

City parish honors King with special liturgy

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For Wayne Uter, the 1963 Poor People's March in Washington, D.C., led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was more than a just an historical event.

Uter was there. This year, Uter had a chance to remember the civil-rights leader and his words in a special way as he and his wife, Thelma, served as storytellers for the King Memorial Mass celebrated Jan. 13 at Immaculate Conception Church, 445 Douglass St.

"He was one of the greatest leaders of all time — certainly the greatest leader of his time," Uter said of King. "What he has said and done has gotten beyond any denomination."

The Mass was part of the the parish's black history celebration, a series of four liturgies marking its commemoration of Black History Month.

The Jan. 13 Mass included a homily by the Rev. Dr. James Evans, president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and a march through the church aisles to commemorate the 1963 civil-rights march led by King.

On Jan. 20, Jacquelyn Dobson, director of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries, is scheduled to preach at the parish. The Mass on Jan. 27 will be a special youth celebration with Shelly Clements — an eighth-grade teacher at Jefferson Middle School — scheduled to deliver the homily. On Feb. 3, Bishop Moses Anderson, auxiliary bishop of the Detroit archdiocese, will be the preacher and principal celebrant.

The theme of the four-week celebration is "Where do we go from here?" and was suggested by the parish's choir director, Paul Boutté.

According to Boutté, the theme came from a rhythm-and-blues song of that title. He wrote new words to the song to reflect the black experience in the United States.

The parish's various celebrations point out that blacks have made progress in terms of equality and freedom in the U.S., Boutté noted.

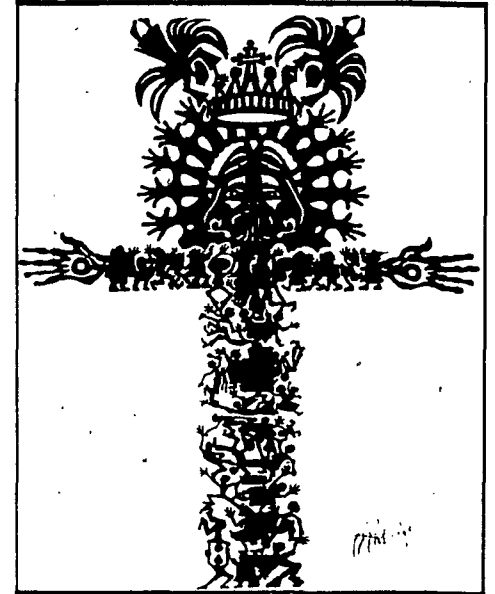
"There were times when we couldn't celebrate this way," Boutté explained. "It makes me feel good that the world is recognizing Dr. King not just as a black, but as a man who fought for peace."

Although blacks had come a long way in terms of civil rights, Boutté added, "We've still got a long way to go until we're equal."

Uter noted that the theme of the parish's celebration is also the title of a book written by King. The slain civil-rights



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Rev. Dr. James Evans, president of the Colgate Rochester Divinity School, preaches the homily during Immaculate Conception Church's Jan. 13 Mass commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Robert Strobridge
"The Bonding Tree," the symbol for this year's celebration, shows the body of Christ composed of interlocked human beings.

leader, he observed, serves as an inspiration for blacks today to continue their struggle for equality. Dr. King's birthday — which fell on Jan. 15, but this year will be officially celebrated on Jan. 21 — serves as a focus for celebration of black accomplishments, he acknowledged.

The music for the celebrations is a reflection of black culture, Boutté noted. Songs and hymns for the Jan. 13 service, for example, included the civil-rights standard "We Shall Overcome," as well as such gospel songs as "Precious Lord, and "We've Come This Far By Faith."

The liturgies incorporate other elements of black culture as well, Uter observed. Each of the preachers will be presented with a *kenta*, a strip of material similar to a priest's stole but of African design. Uter and his wife — who will serve as storytellers for all four of the liturgies — will wear dashikis, tunics modeled after African tribal garments.

The very role of the storyteller is, in itself, an aspect of African tradition, Uter noted.

"In just about all the tribes of Africa, they did have a storyteller," Uter explained. "They (the tribes) carried on the history of the past from generation to generation with the storyteller."

Slaves, likewise "carried on their heritage, the traditions, through storytelling," Uter observed.

At each of the liturgies, the storytellers will share information at each of the liturgies information about blacks' experiences in the United States, he said.

Upcoming events slated to celebrate black history

ROCHESTER — In addition to Immaculate Conception, a number of other parishes and schools in Rochester have presented or scheduled events to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and to mark Black History Month.

The *Catholic Courier* has been notified of these upcoming events:



File photo
A striking Atlanta sanitation worker knelt at the grave of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the second anniversary of King's April 4, 1968, assassination.

Friday, Jan. 18, 1:30 p.m., Nazareth Hall, 180 Raines Park: During an assembly, the newly formed seventh- and eighth-grade gospel group will perform, a folk tale will be enacted for pre-schoolers, and students from Nazareth Academy will present their original piece, "If We Believe."

Monday, Jan. 21, 12-1:30 p.m., Kearney Auditorium at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave.: The scheduled speaker for a King commemoration service is Mary Frances Barry, a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and a professor of American Social Thought at the University of Pennsylvania.

Earlier this week, the following events took place:

Sunday, Jan. 13, at St. Bridget's Church: Martin Luther King Scholarship award service. The program included music and presentation of awards to students from Rochester City and Monroe County school districts.

Tuesday, Jan. 15, at Nazareth Acad-

emy: A "Non-violence Assembly" to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday featured an address by Rochester City Councilwoman Maxine Childress Brown and two dramatic performances by Nazareth students. One of the performances, the student-created piece "If We Believe," reached the semifinals of the Martin Luther King Competition in Albany in December, 1990.

Tuesday, Jan. 15, at Colgate Rochester Divinity School: The Fifth-Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Lecture was presented by the Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Proctor, a visiting professor at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Dr. Proctor's topic was "The Right Man in the Right Place at the Right Time."

Tuesday, Jan. 15, at Rochester Institute of Technology: The event featured a speech by Dr. C.T. Vivian, a former member of Martin Luther King's personal executive staff.

— Lee Strong



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.