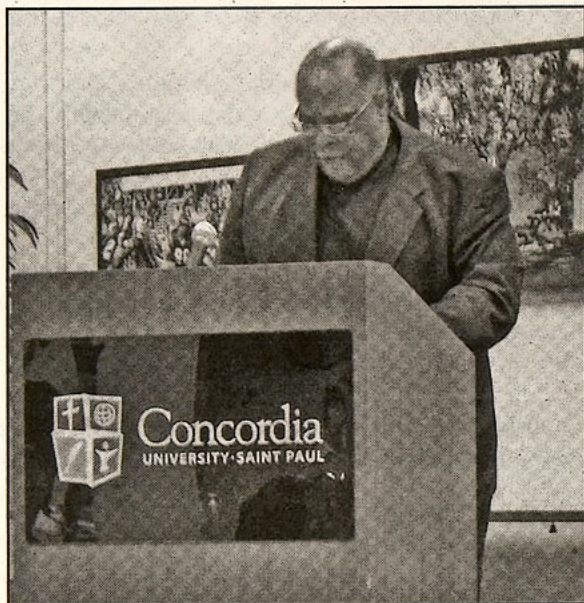


Diversity Panel Offers Words of Wisdom

By Lance Meyer

As part of Concordia's celebration of Black History Month, United Minds of Joint Action (UMOJA) in cooperation with CSP's Alumni Association recently hosted the "Legacy of Diversity Alumni Community Forum." On February 19th at 6 pm, a group of thirty students, faculty, and staff members attended the forum, listened to some words of wisdom, and joined in the conversation about issues facing the African-American community.



Clarence Jones

Members of the panel included Rev. Kelly Chatman, Police Sergeant Al Cooper, bank owner Charlie James Jr., educator Iris Lewis, and administrator Barbara Porter, each of whom has past ties to Concordia in some way. Sergeant Cooper summed up the main objective of the event as he addressed mainly the students in attendance, "Learn from other people's experiences and what they have to offer, and be sure to take advantage of talking to people in the field you're interested in."

Facilitator Clarence Jones, President of the Concordia University Alumni Council, got the evening's main event in motion with two opening questions. Jones started by asking the five panelists, "Based on your professional experience, what are some of the misconceptions about African-Americans in your field?"

While Rev. Chatman, pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, felt relatively blessed in his role as a voice in the community, he spoke of the misconceptions the church sometimes has about hip-hop and other forms of African-American expression. Sergeant Cooper followed suit by talking about the culture of the police department and the misconceptions African-Americans often hold about the field.

"Being a police officer is often not seen in a positive way throughout the African-American community," Cooper expressed. "Sometimes people are reluctant to go into the field because of stereotypes they hold or past experiences they had."

In terms of education at Mayo Medical School in Rochester, MN, Porter discussed a common misconception about who benefits from diversi-

ty programs in schools. "The benefits of diversity accrue to all of us," said Porter. "We are breaking down racial stereotypes through class discussion; all benefit from diversity in the classroom."

Once each panelist had had the opportunity to respond to Jones' first question, the conversation switched gears a bit to talking about the historical situation the African-American community has entered. In light of President Obama's inauguration and the current economic situation, Jones asked the panelists what the most pressing issues for African-Americans were and how they needed to be addressed.

"When Barack Obama was elected it was like something was lifted off me physically... the foot of oppression was removed," responded Iris Lewis who went on to talk about how the racism gap continues to increase. Lewis stressed how important it was during these tough times not to be satisfied by Obama's election but instead continue the fight for equality.

Charles James Jr. also had a few things to add to the discussion given his profession in banking. "The glass ceiling is real," said James in regards to discrimination in the business world and a major issue that African-Americans continue to face. "I never bought into being a victim," added James. "Wherever you're at, learn everything you can and set a good example for those that might feel disenfranchised."

Following James' questions and responses, members from the audience were given a chance to ask a few questions. Time was put aside at the end of the evening for networking and further conversation with the five panelists.



Porter and Lewis

Photos by Lance Meyer

Although there was not a huge crowd on hand for the event, the passionate responses by the evening's panelists and steady attention paid by those in attendance showed that the event was a success. America is at an interesting time in its history as the importance of Obama's election continues to resonate throughout the nation.

However, as all five panelists agreed, stereotypes and racism continue to exist in America, despite the election of a black president, and will continue to exist into the future if more conversations and open discussions like UMOJA's here at Concordia are not held.

Another Successful Year for Concordia's Convocation Series

By Lance Meyer

If you have been around campus on Wednesday mornings at all this year, you have probably noticed the biweekly convocation series that Concordia hosts. Since the 2007-2008 academic year, Professor Cate Vermeland has been the Director of the Faculty Scholarship Center (FSC) and thus in charge of the annual convocation series.

"When I started working with the convocation series, I thought it was good to bring in interesting people," said Vermeland, "but as time went on, I have found that the convocations that really enhance the curriculum of the classroom are the most successful."

Vermeland is referring to speakers like Timothy Pennings of Hope College in Holland, Michigan who used his dog Elvis to discuss calculus in front of a large group of students, faculty, and staff. "The Pennings convocation was well attended by members of the Math Department because of its relevance to the department's classroom curriculum," said Vermeland who looks to achieve this more in the future.

It is the convocations that do not have a message that appeals to one main group that struggle with attendance which is why Vermeland wants to build on the reciprocal relationship between the convocation series and academic departments. Because of this desire to enhance the teaching and learning experience of faculty and students at Concordia, Vermeland is open for suggestions and ideas for next year and how the FSC can better achieve its goals.

Even though Pennings is the best example, other convocations have been successful in the same way. The art department was reached by an April 4th presentation by April Flanders about art and social change. Furthermore, Concordia's rich diversity was enhanced by Judge LaJune Thomas Lange's February 4th discussion, "The Quest for Black Citizenship in the Americas" which took place in concordance with Black History Month. Finally, on April 1, English Professor Eric Dregni will wrap up this academic year's series by talking about his book, *In Cod We Trust*, which will most likely attract a large group of students, faculty, and staff involved in the English Department.

Another major aspect of the convocation series is the annual visit of a Woodrow Wilson Fellow which took place just this past Wednesday. This year's visiting fellow, Anil Singh-Molares, is a global entrepreneur, former Microsoft executive, and philanthropist, and he spent several days on campus for what has become an annual highlight for the FSC's program. Look for more on his visit to Concordia in April's issue of *The Sword*.

So even though this has been another successful year for the FSC's Convocation Series, Vermeland has plans to improve its aim and effect in the coming years. "Enhancing the impact the series has on students, faculty, and staff is the best way to use the money," reiterated Vermeland who has high hopes for what the extracurricular opportunity can offer for the entire Concordia Community.