

From W. T. Handy, Jr.

18 November 1952
Alexandria, La.

Handy was a student in Boston University's School of Religion during King's first year in Boston.¹ In this letter the Methodist preacher describes his experiences as a

1. William Talbot Handy, Jr. (1924–), graduated from New Orleans's Dillard University in 1948 with a B.A. degree. He earned a B.D. at Atlanta's Gammon Theological Seminary and an

*first-year pastor of a church in Louisiana and cautions King, "The only element to restrain our expectations from bearing fruit will be M. L. himself." Handy refers to Roland Haynes, Doug Moore, and Wayman "Mac" McLaughlin, three fellow graduate students at Boston.*²

18 Nov
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Dr. M. L. King, Jr. (Not the real Doctor)
745 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston 15, Mass.

Dear M. L.:

I imagine you were not expecting a letter from me at all, but I assure you that I have not forgotten you nor will I ever. The year we fellowshiped together has made a lasting imprint upon my heart and shall never be obliterated. Then too, if we did drift the relationship between Ruth and the other members of your family would always maintain some sort of tie.

How is old B.U.? I miss the gang in the room solving the problems of the world, politically, socially, and in the theological realm. If only the people of the world would listen to us, there would be no trouble. How is Mac? Has he decided to relieve himself of his many responsibilities? Does he still jump up in the air and kick his heels together? I certainly hope he does something before he has a nervous breakdown.

I am now pastor of a church. I have about 240 members on roll with approximately 160 adult ones I can place my hands on. I realize this is a remarkable percentage and am thankful that seemingly they are now rallying to the cause of the church. When I was appointed I found only 65 active, 31 out of town, 42 children, and 13 dead, all carried on the roll. Honestly one lady had been dead six years and they were still carrying her. To get improvements has meant hard work and I cannot understand how a man can pastor away from the people.

When you go to your church (if ever) please try not to get embroiled in a

S.T.M. at Boston University. Handy was pastor of Newman Methodist Church in Alexandria, Louisiana, from 1952 to 1959, when he was appointed pastor of St. Mark Methodist Church in Baton Rouge. After leaving St. Mark in 1968 he worked with the Methodist Publishing House in Nashville. He was later elected a bishop of the United Methodist Church. He has served as president of the board of trustees for the Interdenominational Theological Center and Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, and as the secretary of the board of trustees of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. See Handy to King Papers Project, 21 November 1991; and Handy, telephone interview with Clayborne Carson, 1 July 1992.

2. Roland Emerson Haynes (1928-) received his A.B. in 1949 from Clark College in Atlanta and his S.T.B., S.T.M., and Ph.D. from Boston University in 1952, 1953, and 1961, respectively. He was college minister and professor of psychology at Clark College from 1957 until 1963. Thereafter he taught at several colleges in South Carolina before becoming professor of psychology at the University of South Carolina in 1972, where he still serves. See Haynes to King Papers Project, 16 May 1992.

Douglas Moore (1928-) received his A.B. from North Carolina College in Durham (1949). Although he never received his Ph.D., he did pursue graduate work at Boston University from 1950 to 1953. Moore was a founding member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

18 Nov building campaign in your first year. When I arrived here I realized that a
1952 new edifice would be needed but I had intentions of starting next year. But
events took place over which I had no control.

About two months ago a realtor approached me concerning a plot of land half-a-square for \$25,000.00. When he mentioned the price, he could just as well have mentioned 25 million. Yet the tract was ideal for our purposes. The location was fine, and there was enough land to erect a nice building, parsonage, and eventually an educational building or gymnasium. Since then I have scurried around and found interests to loan us the major portion of the sum. Last week we entered into the transaction, with the close of the deal and \$24,000.00 more due on January 28, 1953. Pray for me.

On the other hand, the location of our church is in the business district of the city. We are isolated but yet the value of the property is of such a nature that when sold we could erect a modest building without too much debt. Therefore today we are negotiating with realtors to sell. Our minimum asking price is one thousand dollars per front foot and we have 106.66 feet. Therefore \$106,660.00. Brother you see I am now talking in high finance. But do not think it is all smooth. It can certainly develop headaches when the pastor has to do so much of the work himself.

I cannot find time to do as much reading as I would like to. I do get some opportunities and it pays off in the pulpit. Last Sunday was one of my good days and I felt it myself. Still a preacher has his good days and his bad ones. I still am in a dither about my night sermons, and feel somewhat guilty about them. I do alright in the morning but flunk usually ascends the rostrum with me at night. I pray that when this business deal is completed I will do better.

Two weeks ago I was at Dillard to deliver the vesper message. It was quite an experience returning to the alma mater in such a position. Ten years ago there would have been prohibitive odds against such an occurrence. I used as a theme "Gaining God's Approval" with the text coming from the R.S.V. II Tim. 2:15. In the sermon I used the silent conclusion and it seemed to be quite effective. I used an illustration and when I concluded appeared as if I was to continue then abruptly, "Let us pray".

At my annual Conference I delivered one of the morning sermons. Man, there was pandemonium and the place was a wreck. At one point, the place got into such a tantrum that I just stopped until peace could be restored. Really though I did preach one of my best sermons and I cannot understand why. The Lord was evidently with me because I thought I was going to flunk. It was at this session that I met young Jamerson from Gardner Taylor's former church.³ I saw him later and he is really doing a bang up job at Mt. Zion. He

3. Handy refers to Theodore Judson Jemison (1918-) and Gardner Calvin Taylor (1918-). Jemison succeeded Taylor as pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Baton Rouge in 1947. Taylor received his A.B. from Leland College in 1937 and his B.D. from Oberlin in 1940. He led churches in Ohio and New Orleans before becoming pastor of Mount Zion in 1943. After leaving Mount Zion he became pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, where he still serves. Taylor served as president of the Protestant Council of New York City, and was also a member of the city's board of education. In 1961, after contesting the reelection of J. H. Jackson as president,

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also is going to rebuild and get a new parsonage. The boy sounds like he can "tell the story". I heard him give a few remarks.

I know you are now married? Which one was it? No, I know you are still galivanting around Boston, the most eligible and popular bachelor in town. I wonder how you are progressing with my steadying influence gone. Remember M. L., "we are expecting great things from you".⁴ The only element to restrain our expectations from bearing fruit will be M. L. himself. However I know that he will not allow himself or influences to bring failure about him or embarrassment to his beloved Father and Mother.

I won't preach to you anymore. Let me know how Roland is faring. I was somewhat disturbed about his family when he left Atlanta. Is Doug Moore still up in the clouds? Tell him that it is a little different out here and that the world is not going to be converted overnight. However every now and then a little evidence will show you that it all is not in vain.

Ruth has been sick since you last saw her. About six weeks ago I had to rush her to the hospital where she lost her opportunity to have a baby at present. It was quite discouraging but she is fine and in good spirits now. I hope that she will be able to teach next semester. Eventually she is going to need an operation. She sends her regards and hears about you through Christine.

Tomorrow the ministers of the district will convene at our church so that means preparation for entertainment with wholly inadequate facilities. Somehow we will meet the responsibilities. Continue your good work. Keep your eye on the goal. Have you taken your German exam as yet?

Give my regards to Drs. Rowlingson, Booth, Chalmers, and DeWolf. When

he led a movement out of the National Baptist Convention to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention. His books include *How Shall They Preach* (1977) and *The Scarlet Thread* (1981).

Jemison was the youngest child of D. V. Jemison, president of the National Baptist Convention from 1941 until his retirement in 1953. T. J. Jemison received his B.S. from Alabama State College in 1940 and his M.Div. from Virginia Union University in 1945. As pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Staunton, Virginia, Jemison organized the city's first local NAACP chapter. In 1949 he became pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he still serves. In June 1953, Jemison helped organize a ten-day bus boycott in Baton Rouge to protest segregated seating. The carpool system employed by Jemison and others in that city served as a model for the Montgomery Improvement Association's carpool during its boycott of city buses in 1955 and 1956. Also in 1953, Jemison was elected general secretary of the National Baptist Convention, in which capacity he served until his election to the presidency in 1982. Jemison was the founding secretary of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, but resigned a year later. See Weptanomah W. Carter, *Born to Be President* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1984).

4. Handy later explained in a telephone interview that he was quoting a letter written to King, Jr., by Alberta Williams King the previous year. Handy had visited the senior Kings during one of his frequent trips to Atlanta to be with his wife, Ruth, who was teaching at an Atlanta school with Christine King. "We'd go by the [Kings'] house where they fed us and all that kind of thing. Once I went down there and said to Mrs. King how popular he was, how the girls were after him, how he wasn't doing anything wrong, but that he was very popular. . . . She wrote him very soberly and I remember that he shared the letter with me. She said I'd been there and that she'd heard some things about him and she just wanted to be sure that he gets there straight. And she wrote those words, 'Remember M. L., we're expecting great things from you'" (Handy, interview with Clayborne Carson, 1 July 1992). Alberta King's letter has not been located.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

3 Dec is DeWolf's book off the press?⁵ Next week I will hear Gardner Taylor again,
1953 he'll be here for the Teacher's Convention. Bye now,

Your Friend,
[*signed*] Handy

TALS. MLKP-MBU: Box 117.

5. Donald Taggart Rowlingson (1907-) was professor of New Testament at Boston University from 1950 until his retirement in 1972; Edwin Prince Booth (1898-1969) was professor of church history at Boston from 1925 until his retirement in 1963; Allan Knight Chalmers (1897-1972) was professor of preaching and applied Christianity at Boston from 1948 to 1962. DeWolf's book *A Theology of the Living Church* was published by Harper in 1953.