



Guest commentary: Gays, lesbians represent new barometer of human rights in Fond du Lac, too

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As the Fond du Lac community gathered at Marian College to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day, it was fitting that United for Diversity was honored with the Martin Luther King Jr. Spirit Award.

United for Diversity, under the leadership of Sister Stella Storch, has been at the forefront of much of the work done to make Fond du Lac a more welcoming community to the increasingly diverse people who call it home. United for Diversity co-sponsored Diversity Circles in which members of the community had an opportunity to dialog across racial and ethnic boundaries. We Welcome Diversity, another United for Diversity program, invites business and community organizations to show their welcome to all by displaying the program's decal.

As Sister Stella spoke about United for Diversity she noted that the organization works to promote the acceptance of all types of diversity. In publicly opposing the constitutional amendment to deny marriage to same sex couples, United for Diversity demonstrated its commitment to support a broad definition of diversity. That commitment was also reflected in the organization's inclusion of representatives from Fond du Lac High School's Gay Straight Alliance at its fall gathering.

This inclusion of gays and lesbians as part of the diversity that should be welcomed in our community is also consistent with the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. This fall as segments of the African-American community were quoted in the media denying that gay rights were civil rights, my friends Pastor Mary Council-Austin and Judy Goldsmith each voiced her dismay to me that such views were clearly at odds with the legacy of Dr. King.

Both of these local women, who are in the forefront of diversity and justice work in Fond du Lac, have also worked with the national leadership of the civil rights movement.

Speaking at the 40th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, Martin Luther King III said, "Homophobia is hate, and hate has no place in the beloved community."

Speaking to the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, Julian Bond, NAACP chairman said, "When I am asked, 'Are gay rights civil rights?' my answer is always, 'Of course, they are.'"

Most notably, Coretta Scott King became an unwavering supporter for equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and was a keynote speaker at the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce Creating Change Conference in 2000.

Additionally, many still are unaware that a gay black man by the name of Bayard Rustin was the principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. It was Rustin who brought Gandhi's nonviolent protest techniques to the America civil rights movement and he helped to mold Martin Luther King Jr. into an international symbol of peace and nonviolence.

In 1987, a year before his death, Rustin said, "The barometer of where you are on human rights is no longer the black community, it's the gay community. Because it is the community that is most easily mistreated."

Unfortunately, Fond du Lac's gay and lesbian community was not "officially" represented at the King Day event. Hopefully, that will not be the case again next year. United for Diversity has taken positive steps toward their inclusion.

Rustin is right. Gays are the new barometer on human rights, and Fond du Lac should recognize that so we can truly work together toward making this community welcoming to all.

Madonna Bowman is a resident of Fond du Lac.