

SPONSORED BY THE
GREATER ROCHESTER
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
COMMISSION

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ORIGINS

Founded in September 1985, by Willis Sprattling, then Vice President of Public and Community Relations, Xerox Corporation; and Isaiah Jackson, Associate Conductor, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. The Commission was organized to celebrate the first national holiday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For the first two years of its existence, Xerox Corporation provided funding, staff and office support for the Commission. The vision of Willis Sprattling and Isaiah Jackson led to an educational forum and cultural celebration of diversity in our community to highlight the values and dream of Dr. King.



Founders: Willis Sprattling and Isaiah Jackson



OUR MISSION IS TO:

Educate the community about the ideals and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., including his efforts to secure human and civil rights through non-violent social change and the promotion of racial harmony and social justice. Encourage the translation of those ideals into actions, which enhance the quality of life for everyone within the Greater Rochester community. Celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Act as a catalyst to a cross-section of community institutions and groups in their sponsorship of activities, particularly in the month of January.

Inspire our diverse citizenship to be participants, volunteers, and audiences in sponsored activities and the work of the Commission. Since its inception, the Commission has built upon the foundation laid by these two giants of the Rochester community, and has broadened its horizons to include a number of program initiatives that have lasted through the years.

GEOGRAPHIC AREA:

The Greater Rochester community includes the counties of Monroe, Livingston, Wayne, Orleans and Ontario.

40th Anniversary

MLK Day 2025
The 40th Anniversary

Maintaining Infinite Hope



www.grmlk.org

Monday, January 20th at 9AM
Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre
26 Gibbs Street



Enjoy the 40th Annual MLK Day Celebration in Rochester with a rousing worship service with the MLK Community Choir and hear from Pastor Sebrone Johnson of Greater Harvest Church.



“On the one hand we must accept the finite disappointment, but in spite of this we must maintain the infinite hope.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,
Shattered Dreams, 1962

GREETINGS FROM THE COMMISSION

We approach Martin Luther King Day this year with solemnity. There is a cruel irony that, this year, MLK Day falls on the same day as the inauguration of Donald Trump whose white supremacist, neo-fascist, and violent campaign stand in direct contrast to the Kingian vision of the Beloved Community and economic justice.

Those of us who share Dr. King’s values— radical agape love, the transformative possibilities of creative tension, courageous and strategic nonviolent resistance— found ourselves demoralized in the wake of an election that seemed to confirm the adage that, “the more things had changed, the more they had stayed the same.” Still afflicted with irreconcilable wealth and income inequity, still confronting spiritual death from hyper-militarization at the expense of social uplift and agency, still manipulated by virulent racism and xenophobia.

Over the last few months, many of us have run the gamut of reactions to these disappointing times. Some of us were bitter, cynically hoping for comeuppance for political opponents. Others decided to withdraw. More than a few friends reported that they would no longer watch the news or scroll social feeds. Some took the path of fatalism expressed in the resigned sentiment, “it is, what it is...” Yet in his prescient way Dr. King had even considered how we might respond to these moments of profound disappointment.

In the wake of the election, we came across a draft of a chapter King had penned titled, *Shattered Dreams*. In this unpublished text, Dr. King implores us to avoid the traps of bitterness, escapism, and fatalism and he offers us a redemptive path forward. He says that we must honestly confront our shattered dream and ask the question, how might we transform this liability into an asset. And, he suggests to us that though we accept finite disappointment, we **MAINTAIN INFINITE HOPE!**

This is not a passive response. In fact, Dr. King is honest with us that the transformation of disappointment into redemptive action is difficult. But, he notes that “to suffer in a righteous cause is to grow to our humanity’s full stature.” As our struggle for justice enters a new phase that may bring more risk, we respond with the audacity of our hope and courage to sacrifice because “our ultimate measure is not where we stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where we stand at times of challenge and controversy.” And, why must we respond with sacrifice and hope? Because as King goes on to say, “through our suffering in this oppressive prison and our non-violent struggle to get out of it, we may give the kind of spiritual dynamic to western civilization that it so desperately needs to survive.” This point is more relevant than ever and it is indeed a time of challenge and controversy— so we ask you, “Where will you stand?”