

FROM PAGE 1
FEATURE**King**

Continued from page 1

The St. Bridget's event was scheduled in conjunction with the national holiday honoring Dr. King. Established in 1986, Martin Luther King Day will be celebrated this year on Monday, Jan. 17.

The urgency voiced by these teenagers reflects a growing problem in American society. Although Dr. King led many civil-rights causes in the 1950s and 1960s, it's likely that his chief focus in 1994 would have been the increasing violence pervading Rochester and many other U.S. cities.

Dr. King, who would have turned 65 on Jan. 15, was himself a direct victim of violence: he was shot to death in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968.

In the quarter-century since his assassination, many positive results of Dr. King's efforts for African-Americans can be seen throughout society, said Dr. James H. Evans Jr.

"There's been a significant rise in the standard of living for the African-American middle class, and more black elected officials," noted Evans, who serves as president of the Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester. He is also co-chairperson of the 1994 Martin Luther King Jr. Greater Rochester Commission.

However, Evans added, many other aspects of African-Americans' lives are deteriorating. "There is much more that needs to be done. Today violence almost seems to be out of hand," said Evans, who also cited the plight of low-income blacks.

"I don't know if you'd call it a dream deferred. It certainly hasn't been realized," remarked Gaynelle Wethers, who serves as director of multicultural affairs at Nazareth College of Rochester, 4245 East Ave., Pittsford.

By drawing from personal experience, Wethers sees both positives and negatives when assessing Dr. King's hopes for a better future.

Growing up in a segregated black section of New Orleans in the 1960s, Wethers was once shot at while riding a bus through a white section of the city. The bullet barely missed her head.

"When we left home in the morning, we didn't know if we were coming home in the evening," she recalled.

Now, Wethers said that all the "whites only" signs she saw as a child have disappeared from New Orleans restaurants, restrooms and water fountains.

But while blatant racial segregation may be decreasing, Wethers noted that many problems affecting African-Americans stem from a prejudiced public-school system.

"We have to remember that the educational system in this country was not set up for black people," said Wethers. "Our educational system hasn't been changed enough. We cannot say that the white children in the suburbs should be more valuable than the black children in the city."

Eli Danzy, a parishioner at St. Brid-



CNS photo

Alberta (left) and Coretta Scott King joined Dr. King — who was recovering from stab wounds — at New York City Hospital in 1958.

get's in Rochester and Toni Danzy's father, believes that his late brother Curtis was one of these blacks who fell through the cracks.

"All his life he was in and out of jail. He was a street person. But when he needed help, society wasn't there to help him," Danzy observed. "We've got a lot of people in jail who shouldn't be there. We should have some rehabilitation centers. We have to somehow take responsibility."

Unemployment in the inner city also ultimately leads to violence, Danzy maintained.

"Drugs are being brought in since we don't have jobs. Then we're going to sell them, and then we're going to fight over our turf," said Danzy.

Wethers agreed that if young blacks were made to feel more welcome and useful in society, then their tendency toward unlawful behavior would decrease.

"They have the anger and the violence

because they're hurt, and they feel there's nothing out there for them," said Wethers. "If we can all make each person and each child a part of the dream, then I think the hope rises and the violence will diminish."

On the surface, it seems possible that many current problems affecting blacks would be reduced if a charismatic figure such as Dr. King was to emerge.

But don't expect any similarly styled leaders to turn up soon, warned Wethers.

"They could be out there, but would you want to step forth?" she asked. "The problems in our society are so overwhelming that nobody wants to step forth."

Eli Danzy feels that, unlike Dr. King, political leaders of the 1990s are influenced by ulterior motives.

"You had a man out there (Dr. King) who didn't care about the dollars. But you don't have one leader now who doesn't care about the bucks," Danzy charged.

Events scheduled to honor Martin Luther King

A number of activities commemorating Martin Luther King's birthday have been planned in the Rochester diocese. Listed below, in chronological order, is event information which has been furnished to the *Catholic Courier*.

Friday, Jan. 14 — Peace rally and prayer service at St. Bridget's Church, 175 St. Bridget's Drive, Rochester. The event, which begins at 7:30 p.m., is being hosted by Teens for Peace, a newly formed interdenominational group from the Rochester area. The event is free and open to the public.

Friday, Jan. 14 — City-wide cooking contest at Edgerton Community Center, 41 Backus St., Rochester, beginning at 7 p.m. The contest's theme is "Sharing Our Cultural Diversity — Foods From Around the World." The public is invited to attend at no charge.

Sunday, Jan. 16 — Community observance of Martin Luther King Day at All Saints Home Church of God in Christ, E. 5th St., Elmira. The interdenominational event begins at 5 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 16 — Rochester Mayor William A. Johnson Jr. is the scheduled guest speaker at the seventh annual Martin Luther King Scholarship Program, to be held at St. Bridget's

Church from 5-7 p.m. One senior scholarship will be presented to a St. Bridget's parishioner, as well as three ninth-grade "early recognition" awards.

Sunday, Jan. 16, and Monday, Jan. 17 — Nationally acclaimed performer Vinie Burrows has scheduled two one-woman shows. *Africa Fire!* will be presented on Jan. 16 at 2 p.m. at Writers & Books, 740 University Ave., Rochester. *Walk Together Children!* will be performed on Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. in the Nazareth College Arts Center's main auditorium, 4245 East Ave., Pittsford. For ticket information, call 716/473-2590.

Monday, Jan. 17 — St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave., Pittsford, will hold a program from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at the college's Rosina O'Doherty Kearney Auditorium. The keynote speaker will be the Rev. Lewis Stewart, president of the Congress of African American Unity Inc. The program is free and open to the public.

Sunday, Jan. 23 — Sterling Stuckey, professor of history at the University of California at Davis, will speak at the State University of New York College at Brockport. His lecture is titled "African Dance as a Means of Resistance to Slavery." The 7:30 p.m. program will take place in the New York

Evans pointed out that a single dynamic leader such as King may not even be the answer at this point in time.

"Leadership takes on different forms at different times. In Martin Luther King's time, people wanted a voice — not only for the African-Americans, but Americans in general," said Evans.

In fact, *Time* magazine, when announcing Dr. King as its Man of the Year in 1963, labeled him "the unchallenged voice of the Negro people and the disquieting conscience of the white."

But, said Evans, "Today, leadership would be through more coalitions and more alliances. Leaders will draw together various communities."

Although there don't appear to be any Martin Luther King Jr. prototypes on the horizon, Evans feels that the far-reaching influence of Dr. King's legacy serves as a powerful motivator in itself.

"The real issue is to keep alive the power of the critique of modern society that Martin Luther King kept alive during his lifetime," said Evans.

Eli Danzy maintained that Dr. King's message will be also more effective if "we have more pastors and priests out in the community talking about it instead of just behind closed doors."

Danzy added that he thinks about Dr. King "every day of my life. I'm living his dream by being at the church every day, helping people."

Wethers remarked that Dr. King is on her mind "all the time, in terms of how I evaluate things I do in making a difference for the dream he had. It's his dream that keeps people like myself going."

Most important in his dream, said Wethers, is that "everybody — blacks, whites, Jews — work together."

Along those lines, groups such as Teens for Peace are trying to carry Dr. King's influence of racial harmony into a new generation.

"Just seeing blacks and whites work together — I think that's the first step toward solving the violence," said Toni Danzy. "If Martin Luther King was alive today, he'd say this is one thing that his dream meant."

At the same time, Toni's father feels that blacks still need to significantly improve their own quality of life before they can fully reach out to other races.

"How could I feed you if I can't feed my family?," Eli Danzy asked rhetorically.

BARTOLOMEO FUNERAL HOME, INC.

Peter W. Giullari, Jr. Philip P. Perotto Michael P. Perotto

Personalized service in the community since 1922.

1425 Lexington Avenue, Rochester, NY 14606
conveniently located near 390**(716) 254-5400**