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Civil Rights Advocate The Rev. Joseph Lowery to Speak at Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Dinner

January 10, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The Rev. Joseph Lowery, internationally recognized for his prestigious five decade-long commitment to civil rights, will be the keynote speaker at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Dinner.

Co-sponsored by the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington and Normal and by Illinois Wesleyan University, the dinner will be held on Sunday, Jan. 28 at 5:00 p.m. in the Main Lounge of Memorial Center (104 University St., Bloomington). Lowery's speech will be broadcast online: [View the Webcast](#).

Working alongside King, Lowery co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, an organization dedicated to nonviolent conflict resolution, voter registration, and other initiatives in service of the black community. Open to all races, the SCLC is a nation-wide organization with a range of influence that has transcended national boundaries to support the international movement for human rights. Consistently over the years, Lowery has served in various leadership positions within the SCLC, including vice president from 1957 to 1967, chairman of the board from 1967 to 1977, and president and chief executive officer from 1977 until his retirement in 1998.



The Rev. Joseph Lowery

Ticket Information

Tickets for the dinner are \$12 for adults and \$6 for IWU students and children under 12, and are now on sale at the IWU Bookstore in Hansen Student Center (300 Beecher St., Bloomington). The Bookstore is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets for the event will not be sold at the door.

For tickets or group reservations, please contact Carl Teichman, IWU director of government and community relations at (309) 556-3429.

During the 1950s, Lowery served as the head of the Alabama Civic Affairs Association in Mobile, Ala. The organization worked toward the desegregation of public utilities, specifically the bus system. The state of Alabama sued Lowery and several of his colleagues on charges of libel, seizing their property. In the landmark libel case, *Sullivan v. New York Times, Abernathy, Lowery, Shuttlesworth, and Seay*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the ministers, establishing freedom of reporting in civil rights cases in the South.

In 1965, King named Lowery the chairman of the delegation of the Selma to Montgomery March to confront then Gov. George Wallace, which, after the "Bloody Sunday" attacks of the peaceful protestors by police officers, helped secure the passage of the Voting Rights Act. A 25-year extension of the provisions of that act went into law when, in 1982, Lowery led another historic march, this one to free two women falsely convicted of voter fraud.

Earning degrees from A&M University, Knoxville College, Payne Theological Seminary, and the Chicago Ecumenical Institute, Lowery served as a United Methodist pastor in Alabama and Georgia for 45 years. For 18 years, he was the pastor at Central Church, Atlanta's oldest predominantly African American United Methodist church. Membership soared and the church was able to construct Central Methodist Gardens, a 240-unit housing development for low- and moderate-income families.

Lowery is also the co-founder, chairman emeritus, and third president of the Black Leadership Forum (BLF), a coalition of national black advocate groups. The BLF has been working for the empowerment and advancement of African Americans in social, economic, and political life since 1977. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) distinguished Lowery as the "dean of the civil rights movement" when he received their lifetime achievement award in 1997.

Lowery is further distinguished by multiple honorary doctorates he has received from universities including Morehouse College, Clark-Atlanta University, Alabama State, and Beloit University. Additionally, Clark-Atlanta University established the Joseph E. Lowery Institute for Justice & Human Rights in 2001 and the Atlanta Board of Education instituted the Joseph E. Lowery Lecture series on Civic Participation. Recently, the eulogies he delivered at the funerals of Rosa Parks on Nov. 2, 2005 and Coretta Scott King on Feb. 7, 2006 were praised as examples of "speaking truth to power."

Since his retirement, Lowery has remained dedicated to civil rights through his strong support of affirmative action, election reform, criminal justice reform, voter empowerment, and economic justice. As a speaker, Lowery is in high demand at universities across the country. This comes as no surprise to Paul Bushnell, professor of history, who has been teaching a course on the civil rights movement at Illinois Wesleyan since the late 1960s. "Rev. Lowery is truly the voice of experience," Bushnell says. "It will be very interesting to hear his views on the present state of the movement."

[Click here](#) for information on other events honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. at Illinois Wesleyan.

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