

SCLC Youth Day Celebration Continues to Foster Encouragement for a Community



(Left) Roanoke, Virginia SCLC Chapter celebrates Youth Day 2009. (Right) Bishop Edward M. Mitchell, President, Roanoke SCLC Chapter

ROANOKE, VIRGINIA—The Roanoke SCLC Chapter held its Annual Youth Day Celebration, which honored the life of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The noonday service began with a small crowd of supporters gathered Saturday, January 24, 2009, at the MLK Memorial Bridge located on First Street in downtown Roanoke.

Bishop E.M. Mitchell, local SCLC chapter president, served as moderator for this year's event that theoretically focused on the youth. After an arousing opening prayer by Rev. K.B. Wright, pastor of First Baptist Church in Gainsboro; Roanoke Mayor David Bowers spoke reciting several passages from Rev. King's speeches throughout his address.

Although the occasion honors Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., those who spoke at the bridge tailored their remarks most appropriately (in part) toward that most historic event which took place earlier in the week—the inauguration of Barack Obama as America's first African American President. In that same spirit, Mayor Bowers during his remarks acknowledged the presence (in the crowd) of Councilwoman Anita Price who presently sits as the first African American woman on the Roanoke City Council.

Fifth District Congressman Bob Goodlatte spoke briefly yet most poignantly in praise of the historic Obama inauguration. Referring to it, Goodlatte stated, "that any child, any

race, any creed can aspire to the highest office in our land is a wonderful demonstration to the entire world and that is something that every American can be proud of." The Congressman's remarks perfectly closed the first segment of the two-part celebration.

The William Fleming High School Marching Band, followed by a few members of the Buffalo Soldiers, a local motorcycle club, led the crowd in parade-like fashion along the traditional quarter-mile march up First Street from the Martin Luther King Bridge to the First Baptist Church, which customarily hosts the program following the opening service.

As individuals filed into the church, Pernellar Chubb-Wilson, past Roanoke SCLC president and founder, seated at the piano, treated everyone to an exquisite medley of perfectly selected tunes preceding the program. In an amazing performance Mrs. Wilson slipped from such favorite hymns as "How Great Thou Art" into more high-spirited renditions of such patriotic ballads as "America the Beautiful" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"—a display, which magnificently echoed, "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah"

Considered by most to be the mother of the local chapter of the SCLC. Mrs. Wilson through her powerful medley provided the perfect tribute to what could be considered the most phenomenal event in modern history—the inauguration (and global significance) of America's first African American president.

Rev. William Holland, Roanoke SCLC 2nd Vice President served as Master of Ceremonies for the program, which was handled by local high and Jr. high school students. Courtney Penn, a Roanoke City School Board member, upholding his mission as guest speaker, provided much "food for thought" to the youth in attendance.

Through his message Penn urged young people to, among other things, "use the experiences of others to perfect their own lives," and referred to experience as being one of the best teachers. He also advised them to develop a coalition of at least five adults as their mentors.

In somewhat of a blanket approach the SCLC Martin Luther King, Jr. Award went collectively to the students of William Fleming High School. A select group received the award for William Fleming Principal Susan Lawyer Willis who was present. Bettina Mason delivered an energetic acceptance speech awarded for years as an English teacher at Patrick Henry High School. Also awarded as an achiever was Khaia Jones a Northside High School student.

Dr. Diana Christopher, Roanoke Valley Cool Cities Coalition representative briefly spoke on Martin Luther King's focus on what she termed "environmental justice"—a term very much consistent with present issues as global warming and the importance of an energy efficient society.

To close this most rewarding and worthwhile celebration Bishop Mitchell delivered the benediction and after everyone joined in to sing the classic civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome." *scl*