

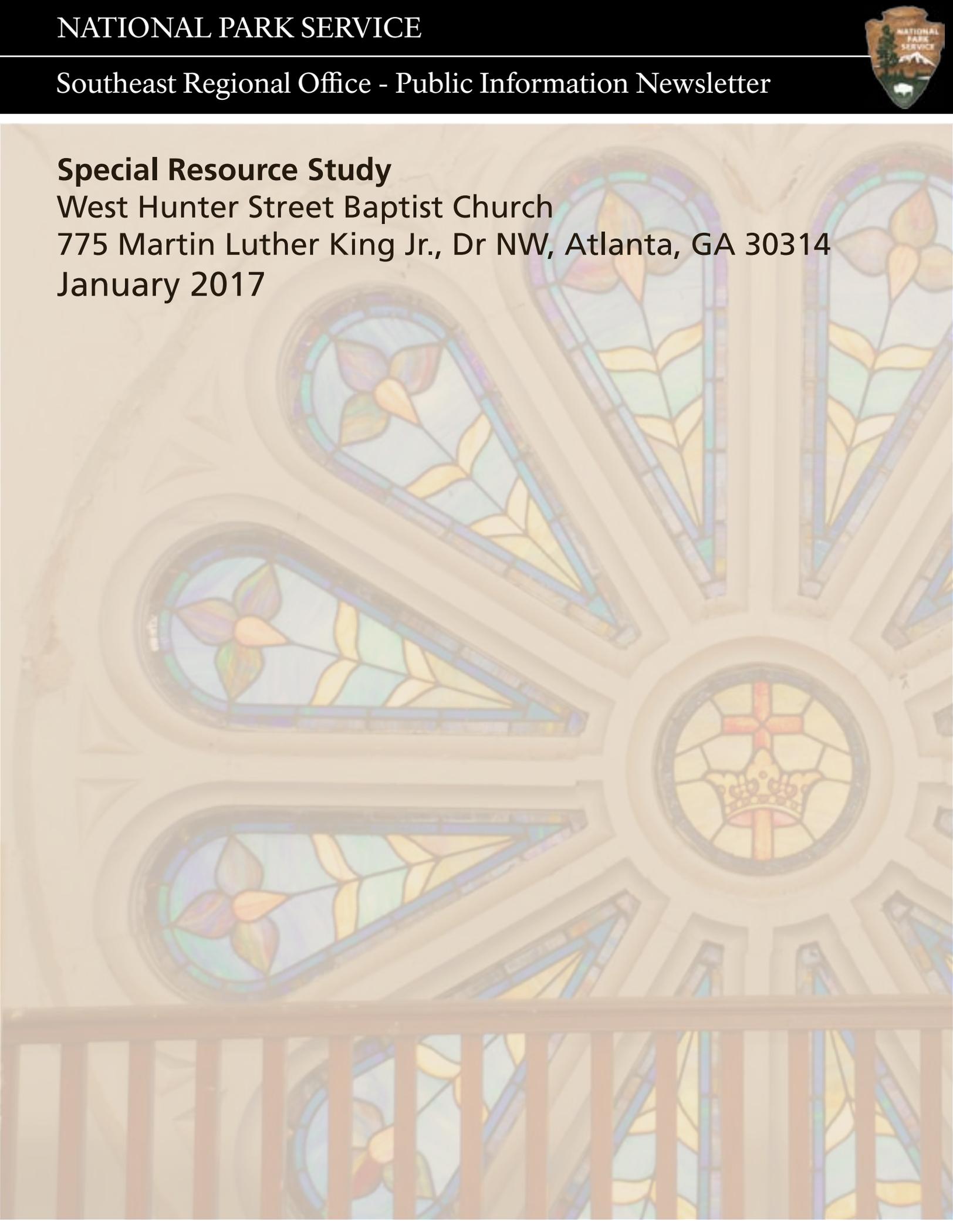


**Special Resource Study**

West Hunter Street Baptist Church

775 Martin Luther King Jr., Dr NW, Atlanta, GA 30314

January 2017





# From the *National Park Service*

Dear Friends:

On December 19, 2014, Congress passed Public Law 113-291, which directed the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a Special Resource Study for the West Hunter Street Baptist Church. *All references to West Hunter Street Baptist Church throughout this document refer to the building at 775 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, SW, Atlanta, Georgia and not the current location of the congregation at 1040 Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard.* The special resource study will be developed over the next two years and will evaluate the national significance of the site, the suitability, and feasibility of designating it as a unit of the national park system.

The purpose of a special resource study is to provide Congress with information about the quality and condition of historical, cultural, or recreational resources associated with a site. The study also examines its relationship to congressionally established criteria for significance, suitability, feasibility, and the need for NPS management. Based on the special resource study, the NPS will determine whether West Hunter Street Baptist Church meets the criteria for inclusion in the national park system and make recommendations to the Secretary of Interior, which would then forward the recommendation to Congress.

As part of the study, the NPS will host two public information meetings to provide members of the public an opportunity to learn about the study process, ask questions, speak with national park staff, and share information for the study and about West Hunter Street Baptist Church. Participants will be presented with a series of questions to solicit comment for the study. The meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

**Thursday  
February 2nd, 2017**  
6:00 – 8:00 PM  
Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library  
Exhibition Hall  
111 James P. Brawley Drive  
Atlanta, GA 30314

**Thursday  
February 9th, 2017**  
6:00 – 8:00 PM  
West Hunter Street Baptist Church  
Dining Hall  
1040 Ralph D. Abernathy Blvd., SW.  
Atlanta, GA 30310

*Plan on attending one of the meetings? Want to get more information or submit a comment?  
Go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/WestHunterBaptistStudy>  
Or email us at [Keilah\\_Spann@nps.gov](mailto:Keilah_Spann@nps.gov)*

## ***West Hunter Street Baptist Church***

Founded in 1881 as Mount Calvary Baptist Church, the congregation moved in 1906 to a Gothic Revival stone sanctuary on West Hunter Street, in Atlanta, GA. Throughout the modern civil rights movement, the church served as a headquarters for many civil rights workers and organizations, was the site of important leadership meetings, and doubled as a school for nonviolent protest during initiatives such as the Voter Education Project and the Freedom Summer of 1964. It was also a spiritual refuge for the men and women who devoted their lives to the cause.

During the Civil Rights Movement church leaders such as Rev. A. Franklin Fisher were actively engaged in activism and community organizing. Rev. Fisher along with several other pastors including Dr. Borders (Wheat Street Baptist Church) and the elder Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. (Ebenezer Baptist Church) organized a desegregation initiative that integrated Atlanta's public transportation. Fisher also reconstructed the sanctuary, making additions such as the floral stain glass window that has come to symbolize the historic building.



*Photo courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.*



*Photo courtesy of the Abernathy family,  
Donzaleigh Abernathy*

Following Fisher's death in 1960, the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy Sr. took over as pastor of West Hunter. Rev. Abernathy, a leader of the modern Civil Rights Movement and confidant of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., served as pastor of the church from 1961 until his death in 1990. Under Rev. Abernathy's leadership the church membership rose to over 1,000 congregants. During his tenure the church's financial operations were restructured resulting in the acquisition of new properties, including a gymnasium and senior housing facility, and relocation to the current sanctuary on 1040 Ralph D. Abernathy Blvd., SW in 1973.

While pastoring West Hunter, Abernathy continued his work as a civil right activist. Subsequent to Dr. King's passing in 1968 Abernathy took over as President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and carried forth national initiatives such as Operation Breadbasket and the Poor People's Campaign. Throughout his life Abernathy organized economic justice and labor initiatives as well as served as a peace negotiator during times of national social conflict (i.e. 1973 siege at Wounded Knee).



*Photo courtesy of the Atlanta  
History Center.*

Following the congregation's relocation in 1973, the building continued to be used as a site for community development and civil rights programs. Civil rights leader Hosea Williams used the site as the home office for his Feed the Hungry Program during the late 1970s. Today the site is owned and maintained by the Ralph D. Abernathy III, Inc. a non-profit developed to preserve the cultural history of the site and surrounding community, and the legacy of Rev. Abernathy.

# What is a *Special Resource Study*?

The National Park Service was created to conserve unimpaired outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The treasures in this system have been set aside by the American people to protect, preserve, and share our nation's greatest stories. Usually a new unit of the national park system is established by an act of Congress. Before passing such legislation, Congress requires reliable information about the quality of resources in the area under consideration and the potential for visitor enjoyment and efficient management. The NPS collects this information and reports its findings to Congress through special resource studies. This process ensures that only those candidate sites that are most deserving of designation are included within the national park system.



*Photo courtesy of the Abernathy family, Donzaleigh Abernathy.*

## ***Special Resource Study Criteria***

The 1998 National Parks Omnibus Management Act (54 U.S. Code 100507) established the process for identifying and authorizing studies of new national park units. Under the law an area must meet all of the following criteria to be recommended as an addition to the national park system:

- Contain nationally significant natural and/or cultural resources. National significance will be evaluated using National Historic Landmark criteria which include: events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns in US history, sites associated with the lives of persons nationally significant to US history; sites that represent some great idea/ideal of the American people; and sites embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type.
- Represent a natural or cultural resource that is not already adequately represented in the national park system or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land-managing entity.
- Must be (1) of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure long-term protection of the resources and visitor enjoyment, and (2) capable of efficient administration by the NPS at a reasonable cost; important feasibility factors include landownership, acquisition costs, life cycle maintenance costs, access, threats to the resource, and staff or development requirements.
- Require direct NPS management that is clearly superior to other management approaches.



*Photo courtesy of the Abernathy family, Donzaleigh Abernathy.*

## Special Resource Study Process

An NPS team has been assembled to prepare the West Hunter Street Baptist Church Special Resource Study. This team will evaluate the church and the block on which it is located to determine if the site does or does not meet the four study criteria previously outlined. Upon conclusion of the study process, the study findings would then be submitted to the NPS Director and the Secretary of the Interior, who in turn, would transmit the report and a recommendation to Congress. It would then be up to Congress to take action on legislation establishing a new unit of the national park system.

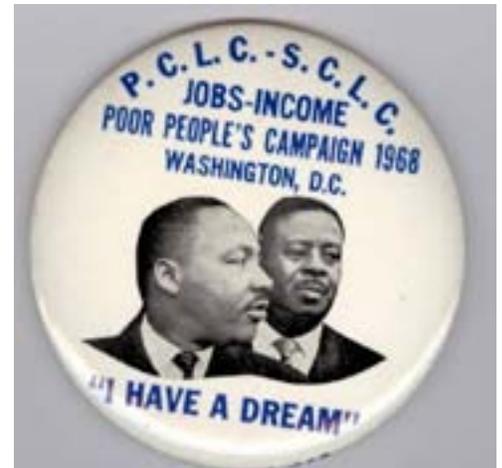
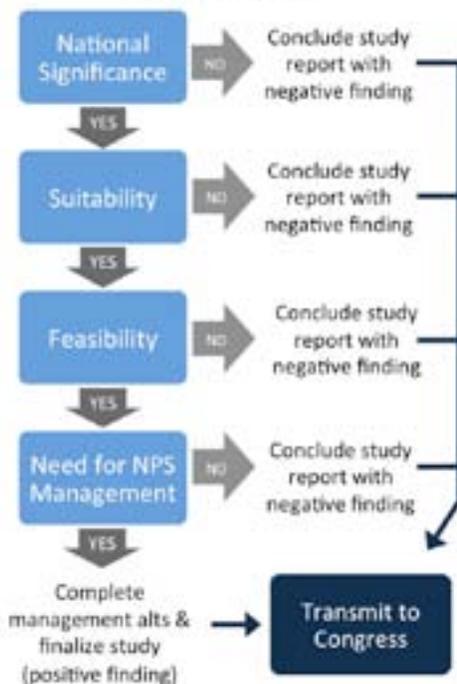


Photo courtesy of the Abernathy family, Donzaleigh Abernathy.

## Public Meeting and Information Questions

1. The West Hunter Baptist Church building is one of the last remaining churches in the Atlanta University National Register District. What are some initiatives that can be undertaken to recognize the history of the site? (i.e. website, audio tour of the area, restoration projects)
2. African American churches have historically been at the center of local community development and the fight for civil rights. In your opinion, is West Hunter Street Baptist Church illustrative of this history? Is the Church's impact on a national, regional, or local scale; and why?

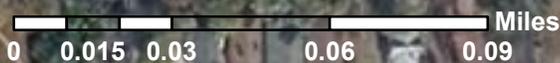
## SRS Completion Pathways



3. In your opinion, how has West Hunter Street Baptist Church's role and history in civil rights and community organizing contributed to the modern civil rights movement?

4. Rev. Dr. Ralph D. Abernathy, Sr., Julian Bond, and Rev. Hosea Williams were civil rights leaders who utilized West Hunter Street Baptist Church as a headquarters to implement multiple civil and human rights programs. In what ways do you feel these individuals influenced civil rights at the national level? What are some of the more tangible aspects of their legacies today?

5. Are there other places within the described study boundary that were in existence and are important to the civil rights story of West Hunter Street Baptist Church?



*\*-The focus of the study is the sanctuary on 775 Martin Luther King Blvd, NW, the former West Hunter Street Baptist Church building.*

*National Park Service | Department of the Interior*



For more information or to submit comments please see:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/WestHunterBaptistStudy>

Or, submit comments through the mail to:

West Hunter Baptist Church Special Resource Study  
Attn: Keilah Spann  
National Park Service – Southeast Regional Office  
100 Alabama Street, SW.  
Atlanta, GA 30303

**Comments received by March 31st, 2017** will be most helpful in preparing the study. Thank you for your interest in the Special Resource Study for West Hunter Street Baptist Church.