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University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University

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December 17, 2009

Gospel Festival Celebrates 20th Anniversary

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – This year marks the 20th anniversary of the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Gospel Festival. It will be held Monday, Jan. 18 from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall (1210 Park St., Bloomington). The event, free and open to the public, honors the birth of civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr.

This year's celebration will include performances by the United Community Gospel Singers Mass Choir, Gayles Memorial Mass Choir (Aurora, IL) Fantastic Jones Family (Springfield, Ill.), Union Baptist Church Adult Choir, Integrity Singers (Peoria, Ill.), Illinois Wesleyan Chapel Gospel Choir, Illinois State Interdenominational Youth Choir, Mt. Pisgah Sunbeam Choir, Loving Missionary Baptist Choir, JAM Production Choir, Boys and Girls Club Choir, Crosswinds Praise Dance Team, The Hour of Deliverance Youth Choir, the City of Refuge Adult Choir, Mt Pisgah Praise Dancers, and Mt. Pisgah Adult Choir.

Bloomington Mayor Steve Stockton and Illinois Wesleyan President Richard F. Wilson will bring welcome to the festival. Former Bloomington Mayor Jesse Smart and others will offer remembrances of the first festival.

Started in 1991 by Corine Sims as a joint effort with Illinois Wesleyan University and the United Community Gospel Singers, the Gospel Festival found a fitting home at Illinois Wesleyan, where King spoke twice, once in 1961 before his famous March on Washington speech, and again in 1966, after he had become the youngest man to win a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts of non-violent protest in the Civil Rights Movement.

Barbara Sims Malone, daughter of Corine Sims and the Rev. James E. Sims, said she remembered how her mother explained the idea of the festival. "She was so excited as she sat there and told us her plan to honor Dr. King, Jr. in a gospel festival of song and dance," said Malone.

For additional information on the Gospel Festival, contact Carl Teichman at 309-556-3429 or cteich@iwu.edu.