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Dr. King's Nonviolence Then and Now Theme of Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Community Celebration

Posted on: January 19th, 2014 by Rick Peterson

Poet, educator and civil rights activist Margaret Rozga discusses the connections between civil rights actions of the 1960s in Milwaukee and social justice activism today at the 23rd annual Martin Luther King Jr., celebration Monday, Jan. 20 at 6:30 p.m. in the Lawrence Memorial Chapel. The event is free and open to the public. A sign language interpreter will be present.



Margaret Rozga

Rozga will deliver the keynote address “Dr. King’s Nonviolence, Today’s Nonviolence” at the community event presented by Lawrence University and Toward Community: Unity in Diversity, with the support of The Post-Crescent, numerous Fox Valley organizations, churches, and individuals.

“In a world where actions speak louder than words, what you do is more important than what you say,” said Pa Lee Moua, Lawrence’s

assistant dean of students for multicultural affairs. “In one way or another, we will all make a contribution to society. For some it may be minimal, but for others it’s life changing. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is and will always be a hero, a legend, a man who will never be forgotten. His stance on nonviolence was crucial then and is especially crucial now as we move toward the future. Let’s honor and celebrate Dr. King by continuing his legacy through our actions toward each other and our community.”

“Your Actions Inspire Me Deeply”

Rozga’s message is inspired by a 1967 telegram the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King sent to Milwaukee Catholic priest James Groppi that began “Your actions inspire me deeply.” In her remarks, Rozga will reexamine those actions that inspired King, the underlying conditions that led the Milwaukee Youth Council of the NAACP and Fr. Groppi to take action and the ways those actions have been carried forward and continue to inspire young people and social justice advocates today.

“This year marks 45 years since Dr. King was assassinated and our community celebration is both an opportunity to remember his life and work and a challenge to everyone to continue his work today,” said Kathy Flores, chair of the MLK Planning Committee and diversity coordinator for the city of Appleton. “The daily news is filled with stories of injustice relating to race, ethnicity, LGBTQ rights, equality, housing, employment, immigration, poverty, education and others. Dr. King’s legacy for all of us is to continue to fight for equality today and always.”

“Margaret Rozga is an excellent example of someone who honors the memory of Dr. King through her work,” Flores added. “I’m confident she will inspire us to keep Dr. King’s dream alive.”

Professor Emerita of English at UW-Waukesha, Rozga participated

in freedom marches and was jailed for fighting for the rights of poor black children in Milwaukee in the 1960s. She chronicled her civil rights movement experiences in the play “March on Milwaukee: A Memoir of the Open Housing Protests.” Her 2009 book of poetry, “200 Nights and One Day,” recounts the history, commitment and passion of activists in Milwaukee who marched on behalf of justice and freedom in the 1960s.

Rozga was honored with the 2007 UW Colleges Chancellor’s award for outstanding achievement in recognition of her efforts to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Milwaukee’s open housing marches.

Honoring Diversity Efforts

The MLK celebration also will include the presentation of Toward Community’s annual Jane LaChapelle McCarty Unity in Diversity Award, which honors an area individual who has made great strides in bringing different people in the community together. Kamlesh Vara, a retired preschool teacher and volunteer with the Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center, received the award in 2013.

Four area students will be recognized as winners of the annual Martin Luther King essay contest and will read their winning entries.

The evening also will feature performances by local musicians Erica Hamilton, a 2007 Lawrence graduate, Tony Gonzalez, a member of Toward Community and the MLK Planning Committee, and the Appleton West High School Chamber Choir.