

# **50th Anniversary of Dr. King assassination being remembered in Alton as a call for reconciliation**

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ALTON – Two events commemorating the life and message of Dr. Martin Luther King are going to occur soon in Alton, and each encourages the spirit of reconciliation.

Riverbend Ministerial Alliance President Jason Harrison said the theme of this year's commemoration of Dr. King's life in Alton will be, “where do we go from here?” Dr. King was murdered in his Memphis hotel room by Altonian James Earl Ray on April 4, 1968, at 6:05 p.m. To commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that tragedy, the Riverbend Ministerial Alliance will be hosting a service of prayer, reflections and consecration at the Deliverance Temple Church, located at 1125 E. Sixth St. Harrison said that service will include video clips of Dr. King as well as prayers of peace and reconciliation as well as an overall question of “how does reconciliation work?”

Harrison said that service will be the beginning of a coupling of events in Alton dedicated to helping the community, which gave the world the man who killed Dr. King

as well as the crowd that killed abolitionist journalist Elijah P. Lovejoy, discover the meaning of reconciliation. The second event will be held on Saturday, April 14, 2018, at the Post Commons, located at 300 Alby St. in Alton, from 10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

“Tomorrow is going to be great, but the 14<sup>th</sup> will have stories you have never heard before – not at this depth anyway,” Harrison said. “The historian we have coming will have photos to go with the story. She will have a timeline, and she's going to break it down. It's going to be a great event.”

That historian will be telling the history of Rocky Fork Church – a church established in Alton to serve freed slaves migrating from the South. Harrison said the church has been purposefully burnt to the ground three times – including as recently as the 1980s when the National Guard had to be called – and was a way for freed and escaped slaves to establish themselves in Alton.

“There is a history showing several things about that church,” Harrison said. “There was a white pastor who came to help people, and they would help the former slaves find work and they would use that work to get them land. A lot of that was funneled through that church to people.”

Union Baptist Church, which is one of the oldest churches in the State of Illinois, will also be represented at the event April 14. Harrison said the church was established in Alton during the time of Lovejoy's death in 1837, adding members of the congregation risked their lives and livelihoods to recover Lovejoy's body.

Other speakers at the event will include the first black couple to have moved into Alton's prestigious Fairmont neighborhood. Harrison said the couple moved from California and had difficulty moving into the gated community due to their race as recently as the year 2000.



Overall, the theme of that Saturday event at Post Commons will be “Where Do We Go From Here,” which is also the title of Dr. King's final book and the title of the speech he delivered at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967, according to a release from the Riverbend Ministerial Alliance.

“Dr. King was very clear about the work that was yet to be done,” Harrison said in that release. “We want to collectively meet his challenge and set the path forward for positive social change.

“This day will not simply recount the history, but will link the issues Dr. King was most concerned about during the last years of his life – poverty, fair wages, affordable and safe housing, quality education, justice and peace – as the method to achieve positive social change. This year the commemorative ceremony will not only include keynote speakers, special presentations, live music, but also guests will be invited to sign a pledge for peace and resolve to take action on the societal issues that Dr. King identified in his final narrative.”