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## Bethel College News

### Bethel's MLK Day celebration to feature "lost recording," King colleague

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*by Melanie Zuercher*

NORTH NEWTON, KAN. – On April 4, 1967 – exactly one year before he was assassinated – Martin Luther King Jr. delivered one of his most controversial speeches to a meeting of Clergy and Laymen Concerned at the Riverside Church in New York City, calling the nation to account for what he saw as a misguided and deeply wrong war in Vietnam.

Vincent Harding drafted that speech, now known as "A Time to Break Silence" or "Beyond Vietnam." Harding will remember his friend and colleague Dr. King when he makes his third visit to Bethel College, this time for Bethel's annual celebration of the national King holiday, Monday, Jan. 18, 2010.

Harding first came to Bethel in 1984 to deliver the Menno Simons Lectures. In 1993, he was the commencement speaker. His presence at Bethel in 2010 will mark the 50-year anniversary of a speech King himself made in Memorial Hall, Jan. 21, 1960. The title of Harding's address is "More than nostalgia: Revisiting King in 2010."

Along with Harding's presentation in Memorial Hall on the evening of Jan. 18, Bethel's King Day celebration will highlight the recent discovery of a recording of King's 1960 speech, heretofore unknown.

Because of the 50th anniversary of the King speech, planning for the 2010 King holiday celebration has been going on for some time. When a note went out in Bethel's alumni e-newsletter asking if anyone had memorabilia from the 1960 speech, it jogged 1961 Bethel graduate Randy Harmison's memory.

Harmison, a Newton native now retired in Erie after 26 years working as an engineer for IBM, has been interested in technology all his life. As a teenage employee of Graber's Hardware, he bought a VM (Voice of Music) reel-to-reel tape recorder and used it to record whatever interested him, from radio broadcasts to live presentations. When Martin Luther King came to Bethel, Harmison, then a junior at the college, thought "this would be a good thing to archive," so he recorded it.

When he received the note from Bethel almost 50 years later, Harmison remembered the recording. He knew he had not taped over it or thrown it away, but wasn't sure where to find it. However, some rummaging in a storage barn on his property produced the tape, "sealed and intact." His old VM recorder was long gone, so he couldn't play the tape to make sure it was what the label said.

Harmison sent the tape to Sondra Bandy Koontz at Bethel, who consulted with Adam Akers in the audio-visual department and John Thiesen in the Mennonite Library and Archives. They determined that it was, in fact, a recording of Martin Luther King Jr. speaking at Bethel College on Jan. 21, 1960 – the only copy in any form known to exist of that speech.

In June, the tape went to The Cutting Corporation of Archival Sound Labs in Bethesda, Md., which specializes in restoring and preserving archival audio materials. By July, the contents had been transferred to CD. The speech will be played in Krehbiel Auditorium at 1 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 18, as the opening event in Bethel's 2010 King holiday celebration.

From 2-4 p.m., also in Krehbiel Auditorium, there will be a panel discussion with Bethel alumni who

attended the speech and/or participated in the Selma-to-Montgomery march in support of voting rights in 1965 or in the exchange program with Spelman College in Atlanta in the early '60s. At 4 p.m., there will be a dedication ceremony for a plaque to be installed in Memorial Hall commemorating the Jan. 20, 1960, speech.

At 6:30 p.m., Memorial Hall will reopen with a display of artwork by USD 373-Newton students and a reception for the artists in the lobby. James Pisano, Bethel assistant professor of music, along with Bob McCurdy, adjunct instructor of trumpet at Bethel, and Jerry Hahn, will perform jazz music during the reception.

The evening program, emceed by Sammie Simmons of Newton and featuring the Newton Community Children's Choir and Vincent Harding's keynote address, begins at 7 p.m.

Harding, a native of Harlem, graduated from the City College of New York and Columbia University and then served two years in the U.S. Army at Ft. Dix, N.J. During that time, he began to explore conscientious objector status. He moved to Chicago to pursue graduate studies at the University of Chicago, from which he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees.

While in Chicago, Harding joined the pastoral team at Woodlawn Mennonite Church. He also met Rosemarie Freeney, a Chicago native and graduate of Goshen (Ind.) College then working out of the Bethel Mennonite Church as an elementary school teacher and social worker. They were married in 1960 and a year later moved to Atlanta as representatives to the Southern Freedom Movement from Mennonite Central Committee.

Vincent Harding had first met Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King in 1958, when King told Harding he "ought to come down here and work with us." In Atlanta, the Hardings opened Mennonite House at 540 Houston Street (just around the corner from the King family), which was home to numerous Mennonite volunteers over the next several years and a Southern Freedom Movement gathering place. In 1964, the Hardings moved back to Chicago for a "sabbatical" year, and lived at Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston, Ill.

Harding has taught at Spelman College, at Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania, both in Philadelphia, and at Pendle Hill, a Quaker study and retreat center near Philadelphia. In 1981, the Hardings moved to Denver where Vincent took a position as professor of religion and social transformation at Iliff School of Theology, where he is now professor emeritus.

Harding was a founder and the first director of what is now the King Center in Atlanta, and he and Rosemarie served as advisors for the PBS series on the Civil Rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize*. In 1997, the Hardings founded the Gandhi-Hamer-King Center for the Study of Religion and Democratic Renewal (based at Iliff), now called the Veterans of Hope Project. Rosemarie died in 2004.

Harding is the author of several books, including *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (1981; reissued 1993) and *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero* (1996; reissued 2008).

Major funding for the Jan. 18 Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration events at Bethel College comes from the Schowalter Foundation and the Fransen Family Foundation, with additional support from the Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (KIPCOR) Peace Lecture Fund and Bethel College. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, call 316-284-5247 or 316-284-5227.

Bethel College is a four-year liberal arts college affiliated with Mennonite Church USA. Bethel is known for its academic excellence and was the only Kansas private college to be ranked in Forbes.com's listing of "America's Best Colleges" for 2009 and one of only two Kansas colleges listed in Colleges of Distinction 2008-09. For more information, see the Bethel Web site at [www.bethelks.edu](http://www.bethelks.edu).

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