg" ("Negro Leader Urges Continued Struggle," *Richmond News Leader*, 2 June 1960). Walker assumed the position in August 1960.

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A case in point is my recent trip to California. I addressed two or three fund raising rallies, and at the end of the meetings more than \$6,000.00 was raised for our work.<sup>3</sup> In each instance the people expressed an enthusiastic desire to give even greater financial support to our work. Now that we are opening our fund raising office in Atlanta on a full time basis, I am sure that our finances will triple. I mention all of these things to simply say that the opportunities are unlimited, and the financial resources will be available for you to do the job in a monumental way.

While there are several details concerning the job that cannot be adequately discussed until the position is accepted, I would like to say that the Committee agreed to offer a beginning salary of \$8,000.00 a year. I don't think you would face any difficulties finding housing accommodations for your family in Atlanta. I am sure that you would find Atlanta a most interesting city in which to live. Its central location would greatly aid you in the travelling that you would have to do, and its urban sophistication (greater Atlanta has a population of more than one million), cultural outlet (there are six colleges and universities in Atlanta for Negroes alone and five for whites), and unique achievements of Negroes in the economic sphere would provide an atmosphere that would be very meaningful and enjoyable to your family.

All of the board members are eagerly awaiting your decision. We are confident that your acceptance of this position would bring into full grown maturity an organization that is presently a sleeping giant, and will add to your already emerging stature as a Christian minister, and as a social reformer.

I will await your reply with great anticipation. We would hope that you can make some decision within the next two weeks so that we may proceed with the other basic business details if your answer is in the affirmative.

Very sincerely yours,  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

MLK:mlb

TLc. MLKP-MBU: Box 74.

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3. On 23 February King spoke at Los Angeles's Temple Isaiah; on 27 February he delivered "The Power Struggle and Security in a Nuclear Space Age" for the Church Federation of Los Angeles, and the following day he delivered "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" at Friendship Baptist Church in Pasadena.