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Members of the Gayles Memorial Mass Choir Praise Team from Aurora, Ill., performed at last year's annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival Celebration at IWU.

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival Celebrates 17th Year

December 21, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Illinois Wesleyan University will host the 17th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival Celebration on Monday, Jan. 15, from 3-8 p.m. in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall (1210 Park St., Bloomington).

Free and open to the public, the gospel festival is in honor of the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

Founded by the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington and Normal, a non-profit organization, and cosponsored by Illinois Wesleyan, this event was launched in 1991 by Corine G. Sims, executive director of the United Community Gospel Singers as a way to continue King's legacy. Among the numerous choirs, soloists, singers and dancers will be the Fantastic Jones Family, Malcolm Williams and the Voices of Great Faith, Gayles Memorial Mass Choir and the New Direction Choir.

King first visited Illinois Wesleyan in February of 1961, where he addressed an audience of more than 500 people at the annual Religious Emphasis Banquet. During his visit, he also met with students during classes and more informally during meal times. He returned to the University campus five years later as a national leader of the Civil Rights Movement and as the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. More than 3,000 people heard him speak at the Fred Young Fieldhouse on Feb. 10, 1966.

King was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. He was 39 years of age. Approximately 75,000 people attended his funeral on April 9th in Atlanta, Ga. One week after his death, former President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1968 Civil Rights Act.

Three of King's children, Yolanda, Martin III, and Rev. Bernice King, have brought their father's message of non-violent social change, social justice and brotherhood to Illinois Wesleyan. His nephew, Vernon King, has addressed the Gospel Festival on two occasions.

For additional information, contact Sims at (309) 828-4602 or Carl Teichman, director of government and community relations at IWU, at (309) 556-3429.

Persons with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids, services or special arrangements for the festival can contact the University at (309) 556-3429.

[Click here](#) for information regarding other events commemorating Dr. Martin King, Jr. Day.

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