

# 27th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Community Memorial Service Held



Sylvia Ontaneda-Bernales of the MLK Holiday Committee welcomes the gathering for the Memorial Service. PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling

The 27th annual Interfaith Community Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Service, sponsored by Northern Nevada Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Committee and the Nevada Clergy Association, was held on Sunday, January 20, 2013, at 3 p.m. at the Second Baptist Church, 1265 Montello Street, in Reno. The International Community of Christ, along with the Nevada Clergy Association and Northern Nevada Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Committee, both of which organizations Bishop Gene Savoy Jr. is president, were among the main sponsors of the event.



Keynote speaker Rev. Michael L. Randle addresses the congregation.  
PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling

This year's program theme was "Moving Forward with the Dream." The keynote speaker, the Reverend Michael L. Randle, pastor of Second Baptist Church and president of the African-American Clergy Council of Northern Nevada, asked, Who will take the mantle of the prophet and carry on the work?

The late Onie Cooper, a civil rights activist in Northern Nevada for 40 years, was remembered on Sunday with the first presentation of the Onie Cooper humanitarian award. It was Rev. Cooper who helped begin the annual interfaith community memorial service 27 years ago in honor of his hero, King. In 2010, one year before Cooper died, the Reno activist visited Rev. Gene Savoy with a request. "He came to me and said 'I'm passing away,'" Savoy said. "He said 'I want you to be the chairman of the organization.' It was extraordinary."



The Reverend Onie Cooper Humanitarian Award was presented to Elder William "Bill" Moon, who serves on the Executive Committee for the Reno-Sparks chapter of the NAACP. PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling

The award went to Bill Moon of the Reno-Sparks NAACP branch executive committee and was presented during the interfaith memorial service "Moving Forward with the Dream" at the Second Baptist Church of Reno.



Rachelle Pellissier, regional vice-president of VOA in northern Nevada, accepted the award for VOA. PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling

The Humanitarian Award was also presented to Volunteers of

America (VOA), the non-profit organization that runs the family homeless shelters in downtown Reno. Rachelle Pellissier, regional vice-president of VOA in northern Nevada, accepted the award.

Bishop Gene Savoy, Jr., chairman of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission and president of the Nevada Clergy Association, congratulated the recipients of the Onie Cooper Humanitarian Award for their “service and dedication to helping others as we celebrate the life and legacy of a great American, especially in the context of the issues that face us today.”



NCA President Gene Savoy Jr. addressed the congregation with closing remarks. PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling

NCA President Gene Savoy Jr. also addressed the congregation with a few closing remarks before the members of the gathering joined hands to sing a final song, “We Shall Overcome”:

*“We are all familiar with Dr. King’s legacy – clergyman, activist and civil rights leader – and that he was the foremost American proponent of using nonviolent methods following in the footsteps and in the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. He truly is a national icon in the history of America. . . .*

*“His vision of expanded American values and that of a color blind society established his reputation as one of the greatest orators. And we also know that he became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to end racial segregation and racial discrimination through nonviolent civil disobedience. . . .*

*“By the time of his death, he had refocused his efforts on ending poverty and advancing the concept of economic justice – a principle of Gandhi’s as well. Unfortunately, neither were successful in this regard due to their untimely deaths. . . .*

*“In 1959, with the assistance from a Quaker group, the American Friends Service Committee, Martin Luther King visited Gandhi’s birthplace. He was deeply moved and inspired by Gandhi’s success with non-violent activism, and it affected him in a profound way. He was able to deepen his understanding of non-violent resistance and his commitment to America’s struggle for civil rights and social justice. . . .*

*“On his final evening in India, King said, ‘Ssince being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation.’ . . .*

*“The rest is history, but, as history teaches us, there is still much to learn. And that is our task and our work.”*



PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling



Bishop Gene Savoy Jr. hold up prototype of the sign that will identify cars in the MLK Highway caravan. PHOTO: Stephan Fuelling

On Monday, January 21, 2013, participants in the 15th annual Community Memorial Caravan gathered at Second Baptist Church at 10:30 a.m. to drive a portion of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Highway (I-580) to honor King. After the caravan, a reception was held at the church.

[Link to the article on the MLK Memorial Service in the Reno Gazette-Journal.](#)