

Breaking Silence, Building Bridges

Over 20 years ago, not long after moving to Bloomington, I was invited to plan the annual community event held in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Setting to work, I soon concluded that the best way to honor Dr. King's memory and legacy would be to have his story re-told, using his own words as much as possible. His eloquence and insight are hard to surpass. His words continue to speak to us today, and will do so for untold generations to come.

In that vein and spirit, the greater Bloomington community has a unique opportunity to gather together on April 6 for an event that will serve both as a remembrance of Dr. King's life and legacy, and as an occasion for giving expression to our common concerns regarding our nation's protracted military involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq. The event, sponsored by Building Bridges, an interfaith group devoted to promoting dialogue, and co-sponsored by such groups as Monroe County Religious Leaders and the Bloomington Human Rights Commission, will be called "A Time to Break Silence: Clergy and Laity Concerned about Afghanistan and Iraq."

The timing of this event marks the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. King, on April 4, 1968. Precisely one year earlier, Dr. King delivered one of his most notable speeches to a gathering of Clergy and Laity Concerned at the Riverside Church in New York City. That speech, an eloquent, courageous, and prophetic statement addressing those gathered, and the nation, was titled "Beyond Vietnam – A Time to Break Silence." In that speech Dr. King established himself as not simply the most prominent leader of the American civil rights movement, but as a political visionary and statesman who recognized that U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war was symptomatic of "a far deeper malady within the American spirit. . . . (I)f we ignore this sobering reality, we will find ourselves organizing 'clergy and laymen concerned' committees for the next generation."

It is past time to "break silence" for, in Dr. King's words, "no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war." Come together next Sunday, April 6, from 3-5 p.m. in the Ivy Tech Commons to hear excerpts from Dr. King's historic speech and responses from local religious leaders, and to join in continuing conversations exploring ways to pursue and practice peace in our time.

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The text of Dr. King's Riverside Church speech can be found at
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>