

To Samuel L. Spear

16 Dec
1960

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[Atlanta, Ga.]

Following the death of the pastor at Atlanta's West Hunter Baptist Church, Spear, a Philadelphia minister and longtime West Hunter member, asked King if he might be interested in filling the vacancy.¹ King declines, reasoning that he has "certain advantages" as co-pastor at Ebenezer, and recommends Abernathy for the job.² Abernathy accepted the position at the church in August 1961 and moved to Atlanta the following November.

Mr. Samuel L. Spear
7036 Lincoln Drive
Philadelphia 19, Pennsylvania

Dear Brother Spear:

This is just a note to acknowledge receipt of your very kind letter of recent date. I am indeed flattered to know that you are interested in my going to West Hunter to become your pastor. It makes me feel humble indeed to know that you have such trust and confidence in me. Let me assure you that I think a great deal of West Hunter Baptist church and I am greatly impressed with its potentialities. However, I feel that for the present at least, I should remain here at Ebenezer. I am sure that you can see how there are certain advantages that I have here that would not exist in a situation where I am the only pastor.

I do have another person that I am convinced would make West Hunter a great pastor. I speak of Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, who is presently pastor of First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Ralph is a dynamic and able preacher, an exceptionally good administrator and organizer, and a great community leader. I am sure that he could give to West Hunter a type of leadership that would both double its membership and its spiritual impact in the community. I believe he would accept if a call were extended, although I cannot state this as a fact.

I would appreciate any good word that you could say for Ralph Abernathy, and I am sure that it would have an impact. I have not spoken to any of the officers about this yet because I am not sure whether they have started hearing prospective candidates.

Thank you again for your interest, and I will join you in praying that West Hunter

1. Spear to King, 5 December 1960. A. Franklin Fisher was pastor of West Hunter until his death in November 1960; King wired condolences to Fisher's widow on 9 November. Samuel L. Spear (1920-1986), born in Carlton, Georgia, attended Morehouse College from 1939 until 1941. In 1954, he accepted the pastorate of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Philadelphia, where he remained until his death.

2. King later wrote the chairman of the church board, giving Abernathy "an unqualified recommendation" as "one of the most capable men in our nation today" (King to J. R. Butts, 8 February 1961).

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

20 Dec 1960 will have God's guidance as she sets out on this sacred and serious responsibility of calling a pastor.

Sincerely yours,
Martin Luther King, Jr.

MLK.m

TLc. MLKP-MBU: Box 69.