

At King tribute, clergy 'stand up for equal rights'



by Jill Garbi
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A challenge to pursue their own dreams in tribute to those of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. elicited a standing ovation from attendees at an interfaith gathering in Oakhurst.

The Rev. Aaron Gibson of the Second Baptist Church of Long Branch issued the challenge during his keynote address at "All Different, All Equal," a celebration of the life and accomplishments of King Jan. 11 at Congregation Torat El.

"When we get together as a community of Jews, Christians, and Muslims," Gibson said, "we can do great things. I say to the people of God tonight: On your mark, get set, go! Let's stand up for equal rights and righteousness and act out our faith."

More than 200 people gathered for the seventh annual event, which drew members of the Conservative temple and Gibson's church as well as representatives of Brookdale Community College in Lincroft and the Greater Long Branch Ministerium. The federal holiday marking King's birthday this year fell on Jan. 16.

The event featured performances by the Trinity and St. Philip's Cathedral Choir of Newark and the Second Baptist Church Choir. Former Torat El president Jeff Donner of Jackson helped coordinate the event and served as emcee.

Torat El's Rabbi Aaron Schonbrun spoke about the honor of hosting a celebration of King's legacy. "We have come a long way since 1968, but we have a long way to go to reach the promised land," he said. "There are still too many children going to bed hungry; there is still injustice, intolerance, and racism.

"We have to work harder each day to make sure Dr. King's legacy lives on in our actions. We must have determination, compassion, and passion to fight injustice and inequality."

Professor Darrell Willis of Brookdale Community College delivered a powerful reading of an excerpt of King's famous "I Have A Dream" speech — delivered from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the August 1963 March on Washington.



At Torat El's gathering in commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are event planners, from left, Stuart Koperweis, Torat El cochair; Jeff Donner, Torat El event chair; Rabbi Aaron Schonbrun; Prof. Darrell Willis; the Rev. Susan Mamchak; the Rev. Aaron Gibson; and Jerry Russell, Torat El event committee community outreach coordinator. Photos by Mark Engel

Closing remarks were made by the Rev. Susan Mamchak of the ministerium and executive director of Ezekiel's Wheels, which helps feed the hungry in Long Branch. Imam Abdul Rahmin Shakur of Newark was an honored guest at the event, which was made possible by a grant from the B'nai Sholom-Beth El Foundation.

"It was remarkably inspiring to see different religious groups come together and realize that spiritually we are all connected," said Torat El member Stuart Koperweis of Wanamassa. "The music and the words moved me in a way that I believe God wanted it to be seen."

Temple member Dorothy Secol of Allenhurst said she was proud to take part in the community-building celebration. "We need to come together or we'll never solve the problems of the world," she said. "We are all God's children. It's about time we started acting like it."

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