

King's daughter declines helm of SCLC

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [February 22, 2011](#) issue

Fifteen months after being tapped to head the civil rights group founded by her famous father, Bernice King has declined the post, citing a leadership clash and an inability to "move forward."

King's decision leaves the venerable Southern Christian Leadership Conference again facing an uncertain future, a half century after it was founded to mobilize black churches in Martin Luther King's fight against discrimination.

"After numerous attempts to connect with the official board leaders on how to move forward under my leadership, unfortunately our visions did not align," King said in statement on January 21. Instead, she said, she plans to work with immigration activist Samuel Rodriguez, whose National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference is modeled on the SCLC, and work to develop the legacy of her mother, Coretta Scott King.

Founded in 1957, the Atlanta-based SCLC has been wracked by turmoil over financial and leadership fights that landed in a state court. In September, a judge ruled that a board faction that attempted to have its own meetings had acted improperly.

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes said the SCLC, like other civil rights organizations, is grappling with how to operate in a new generation with new identities. "We've reached a point where black communities are going through a transition in terms of who we are," said Gilkes, a professor of African-American studies at Colby College in Maine.

SCLC leaders say the organization will forge ahead despite not having a member of the King family at the top.

Bernice

King, a motivational speaker and a minister at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church near Atlanta, could not be reached for comment about the specifics of her plans. But Rodriguez said he expects that he and King will launch their joint initiative by June, focusing on immigration reform and the high dropout rates among black and Latino high school students. —RNS