

Dream of Justice, Work for Justice, King Speaker Says

BY KATHY ROUTLIFFE - Evanston Review

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Dream big dreams of justice, the Rev. Walter Earl Fluker urged listeners Monday at Evanston's Second Baptist Church during a service commemorating the birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Go further, Fluker said, and question those in power to win and preserve justice for all.

"You must ask hard questions of power. How dare we celebrate the life of Martin Luther King Jr. and not question power," he asked his large audience. "Ask who makes the rules, who enforces the rules.

"Dare to dream until politicians pay attention ... dream until rich folk understand there is another part of the world."

Fluker's keynote message was echoed in shorter reflections by local legislators, including U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, and state Rep. Julie Hamos, D-18th.

Singers and entertainment by young dancers and drummers from the Soul Creations troupe brought attendees to their feet several times during the emotional service.

Fluker, born in Mississippi and raised in Chicago, is executive director of the Leadership Center. He is a professor of philosophy and religion at Atlanta's Morehouse College. He received his master of divinity degree from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, attended Northwestern University and Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. He holds a doctorate in philosophy from Boston University.

During the service he prompted shouts of approval and applause as he hammered home a message that Dr. King's struggles went far beyond those for civil rights and peace.

The slain Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was assassinated in 1968 at a Memphis motel, near the end of his life preached unpopular messages against the Vietnam war and economic injustice in America, Fluker said, adding that he would have done the same with today's war in Iraq.

"If you're not enraged by Iraq, then you don't understand Martin Luther King," he said. "It's not the sons and daughters of (President) George Bush who are fighting in Iraq. It's the sons and daughters of poor people ... and their lives are shattered in somebody else's land."

The Rev. Robert Thompson of Evanston's Lake Street Church said that in today's world, the commitment to peace that King sought continues to be tenuous: "Everybody talks about peace as a goal, but among the wielders of power, peace is practically nobody's business."

Schakowsky's message was similar. She said the United States was "wandering, or perhaps racing," in the wrong direction. She urged listeners to register to vote in both the March primary and the November general election.

Quoting Dr. King, Schakowsky said, "the battle is in our hands. We are still in the season of suffering. How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever."

George Mitchell, president of the Evanston-North Shore branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, told listeners that Dr. King spoke of God and of God's will, adding that Dr. King's life shows that success comes at a price.

People must be involved in school systems, "even if we're tired," Mitchell said, in order to make them better, and vote in elections "even if the results are already known and the weather is cold" in order to keep democracy vibrant.

Hamos said King would find continuing education, health and job disparities between black and white Americans if he were alive today, and learn that his hopes that racial prejudice would end had not come true.

"But he would also see this wonderful city of Evanston, where we work so hard to maintain diversity," she added.

Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin, D-13th, of Evanston, told listeners, "my prayer today is that we all work in this year to come to hold a mirror to our society."

State Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg, D-9th, likened Dr. King to Moses, leading people to the promised land but unable to enter it himself.

"Moses never had the pleasure of seeing the fruits of his labor. Neither did Dr. King. But that does not mean that those of us who are led do not remember."

The Rev. Karen Mosby-Avery of the Good News Church of Christ in Chicago reminded attendees that Dr. King's battles and successes had their roots in religious faith.

"What was it about Dr. Martin Luther King and that movement that we don't have now?" she asked. "They were people of faith. God's vision calls for justice and we have to have it because God says we have to. But we have to work for it.

"We must ask God to help us put the pieces back together."

And Fluker reminded his listeners, "This is not the time for celebration. This is not the time for rest. We have only crossed the ocean. Now we must cross the sea."