

King's nephew named to head civil rights group

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) Two and a half weeks after the sudden death of its president, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has named a nephew of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as its new leader.

Isaac Newton Farris Jr., 48, was elected on Monday (Aug. 15) to lead the Atlanta-based organization that has mobilized churches to fight discrimination.

Farris, a lifelong member of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where his uncle preached, had served as interim president. He succeeds the Rev. Howard Crecy Jr., who was tapped earlier this year but died unexpectedly on July 28.

King helped found the SCLC in 1957 and served as its first president.

In an interview Tuesday, Farris said the organization's primary focus will be on access to higher education.

"The mission will not change but we have to operate in the current environment," he said. "It's getting harder for everyone to get an education, so that's the civil rights issue for 2011."

The SCLC had plans to be led by another King family member. In January, the Rev. Bernice King, daughter of the founder, decided not to assume the presidency, citing a leadership clash.

Farris said he is ready to succeed veteran civil rights leaders, any of whom led the SCLC as ordained ministers.

"I never had that calling that way but I've always felt a call of public service," he said.