

Head of Southern Christian Leadership Conference dies

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) The Rev. Howard Creecy Jr., a Baptist preacher chosen early this year as the new president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, died suddenly Thursday (July 28) at the age of 57.

His death means the civil rights organization founded by the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. will go through another unexpected transition. Creecy became president after the Rev. Bernice King, the founder's daughter, decided in January not to assume the presidency, citing a leadership clash.

SCLC leaders expressed shock at Creecy's death of a suspected heart attack but vowed to continue the work he started.

"He was a strong leader but he has laid the groundwork for us to move forward in a way that we probably haven't been able to in the past," said Damien Conners, program director of the Atlanta-based organization.

Conners said the SCLC will sponsor a Washington event on jobs and political advocacy -- timed to the late August dedication of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial -- and a fall campaign on college campuses to boost funding of education.//

Isaac Newton Farris Jr., King's nephew, will become interim president.

In a statement, Farris credited Creecy with revitalizing the SCLC, calling him "a prophetic leader who deeply inspired me along with countless others across this great nation and world."

Creecy, a third-generation preacher, was pastor of The Olivet Church in the Atlanta suburb of Fayetteville, Ga. The Rev. Carroll Baltimore, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, called Creecy "one of PNBC's greatest pastors."