

Br. Bob encourages carrying dreams forward

By **Brian T. Olszewski**
Catholic Herald Staff

MILWAUKEE — Capuchin Br. Bob Smith has a suggestion for dreamers: Read Genesis 37, in particular verse 20: “We shall then see what comes of his dreams.”

Br. Bob made the biblical reference during the 18th annual memorial prayer service commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King at which he was the principal speaker.

He noted that just as Joseph’s brothers were skeptical and hateful of him, there are people today who are equally skeptical and hateful.

“The key to dreams is who carries them forward,” Br. Bob said. “Dreamers of today are dangerous people as they dream with their eyes open so they can see their dreams come true.”

President of the four Messmer schools, Br. Bob geared much of his presentation to the youth in the Community Choir that provided the evening’s music and to the congregation at St. Francis of Assisi Church. He said

he was concerned when he asked young people why Martin Luther King was being commemorated, and they didn’t know.

“His is a lesson for young people not only to hear and read about, but to understand,” he said.

Br. Bob referred to King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” excerpts of which had been read earlier in the program by Earl Bracey.

“Dr. King’s message was to men of the church of the community who had told him, ‘It is not right for the church to be involved (in civil rights efforts). All you’re doing is stirring up trouble,’” Br. Bob said.

He noted that as a boy, he and his family would come to Milwaukee and visit his uncle, Br. Booker Ashe.

Describing St. Francis Parish as the place people “gathered to carry the message of Dr. King around our community,” Br. Bob added, “I remember being warned that if you got involved with (civil rights) not only would you face excommunication from the church, but you

might get into trouble with the law.”

Pausing, he continued, “Trouble takes you some interesting places in life, especially when you try to do the right thing.”

Br. Bob said that King fought injustice, trying to change laws that prohibited blacks from attending school with whites and prohibited blacks from using restrooms designated for whites.

“(These were) laws that said, ‘You couldn’t do it,’” he said, noting that fighting to change those laws could get a person killed.

Drawing upon his experience as an educator and a prison minister, Br. Bob said that he tells students education determines the type of job they will get. If they drop out and work a job that does not offer them the income to purchase the items they see on TV, they might be tempted to turn to a life of crime.

“There aren’t many retirees in drug sales,” he said.

On the eve of President Barack Obama’s inauguration, references were made

throughout the evening to the country’s first African American president.

“Tomorrow, we will share with the world and history a thing people said hell would freeze over before it would happen. That celebration of an African American male is important and historic, but it is not the end,” Br. Bob said, noting that other “capable people” should also have the opportunity to lead the nation.

He said that among the influences on King was Fyodor Dostoevsky who, during imprisonment for refusing to pay taxes, noted that a man wrongly convicted of fratricide had been put to death.

According to Br. Bob, Dostoevsky called a group of men together and said, “Brothers, in 20 years or more, if we become rich with wealth or fall into poverty, let us remember what it was like when we were all together, united by the good and kind spirit which made us, perhaps, better than we really are.”

Br. Bob concluded, “The dreamers of today are dangerous people.”