

January 31, 1953

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Howard Thurman

RE: Boston University

PART I

As the result of a long-distance telephone conversation with President Harold Case of Boston University, I had a conference with him at the Statler Hotel in Los Angeles Friday, January 9.

At this conference, President Case formally offered me the position of Dean of the Marsh Memorial Chapel, Minister of the Boston University Community Church which I would have full responsibility in shaping the organization thereof, and a professorship in the School of Theology.

There are several considerations which he presented for my reflection:

1. I would be one of the nine administrative deans of the university.
2. As dean, I would be the university preacher, carrying responsibility for special services on various occasions in the life of the community, and with the assistance of a student-faculty commission provide weekday chapel services. In addition to these duties, I would serve as the coordinator of all religious affairs at the university, assisting the deans and student councils of

the several colleges and schools in planning programs and assemblies of religious nature and be the adviser to numerous interfaith, interdenominational and denominational organizations on campus.

3. The general counseling in matters of religious needs would be shared with me by the Roman Catholic Chaplain and the Jewish Chaplain of the university.

4. As the result of what has been developed practically as a religious fellowship cutting across various lines in our church, President Case wants to project, through my leadership, the development of a community church at the university, membership of which would come from the university family and the community of Boston. This would be a non-creedal, non-sectarian, interracial, interfaith and intercultural religious fellowship.

5. In addition to the university choir with a full-time director, there would be at my disposal the resources of the Sargent School of the Dance, the School of Theology, the Fine Arts and Drama Department and any other facilities in the total university life.

6. The enrollment at Boston University, as of March 15, 1952, showed a net total of 18,161 men and 11,472 women, making a grand number of 29,633. In the School of Theology, as of the fall of 1952, there were 411 men coming from more than 230 universities and colleges in the United States, and from 15 foreign countries.

7. Last Founders Day, the university introduced a Brotherhood in Action program, culminating in the establishment of a Human Relations Center. This center will relate to all the activities of the university which make for deeper understanding and interpersonal participation across all group lines.

8. On July 1, a Mr. Brown, who has been Chief Adviser of the State Department for Africa, will become the head of the newly developed African Area Studies program.

PART II

1. President Case recognized in his discussion with me the wisdom and the necessity for my maintaining some kind of continuing relationship with Fellowship Church. He had no detailed suggestion to make except to express a willingness to confer with any representatives of the church for the consideration of plans and/or proposals for the continuation of the tremendous undertaking which has taken root in this place.

2. On Saturday, February 28, when I am at Wellesley for the Religious Forum lectures, I shall spend most of the day visiting the campus and talking with the President and the Dean of Theology and various other people. I did not want to do this without having the Board share with me the fateful decision which some time between now and the middle of the summer I shall be called upon to make.

3. I may add that of the various opportunities that have come to me during the past eight and one-half years, this is the first one to which I have given any serious consideration. And for the following reasons:

a. To develop a church somewhat like this in a university community is to touch at every step of the way hundreds of young people who themselves will be going to the ends of the earth to take up their responsibilities as members of communities. Conceivably, this means the widest possible dissemination of the ideas in which I believe, in the very nature of the operation itself.

b. The fact that one of America's great universities takes the completely unprecedented step in American education to invite a Negro to become one of its administrative deans, on behalf of a development in religious meaning and experience, in itself makes a limitless contribution to intergroup relations at this fateful moment in the history of America and the world.

c. At the moment, and I emphasize the words at the moment, it seems to be in line with the vision which first sent me forth from Howard University to live and work in the church here.

d. I am 52 years old, which means that according to the classical American timetable, I have 13 years of active work. This gives me no sense of urgency but it does point up the fact that if my life is to be spent to the fullest advantage on behalf of what seems to me to be the great hope for mankind, it is important to work on its behalf where there is the maximum possibility of contagion.

4. I would like it clearly understood that I have made no decision nor have I made any commitment of any kind with reference to this matter. I present it to you primarily for your information and if you have any discussion that may be suggestive to me as I come to rest in a decision, as my friends and colleagues committed to the same adventure, I would want you to share it.

I would appreciate it if this memorandum which I am reading to you be regarded as confidential matter for the Board.

I shall share with you the results of my discussion in Boston when I return from Wellesley.

HT:r