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January 7, 1993

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Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday

Bernice King to Speak at Illinois Wesleyan on Jan. 15

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The Rev. Bernice Albertine King, daughter of the late civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., will speak at Illinois Wesleyan University on Jan. 15--the 64th anniversary of her father's birth--as part of the Third Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival.

Rev. King's speech is the first of three events on Jan. 15 and Jan. 18, marking the national holiday that commemorates her father's birth, sponsored by IWU and the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, Ill., a non-profit organization.

Rev. King's address, which will assess the state of civil rights in the United States, is slated for 5:30 p.m. in Westbrook Auditorium of IWU's Memorial Student Center. It will be followed at 7 p.m. by a fellowship dinner in the Main Lounge of IWU's Memorial Student Center.

Tickets for Rev. King's speech and the fellowship dinner are \$10 for adults, \$7 for college students, and \$3 for children under age 12. To purchase tickets, call Corine Sims, executive director of the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, at 309/828-4602 or 309/828-9131.

"The warm reception Bernice King received last year from the university and the Bloomington-Normal community," explained Joy Carew, director of IWU's minority services, "played a big part in her decision to return to IWU this year.

"I remember Mrs. Sims telling me that after her speech last year, when Mrs. Sims was hugging Rev. Bernice King, and told her, 'I love you,' Rev. King responded by saying, 'Thank you. Send for me and I'll come back.'"

The third annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival, founded by the United Community Gospel Singers and co-sponsored by IWU, is scheduled for 2-8 p.m. on Jan. 18 in IWU's Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall. The Gospel Festival, which will take place on the Martin Luther King national holiday, is open to the public; admission is free.

About Bernice Albertine King

Bernice King, the fourth and youngest child of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Coretta Scott King, was born March 28, 1963, in Atlanta, Ga. She graduated from Atlanta's Spelman College in 1985, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, with a concentration in pre-law. As vice president of Spelman's Student Government Association, she was active in voter registration activities.

Bernice King earned doctor of law and master of divinity degrees at Emory University in 1990. As a theology student, she was a ministerial intern at the Georgia Retardation Center and the Support to Employment Program of Atlanta, which meets the needs of residents of public housing projects. She also has served as a chaplain at the Georgia Baptist Medical Center, where she completed her Clinical Pastoral Education. King was ordained into the Christian ministry in 1990.

She has served as a congressional intern in Washington, D.C., for U.S. Rep. Katie Hall of Indiana and as a counselor intern at the Fulton County (Ga.) Juvenile Detention Center.

Bernice King is chairperson the National Advisory Committee for the National King Week College and University Student Conference on Kingian Nonviolence, which is sponsored by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission.

She hopes to integrate her legal, psychological, and theological training by incorporating pastoral counseling into a juvenile prison ministry. She is working with ministers involved in Nurturance (AMEN), which is an organization devoted to the use of a holistic ministry to address the needs of juvenile delinquents.

Bernice King is the third member of the King family to speak at Wesleyan. Her father spoke on campus in 1961 and 1966, while her brother, Martin III, spoke at IWU in 1991.

She visited Illinois Wesleyan last January, as part of festivities on the King national holiday weekend.

In her 1992 address, Bernice King said IWU "continues to lift up and recognize the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the proponent of non-violence for this country and probably for the world now. And I certainly am

proud of all of you for taking this stance and continuing to keep his dream alive in the way in which you celebrate his birthday every year, because we're told that if we do not remember our past, we are bound to repeat it."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and IWU

When Dr. 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.

Dr. 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.

Dr. 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.

Dr. King--a longtime 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 200,000 participants and much of the civil rights movement's leadership to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Dr. 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 one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"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 . . . "

Dr. 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 the 1968 Civil Rights Act into federal law. On March 10, 1969, James Earl Ray was convicted of assassinating Dr. 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 slain civil rights leader. Dr. King was the first person honored with a federal holiday since George Washington's birthday was so designated.

The Fellowship Dinner

The theme of the fellowship dinner is "Where Do We Go from Here?"

Among those on the fellowship dinner program are: Jesse Smart, mayor, City of Bloomington; the Rev. Frank McSwain of the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal; Lloyd M. Bertholf, former IWU president; and Minor Myers, jr., IWU president.

The fellowship dinner is expected to draw wide community participation.

Shuttle van services will be available for senior citizens and others needing transportation assistance from the Presser Hall site of Rev. King's speech and the IWU Memorial Student Center where the fellowship dinner will be held.

The Gospel Festival

Mrs. Corine Sims launched the Gospel Festival in 1991 as a way to perpetuate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 's legacy. This is the third time that Illinois Wesleyan has co-sponsored the event with the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal.

The Gospel Festival is expected to attract about 30 churches and choirs from the Twin Cities, Aurora, Chicago, and elsewhere. Area elementary and junior high school students will receive awards for outstanding work in art, speech, and essay writing on themes associated with Dr. King.

Editor's Note: For more information about Bernice King's appearance at IWU and the Gospel Festival, call IWU Public Relations-News Services at 309/556-3181.