

The Chelsea Standard

'An indelible impact'

Local resident says meeting Dr. King was an honor

By Catherine E. Evans
, Guest Writer

My husband, Dr. Rev. David S. Evans, served in the West Michigan Methodist Conference for 50 years. During his ministry he was active in the Michigan Council of Churches' programs working closely with the Wolverine Baptist Association in Detroit, a powerful African merican religious organization in civic affairs.

My husband's relationship with this association resulted in Dr. Martin Luther King preaching at the First United Methodist Church in Battle Creek, where he served as the senior minister. Dr. King was a guest speaker on March 20, 1960, during a Lentenseries sponsored by the church. It took a great deal of correspondence and planning to have Dr. King travel from a speaking engagement in Detroit to our church in Battle Creek.

The First United Methodist Church was built to accommodate around 900 people, but the night that Dr. King preached, there were almost 1,100 people attending the service. The service began at 7:30 in the evening, but people started arriving three hours early to ensure they were able to find a seat.

Dr. King's sermon that night was "Paul's Letter to American Christians." It was a beautiful service and one that I will never forget.

Fortunately, the service was conducted without incidence.

There was some uneasiness about the possibility of trouble makers who might try to interrupt the service. To ensure there were no problems, three plainclothes police officers were in the audience. There was also a question of security for Dr. King if he attended a reception in the church's social hall.

The hall could not hold the large number of people attending the service, so the decision was made not to hold a reception after the service. I know there were a number of people hoping to have a word with Dr. King, but there was great concern about his safety.

On his way back to Detroit, our family was privileged to have Dr. King stop by our parsonage for a meal. My three children were able to meet him and have fond memories of his interest in hearing about school and their many activities.

He left an indelible impact on all of my family as he spoke about his sorrow that he could not take his youngest daughter, Yolanda, to an amusement park to go on one of the rides she had seen advertised because of segregation policies.

Dr. King's visit to Battle Creek is part of my family's rich history. This year will be particularly meaningful for all Americans as we observe Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

We will be recognizing a man who gave his life for the cause of justice and equality one day before our country witnesses the swearing in of our 44th President, Barack Obama.

History will be made on Jan. 20, but we must not forget to keep alive the example of Dr. King's life and beliefs. We must continue to work for the goals he struggled to attain.

We must continue to enlist others in the task. In this way we can carry on Dr. King's legacy.

Catherine Evans is a resident of Silver Maples of Chelsea and a current member of Chelsea's First United Methodist Church. Now 88, she is pleased to share her story of meeting Dr. King in 1960, when her husband invited Dr. King to speak at their church in Battle Creek.

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