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January 4, 2002

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12th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival at IWU

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--In honor of the birth of slain civil-rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the 12th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival will be held on Monday, Jan. 21.

Founded by the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, a nonprofit organization and co-sponsored with Illinois Wesleyan University, the festival will take place from 2-9 p.m. in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall, 303 E. University Ave., Bloomington. The program is open to the public, free of charge.

Diane McCauley, who is an independent educational consultant to school districts and institutions of higher education across the country and a board member of the District 87 Public Schools, will be the guest speaker at the gospel festival at approximately 3:30 p.m.

Corine Sims of Bloomington launched the gospel festival in 1991 as a way to continue Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy. The festival is expected to attract numerous choirs, soloists, singers and dancers. Also, elementary and junior high school students will receive awards for outstanding work in art, speech, and essay writing on themes associated with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among the choirs scheduled to appear on the program will be: The Fantastic Jones Family from Springfield, De Andre Patterson and The Progressive Radio Choir from Bolingbrook, Ill., The Voices of Great Faith Choir from Chicago, and Totally Focused from Bloomington and Chicago.

King, who 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, visited Illinois Wesleyan on Feb. 14, 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 at meal times.

King returned to Illinois Wesleyan four and one-half years later as a national leader of the civil-rights movement and the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. On Feb. 10, 1966, King addressed an audience of more than 3,000 at the Fred Young Fieldhouse, where he told the audience, "We must work to change the climate that makes for bitterness that causes individuals to turn to these types of self-destruction."

King was assassinated at age 39 by a sniper in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. 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.

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 Illinois Wesleyan, and King's nephew, Vernon King, has twice addressed the Gospel Festival.