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Dec. 16, 1999

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Thomas N. Todd Chicago Civil-Rights Attorney to Address 10th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Gospel Festival at IWU

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—Civil-rights attorney Thomas N. Todd, who was the first full-time black professor at Northwestern University's School of Law (1970-74), will headline the 10th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday Gospel Festival at Illinois Wesleyan University next month.

Todd will deliver the festival's keynote address on Saturday, Jan. 15, 2000, at 5 p.m. in the Main Lounge of IWU's Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University Ave., Bloomington.

Tickets for Todd's address and the annual fellowship dinner that will follow his presentation are \$10 for adults, \$8.50 for students, and \$4 for children under age 12. Tickets may be purchased at the Main Desk, IWU Memorial Student Center or by calling Corine Sims at 309/828-4602.

Gospel Festival, Jan. 17, 2000

IWU will cap the National Holiday marking the birth of slain civil-rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with a seven-hour gospel festival, beginning at 2 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 17, in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall (IWU's School of Music), 303 E. University Ave., Bloomington.

Jack Porter, who came to Bloomington from Chicago in 1963 as pastor of the Western Avenue Presbyterian Church, will address the Jan. 17 gospel festival around 3 p.m. Bloomington honored Porter in 1994 with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Human Relations Award.

The gospel festival is open to the public, free of charge.

The Jan. 15 and Jan. 17 events are co-sponsored by IWU and the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, a nonprofit organization.

Thomas N. Todd

Todd has held many positions reflecting his interest in civil rights. He was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Chicago Chapter (1971). SCLC is the organization once headed by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among Todd's other posts have been executive vice president of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity), an organization founded and headed by the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and he acted as president of Operation PUSH from 1983-84.

Todd has handled many civil-rights cases involving education, housing, police misconduct, employment discrimination, and reapportionment.

He is licensed to practice law before the U.S. Supreme Court, Supreme Courts of Illinois and Louisiana, and the U.S. Court of Military Appeals.

A native of Demopolis, Ala., Todd received a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Southern University in Baton Rouge, La. He attended Southern University's School of Law, graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1963.

Todd has received honorary doctorates from Grambling State University (1987), Syracuse University (1990), Wilberforce University (1993), and Talladega College (1998).

He has written articles published in Dollars and Sense Magazine, The Southern University Law Review, and the National School Board News.

Todd has spoken to organizations throughout the United States, Africa, Mexico, and the Bahamas, oftentimes discussing the law, civil rights, and education. He also has conducted affirmative-action seminars for various corporations. Todd is the recipient of more than 400 awards and honors.

He is married to Janis Roberts and has two children: Tamara Nicole and Traci Neuborne.
Jack Porter

Porter first heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speak at Oberlin College shortly after the 1956 Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott, which many credit with launching the civil rights movement. Subsequently, he read King's book about the boycott, "Stride Toward Freedom."

In 1960-62, Porter studied in India, where he became familiar with the work of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violent struggle and met some of Gandhi's colleagues in the movement to oust British rule from India. King also was greatly influenced by Gandhi's teachings.

"The civil rights movement in the South inspired greater consciousness of injustice in Bloomington-Normal and more energetic civil rights work," according to a Porter biography. "Porter and others formed a civil rights group called US, which publicly confronted community issues, particularly racism and poverty."

In 1968, Porter became director of the Community for Social Action, a group attempting to organize within the white community to combat racism, poverty, the war in Vietnam, and other injustices. That group sent Porter to law school at the University of Illinois in 1975 in a move to help the Community for Social Action reach its goals.

Porter became a staff attorney in 1978 with Bloomington's Prairie State Legal Services, a legal aid office representing low-income and elderly persons in civil matters, particularly issues involving domestic violence, evictions, government programs such as Supplemental Security Income and jobless compensation, and consumer matters. In 1986, he became managing attorney in the Bloomington office, a post from which he retired in 1998.

Since then, Porter has become involved in the Central Illinois Organizing Project, a faith-based attempt to organize Central Illinois congregations and others around issues of social justice, including bank lending practices.

The Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church asked Porter in 1994 to join other ministers from around the country for a week in Hattiesburg, Miss., to support voter registration for African-Americans in that area. He participated in the Freedom Summer activities of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which established an alternative process of "registration" and political education for black citizens excluded from the official process. Similarly, others from Bloomington-Normal—black and white—traveled to Mississippi and Alabama to support the right to vote of African-Americans and returned to this community to share their experiences and to host civil rights workers who came here to seek support.

He also has become co-chair of the Minority Advocacy Council, a group concerned with helping citizens obtain effective remedies for police abuse.

Among Porter's other activities are the First Presbyterian Church of Normal, the Bloomington-Normal interreligious initiative, the Vladimir/Canterbury Sister City Association, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Gospel Festival

Corine Sims of Bloomington launched the gospel festival in 1991 as a way to perpetuate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy. 2000 marks the 10th time Illinois Wesleyan has cosponsored the event.

The gospel festival is expected to attract numerous choirs, as well as soloists, singers, and dancers. Area elementary and junior high school students will receive awards for outstanding work in art, speech, and essay writing on themes associated with Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among Chicago-area choirs slated to perform are Malcolm Williams and the Voices of Great Faith and Lonnie Hunter and the Voices of St. Mark.

Malcolm Williams and the Voices of Great Faith was organized in 1994 by Gregory Payton. "Great Faith" consists of 30 energetic, excited, spirit-filled voices.

Williams' musical career began as a youngster, when he began directing the junior choir at his family's church. He was the only male in the 60-voice choir.

Williams is known for his a cappellas, spirituals, and hymns.

As a college student, Williams conducted the Northern Black Choir, a collegiate gospel group. During college, he also was assistant director of Tyscot recording artist, Mark Hubbard and the United Voices. Williams serves as co-producer and songwriter on their album, "He's Up There."

The choir has begun several outreach ministries, including street witnessing, feeding the homeless, and visiting shut-in facilities.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and IWU

When Martin Luther King, Jr., visited Illinois Wesleyan in 1961, he addressed an audience of more than 500 at the annual Religious Emphasis Banquet. He also met with students in their classes and more informally as part of meal functions.

King returned to IWU four and one-half years later as a national leader of the civil-rights movement and the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize; he donated the honor, valued at \$54,600, to the civil-rights movement.

In 1966, he addressed an audience of more than 3,000 at the Fred Young Fieldhouse, declaring: "We must build a greater America. It cannot be built on bombs. It cannot be built on riots. We must work to change the climate that makes for bitterness that causes individuals to turn to these types of self-destruction."

Three of King's children--Yolanda, Martin III, and Bernice--have brought their father's message of non-violent social change, social justice, and brotherhood to IWU. Vernon King, the slain civil-rights leader's nephew, twice addressed the Gospel Festival.

King and the Civil-Rights Movement

King first caught the nation's attention in 1956, when at the age of 27 he organized a boycott of the public transportation system in Montgomery, Ala., as a protest against racial discrimination.

King—the long-time champion of civil rights, school desegregation, and non-violent social change—is perhaps best remembered for the Aug. 28, 1963, Freedom March on Washington, D.C., which brought about 250,000 participants and much of the civil-rights movement's leadership to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. King in his now-famous "I have a dream" speech, said, "I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . .

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character . . . "

King was assassinated at age 39 by a sniper in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968, sparking civil unrest in many cities. He was in Memphis to support a sanitation workers' strike. His April 9 funeral in Atlanta was attended by an estimated 75,000 people. One week after he was gunned down, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into federal law the 1968 Civil Rights Act.

On March 10, 1969, James Earl Ray was convicted of assassinating King and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

President Ronald Reagan signed legislation Nov. 2, 1983, establishing a federal holiday on the third Monday of January to honor the assassinated civil-rights leader. King was the first person honored with a federal holiday since George Washington's birthday was so designated.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine ranks Illinois Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's 1,600 private colleges in providing a high-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton University and Dartmouth College.

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