



Winter 1-12-1993

Honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. - Gospel Festival Set for Jan. 18 at Illinois Wesleyan

Bob Aaron
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "Honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. - Gospel Festival Set for Jan. 18 at Illinois Wesleyan" (1993). *News and Events*. 6158.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/6158>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

January 12, 1993

Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3203

Honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.

Gospel Festival Set for Jan. 18 at Illinois Wesleyan

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The third annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival, founded by the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal and co-sponsored by Illinois Wesleyan University, will take place Jan. 18 on the national holiday honoring the slain civil rights leader.

The Gospel Festival, which is open to the public with no admission fee, will feature church choirs and soloists from Bloomington-Normal, Chicago, and elsewhere in a six-hour inspirational program honoring the memory and accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King, the human rights advocate and 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner who was assassinated in 1968.

Keynote and Other Speakers

Silas Purnell, director of the Chicago-based Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Educational Services Division, will be the Gospel Festival's keynote speaker. Since 1967, when he launched the educational and counseling service for the black community, Purnell has successfully placed black students in colleges throughout the United States. In 1991 alone, Purnell and his staff interviewed and counseled more than 5,800 students, assisting about 2,500 to enroll in colleges and universities.

Among other speakers on the Gospel Festival program are Normal Mayor Paul Harmon; the Rev. James E. Sims, Sr. of the Second Baptist Church in Streator, Ill.; the Rev. Luther McSwain of the Sunlight Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago; the Rev. Spencer Gibson, Jr. of the Center of Hope Church in Normal; and IWU President Minor Myers, jr.

Gospel Festival Background

The Gospel Festival--which was founded in 1990 by Mrs. Corine Sims, who is executive director of the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal--will take place in Westbrook Auditorium in IWU's Presser Hall, 303 E. University Street, Bloomington.

"The success of the Gospel Festival is a tribute to Bloomington-Normal's commitment to keeping alive Martin Luther King's memory," said Joy Carew, director of IWU's minority services. "The lessons Dr. King taught--a commitment

Chgo
Cent. P.C.
Locals
Minority
Ed. Editors

to civil rights and non-violent social change--are just as valuable and important today as they were 25 years ago."

Silas Purnell Profiled

Purnell left a career as a district manager for the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. in Chicago 25 years ago to begin the educational counseling service. For the first year, he worked without pay to put the program on its feet and operated out of a basement office in a housing project on Chicago's south side.

Over the years, Purnell has established working relationships with more than 200 educational institutions (he's worked with IWU since the late 1960's) to assist black and other minority students, as well as non-minority students, to gain admission to public and private, historically black and predominantly white, large and small colleges and universities.

"Our students," Purnell said, "are doing some of everything--medicine, dentistry, engineering, and law--and many of them came right out of the projects."

Purnell has a strong faith in education, noting, "Education gets kids off the street. Education is the key to all our problems. It helps solve problems like housing, unemployment, teen pregnancy, and crime. But kids need money to stay in school--and many young people who want to go to school don't think it's possible since they don't have money."

Purnell's office is in the basement of the Dearborn Homes housing project, a complex of more than 10 mid-rise apartment buildings that house about 800 families, just a few blocks from where he was born in 1923. Asked why he works in a neighborhood known for its high crime rate and widespread poverty, Purnell says it's because "that's where the people are."

Purnell was honored last October during Homecoming festivities by IWU's 300-member Minority Alumni Network.

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.

Other Program Highlights and Participants

Among other Gospel Festival program highlights are a slide and audio presentation of Dr. King's 1966 visit to IWU; a poetry reading; award presentations to Bloomington-Normal schoolchildren who participated in the "I Have a Dream" speech contest, an art contest, and the "My Dream for the World" essay contest.

Several churches and choirs are participating in the Gospel Festival: Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, Rev. Frank McSwain, pastor, Bloomington; Triumphant Church, Rev. Randy Mactin, pastor, Bloomington; Loving Baptist Church, Rev. James Hines, pastor, Bloomington; Christian Life Center, Rev. Daniel Marshall, pastor, Bloomington; Sunlight Missionary Baptist Church, Rev. Luther J. McSwain, pastor, Chicago; New Hope Baptist Church, Rev. Walter Banks, pastor, Bloomington; Wayman A.M.E. Church, Rev. Robert Harvey, pastor, Bloomington; City of Refuge Church, Rev. Andrew Bennett, pastor, Bloomington; Christ Temple Pentecostal, Elder Smith, pastor, Bloomington; Tiurpant Chorale Choir and Treasures Choir, Don McNeal, director, Bloomington and Normal; Center of Hope Church, Rev. Spencer Gibson, Jr., pastor, Bloomington; Agape Gospel Singers Group, Robert Wilbun, manager, Normal; Union Baptist Church, Rev. P. Bush, pastor, and the Gospel Light Singers, James Johnson, director; City of Refuge Church, Don T. Calhoun, director, Drama Tribute to King, Bloomington; Rock of Praises Group and Perfected Praise, Micheal Beich, director, Bloomington; and the Neighbor-to-Neighbor Singing Group, Bloomington.

The National Holiday Gospel Festival directors are Shirley Boykin and James Joyner of Bloomington and Normal.

Members of the Board of Directors of the United Community Gospel Singers are Corine Sims, organizer; Antone Malone; Rev. James Hines; Rev. James E. Sims, Sr.; Yvonne C. Jones; Barbara Malone; Rev. Fred Harris; Rev. Frank McSwain; and Qullian Garrett.

Schools participating in the various Gospel Festival speech, essay, and art contests are Bloomington Junior High School, Bent School, Irving School, Lincoln School, Oakland School, Sheridan School, Stevenson School, Washington School, St. Mary Catholic School, Chiddix Junior High School, Parkside Junior High School, Brigham School, Carlock School (Carlock), Fairview School, Field School, Glenn School, Hoose School, Hudson School (Hudson); Northpointe School,

Oakdale School, Parkside School, Sugar Creek School, and Towanda School (Towanda).

Bernice King Speech, Fellowship Dinner

The Gospel Festival is the third IWU event slated for Jan. 15 and Jan. 18 to honor Dr. King over the national holiday weekend.

The Rev. Bernice Albertine King, his daughter, will deliver an address at IWU at 5:30 p.m. on Jan. 15 in Westbrook Auditorium in Presser Hall. A fellowship dinner, with the theme of "Where Do We Go from Here?", will follow at 7 p.m. 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. Tickets also are available for the address only at \$5. To purchase tickets, call Corine Sims, executive director of the University Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, at 309/828-4602 or 309/828-9131.

The speech by Rev. King, the fellowship dinner, and the Gospel Festival are co-sponsored by the United Community Gospel Singers of Bloomington-Normal, a non-profit organization, and IWU.

Editor's Note: For more information about the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday Gospel Festival, call: Mrs. Corine Sims, 309/828-9131 or 309/828-4602.