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15th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival Scheduled at IWU
January 7, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.-On Monday, Jan. 17, from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m., the 15th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival will be held on the campus of Illinois Wesleyan University, in Presser Hall of Westbrook Auditorium, 1210 Park St., Bloomington.

The event in honor of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, the slain civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, is free and open to the public.

Founded by the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington and Normal and co-sponsored with Illinois Wesleyan University, the gospel festival was launched in 1991 by Corine Sims of Bloomington as a way to continue King's legacy. Several choirs, soloists, singers and dancers will perform, and elementary school students will receive awards for outstanding work in art on themes associated with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among the choirs scheduled to appear on the program will be Malcolm Williams and the Voices of Great Faith from Chicago, Gayles Memorial Mass Choir from Aurora, and The Fantastic Jones Family from Springfield.

At the age of 27, King organized a boycott of the public transportation system in Montgomery, Ala., as a protest against racial discrimination. He visited Illinois Wesleyan on Feb. 14, 1961, where 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 time.

Four and one-half years later on Feb. 10, 1966, King made a return trip to the University as a national leader of the civil-rights movement and the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. He addressed approximately 3,000 people at the Fred Young Field house, 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 in Memphis, Tenn., at the age of 39, on April 4, 1968. An estimated 75,000 people attended his April 9 funeral in Atlanta, Ga. 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. His nephew, Vernon King, has twice addressed the Gospel Festival.

For more information, contact the IWU Office of Multicultural Affairs at (309) 556-3412.