

My Call to the Ministry

7 August 1959
[Montgomery, Ala]

Joan Thatcher, publicity director of the American Baptist Convention, asked King to compose this statement. In her request, Thatcher noted, "Apparently many of our young people still feel that unless they see a burning bush or a blinding light on the road to Damascus, they haven't been called."¹

¹ Thatcher to King, 30 July 1959. Maude Ballou enclosed this statement in a 7 August 1959 reply to Thatcher. Thatcher's letter indicated that King's message was to be included in a leaflet for the January 1960 observance of Life Service Sunday.

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My call to the ministry was neither dramatic nor spectacular. It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it did not come as a sudden realization. Rather, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the ministry. At first I planned to be a physician, then I turned my attention in the direction of law. But as I passed through the preparation stages of these two professions, I still felt within that undying urge to serve God and humanity through the ministry. During my senior year in college I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry. I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become. A few months after preaching my first sermon I entered theological seminary.² This, in brief, is an account of my call and pilgrimage to the ministry.

Martin Luther King, Jr

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² King preached his trial sermon at Ebenezer in the fall of 1947 and was ordained in February 1948. He graduated from Morehouse College in May of that year and entered Crozer Theological Seminary the following September.